“My entire people are a homeland resisting,” reads the projection on the facade of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City. We offer this reader as a form of direct action. Unmediated by MoMA, it embodies the collective labor of thinking, organizing, writing, and artmaking by numerous groups and individuals who have found one another through the shared recognition for the need to collectively exit from the terms and conditions of MoMA. We thank all those who have generously shared their time, resources, wisdom, knowledge, skills, and imagination in building out this initiative in person and online, from New York, to Palestine, to the Dominican Republic and Colombia, to the many other sites of resistance around the globe. In this work, the artist organizes and the organizer practices art embedded in struggle as we decenter, dismantle, and abolish structures of oppression and domination no matter what they call themselves. We especially thank the artists, scholars, students, journalists, community organizers, and workers, including MoMA staff who have taken risks, relayed their support, and kept in touch as the second phase of Strike MoMA continues to unfold. We also thank core community groups who participated and helped organize Ten Weeks of Art, Action and Conversations, especially Within Our Lifetime: Palestine Will Be Free, Dominicans United NYC, Colombianos en NY, Mexicanos Unidos, De-colonize Ayiti, Rude Mechanical Orchestra, and the Illuminator. With love and generosity, we continue to chart the pathways of the Post-MoMA future together. We hope this reader will be a testimonial marker of the work, challenges, and successes thus far, as well as a tool to be deployed by others with shared politics in the struggle to get free.

– The Strike MoMA Working Group of International Imagination of Anti-national, Anti-imperialist Feelings (IIAAF)
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17. MoMA Divest Statement (February 4)
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48. To the Workers of MoMA (distributed at MoMA on March 25, made public May 1)
50. Remarks by Dylan Rodriguez at P.S.1 “Abolitionist Imaginaries” symposium (March 26)
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INTRODUCTION

This reader is an offering from the Strike MoMA Working Group of the International Imagination of Anti-National, Anti-Imperialist Feelings (IIAAF). We intend this reader to be an instrument of organizing and a form of direct action in furtherance of the ongoing strike against the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). It is part of a relational and material infrastructure that has been nurtured over the course of the strike. What you will find in these pages reflects an extended movement conversation that advances the case for abolishing MoMA while at the same time accelerating the process of collective exit from the terms and conditions of the museum. This reader is an intellectual assemblage, a gathering of voices that meet and speak to each other, with the goal of moving forward without assuming unanimity. We present it as a medium of counter-institutional memory, intergenerational learning, and movement pedagogy, a tactical study-guide for understanding how power acts and reacts in the face of heightening contradictions and sharpening antagonisms. We have compiled it as a living library for post-MoMA futures that overwrites MoMA’s efforts to distort, repress, forget, co-opt, and foreclose. As a manifestation of post-MoMA futures in the here and now, it provides frames and directions for the extension of Strike MoMA Phase II as we move into the next calendar year.

The reader has six components. First is a date-by-date timeline of Strike MoMA Phase I as it unfolded last spring. The driving structure of this phase was the Ten Weeks of Art, Conversation, and Action (April 9-June 11), anchored in a weekly pop-up de-occupation of the privately owned public space across the street from MoMA (dubbed Post-MoMA Plaza), as well as a parallel weekly assembly online. Second is a dossier of primary documents generated during Phase I, including direct public responses to the counterinsurgency tactics of the MoMA administration. Third is a wide-ranging constellation of texts and images from friends and comrades (several of whom have worked at or with MoMA in some capacity) engaging with the Strike MoMA framework, including a core cluster of texts that shed light on the empire of hemispheric extractivism of the Cisneros family and its connections to MoMA. Fourth is a sequence of movement conversations strategically timed to augment, support, and amplify on-the-ground organizing and actions. Finally, there are two appendixes attached. First is the organizing manual for Globalize The Intifada, an initiative that emerged late last summer from the relationships formed during Strike MoMA under the banner of “interlocking directorate, interconnected struggles.” The second appendix is a collection of five communiqués originally issued in video form over the course of Strike MoMA Phase I by Comandante Scream.

When read together, these materials offer an abundance of entry points, and a kaleidoscopic refraction of the ideas, experiences, and histories of struggle that converged in the process of developing Strike MoMA as a movement apparatus. Though focused on MoMA as a primary case study and target, this reader situates MoMA within an expanding field of institutional crisis and conflict encompassing not only museums but also the university. The long-term contradictions, harms, and failures of settler institutions have been more and more apparent—thanks in large part to the decolonial and abolitionist formations that have emerged in the past decade from the crucible-events of Ferguson, Standing Rock, the George Floyd Rebellion, the Line 3 struggle, the migrant justice/sanctuary movement, and the
officers… putting staff, who are predominantly the museum decided to hide behind its security with Strike MoMA,’ said one employee. ‘So of staffers might stage a walkout in solidarity the outset, there was a lot of anxiety from the doors, stoked feelings of distrust among be allowed inside the building, only to lock our solidarity with all forms of workplace subversion, testimonial communications, and direct action by MoMA workers against their hamstrung bosses.

Over the course of the Ten Weeks, counterinsurgency took many forms. We learned that when MoMA loses control, the familiar mechanisms of repressive tolerance reveal their flip side in aggression, fortification, and policing. Doors locked. People harmed. People demonized. People banned. People lied to. Gaslighting. Propaganda. Psych-ops. Attempts at manipulation, fearmongering, veiled threats. But cultures of dissent and liberation are percolating at lower frequencies, the subterranean murmuring of the strike. “There isn’t space to talk about anything,” an anonymous worker told Artnet in late July, “There isn’t space to talk about anything.”

Meanwhile, as methods of banning, silencing, and intimidating are used against organizers and workers, members of the academic intelligentsia are being recruited to provide an armature of scholarly legitimacy for the faltering institution, propping up a monument to imperial modernity that is crumbling at its foundations. The divestment of our collective intellects from MoMA is a crucial component of the ongoing strike. The top brass at MoMA and other institutions recognize this, and it is for this reason that the incorporation of knowledge has been a central part of their efforts to neutralize the waves of resistance that have shaken the artworld system in recent years. This is exemplified by the recent announcement that MoMA and the Ford Foundation will be partnering to launch (in September 2022) a new Scholars in Residence Program that will support scholars whose work deals with historically underrepresented artists, moments, movements, and geographies, or offers new perspectives on art-historical topics. As Dylan Rodriguez (a former Ford Fellow) reminds us, the Ford Foundation has been a central actor in counter-insurgency efforts since the rebellions of the 1960s.

Such worker testimonies break the silence mandated from above, subvert the supposed common interest of workers and the administration invoked by museum leadership, and evidence potential cross-class solidarities between otherwise segmented parts of the staff, creating space for something else to emerge, something controlled by workers, artists, and communities rather than oligarchs like Leon Black. We continue to offer our solidarity with all forms of workplace subversion, testimonial communications, and direct action by MoMA workers against their hamstrung bosses.

We must not forget that it is the oligarchs who own MoMA have played a crucial role in bringing us to the current moment. Since its origins with the Rockefellerers to the present day, MoMA has always attempted to mediate and manage the contradictions of liberal imperialism, often dovetailing with fascism in the process. It has made space for radical ideals on the walls of the museum even as the those who control it do their best to combat those legacies and ideas in the real world. When it comes to current board members, think of people like Ronald Lauder, who for decades has aided and abetted the ascendant Christian right in order to solidify support for Israeli settler-colonialism. In March 2021, former Trump advisor Larry Fink, whose Blackrock hedge fund owns 4% of the Enbridge Pipeline cutting through Ojibwe lands in Minnesota, and which recently invested 15 billion dollars in the Saudi oil company Aramco, has been a valued member of the donor community despite two new accusations against him in just the past few months. Thats the kind of place that MoMA is at its core, and it reminds us why there is a collective exit happening from MoMA and places like it.

The museum and the university continue to be sites of intensifying struggle. But these struggles are increasingly 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 blossom forth in a thousand ways, cultivating a politics of life, land, and liberation amongst the ruins of empire.
This timeline begins in early 2021, the immediate period in which the Strike MoMA initiative was launched. We want to reiterate the acknowledgement made in the Strike MoMA document of the many histories and generations of thinking, organizing, and art that laid the groundwork for activating museums as sites of struggle.

The timeline below marks a series of dated events as a way of distilling things into an overall shape and trajectory. Suffice to say it is not exhaustive, and throughout the period marked on the timeline, organizing, conversation, and artmaking were constantly taking place. The website Hyperallergic produced continuous, in-depth reporting on the Ten Weeks of Action, providing granular accounts of many of the events noted here. It should be noted that since the crisis around Leon Black came to a head in February of 2021, MoMA has never issued a single statement about Black in response to the calls for his removal, or indeed the very fact that he was forced to step down from chairmanship after the announcement of Strike MoMA (though he remains on the board itself). Relatedly, neither David Rockefeller Director Glenn Lowry nor any member of the museum leadership has ever once reached out to Strike MoMA organizers or stepped across 53rd street to learn about the initiative or dialogue with its participants. To our knowledge, the two brief statements by MoMA to press about Strike MoMA attributed physical violence to organizers, and confirmed that five Strike MoMA participants had been banned from the museum.

January 25: Leon Black’s Apollo hedge fund announces, in its own words, a “Review of Significant Governance Enhancements as Part of Continued Evolution and Institutionalization of the Firm and Leadership Transition.” Avoiding any mention of Black’s deep financial and personal ties to Jeffrey Epstein (for which he, along with fellow board member Greg Dubin, were subpoenaed in 2020) the announcement explains that Black will be stepping down in July from his role as CEO, but will remain on the board of the company.

January 27: An article by Robin Pogrebin for the New York Times reports that, despite stepping down from his leadership role at Apollo, it is rumored that Leon Black will remain the Chairman of the Board of MoMA. Decolonize This Place is quoted in the article as saying “It underscores that what is at stake here is not just toxic philanthropy, but a toxic system of wealth and power that must be overhauled.”

February 3: The Guerrilla Girls announce that they have canceled their book deal with the art publisher Phaidon, which is owned by Leon Black. The announcement stems from the group’s earlier agitational work around Black as well as Glenn Dubin, who was also subpoenaed in the Epstein case in 2019.

February 4: At Hyperallergic, Hakimah Bahara publishes “Over 150 Artists Call for Leon Black’s Removal From MoMA’s Board,” over Jeffrey Epstein financial ties, containing statements from an adhoc group of art workers, MoMA Divest, and Decolonize This Place, whose statement is entitled “Fuck MoMA: An Open Call to Action” and reads, in part, “Board members are not the problem. They only make the problem visible. MoMA in its entirety is the problem. Perhaps it’s time to abolish MoMA.”


March 25: Organizers distribute “To the Workers of MoMA” letter to workers at the museum.

March 26: According to the New York Times, Leon Black “tells colleagues” that he will not in fact stand for re-election in June as the chairman of the MoMA board. MoMA itself does not issue a statement.

April 2: re/Orientation to 10 Weeks - General
April 4: re/Orientations/Training for the 10 Weeks - BIPOC, NYC, International
PRIMARY DOCUMENTS
Collective Statement Signed by 157 Artists, Curators, and Art Workers

We, as artists and art workers, support the removal of Leon Black from the board of MoMA for reasons that have already been stated by many others. However, this should be considered the bare minimum. Beyond his removal, we must think seriously about a collective exit from art’s imbrication in toxic philanthropy and structures of oppression, so that we don’t have to have the same conversations over and over, one board member at a time. This thinking can only catalyze action once we state plainly: We do not need this money. Museums and other arts institutions must pursue alternative models, cooperative structures, Land Back initiatives, reparations, and additional ideas that constitute an abolitionist approach toward the arts and arts patronage, so that they align with the egalitarian principles that drew us to art in the first place.

For signatories, go here.

Recent confirmations of MoMA Board of Trustees Chair Leon Black’s deep financial and personal connections to Jeffrey Epstein underline the problems that MoMA and other major museum boards face and have failed to reckon with in any meaningful way. We note that Leon Black’s corruption extends far as his “investment” firm is also the owner of Constellis, formerly known as Blackwater, a private military firm which was banned from operating in Iraq after its staff were charged with war crimes (when MoMA Divest peacefully protested this last year in solidarity with exhibiting artist Ali Yass, PS1 responded by calling NYPD). Those war criminals were part of the recent spate of pardons by Trump.

Leon Black is not an anomaly. Five MoMA board members – Tananbaum, Dubin, Black, Fink – have been identified and targeted by different groups over the last year for their ties to war, racist prison and border enforcement systems, vulture fund exploitation, gentrification and displacement of the poor, extractivism and environmental degradation, and patriarchal forms of violence. Board members also have ties and donate to the NYPD Police Foundation. In short, the rot is at the core of the institution, which includes PS1. MoMA/PS1 directors and administrators have quietly taken the dirty money in the name of art and made empty curatorial gestures towards political issues. MoMA’s director Glenn Lowry has said that Leon Black “continue[s] this tradition of visionary leadership with their passion for modern and contemporary art, strategic planning and financial expertise, and deep understanding of the Museum and its mission.” MoMA’s mission, then, must be artwashing; but it can no longer clean the fact that war and prison profiteering, child prostitution, and various forms of structural racism are part of the structure of MoMA/PS1. For a civic institution with civic responsibilities this is unacceptable. Nothing short of a major reconstitution of the board, a change of directors, a public reckoning, and a reimagining of the institutional and curatorial mission of the museum is acceptable. We also reiterate previous demands that MoMA/PS1 issue a public statement regarding their position on proceeds and donations that come as a result of violence from these issues, and start a transparent public investigation into any and all funds linked to these matters, including those in the various pension funds used by the institution; and that MoMA/PS1 begin a community-based process of reinvestment, redistribution, land restoration, and reparations in affected communities.

MoMA Divest Coalition
Fuck MoMA: An Open Call To Action

We are tired of the same shit making news over and over. It has become a banal routine. One place after another. Another institution, another oligarch airwashing their death-dealing profits, with women bearing the brunt of it all. This is not a PR crisis, or just a matter of toxic philanthropy. MoMA is a frontline of gendered and racialized class war, and we all have a responsibility to act.

Letters, pleas, and backroom deals are not enough. After the removal of Kandors from the Whitney, after the George Floyd rebellion, after the open declaration of war by Fascists seeking to salvage white heteropatriarchal rule, we must do and demand more. Board members are not the problem. They only make the problem visible. MoMA in its entirety is the problem. Perhaps it’s time to abolish MoMA.

MoMA was founded with the oil wealth of the Rockefellers. Since then, the museum has been a clearing house for capital, a showcase for domination, and an ecocidal machine. It has diversified in content, but in practice it has been an enemy of the poor and the marginalized: the fired and the furloughed, the displaced and the dispossessed, the detained and the deported, the dying and the dead. After the recent uprisings, MoMA and other cultural institutions are scrambling to proclaim their commitment to justice, diversity, and equity. How can an institution claim such values with predatory billionaires controlling it? Even visionary exhibitions like Marking Time, Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration cannot escape this contradiction.

Various campaigns and actions have said this in recent years. MoMA is anti-Queer, anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, anti-Migrant, anti-Worker. Not simply because MoMA has failed to be truly inclusive in its collection or programming or staffing. But because MoMA, as an institution harboring the likes of Louie Black and Larry Fink, is complicit in oppression globally, from the burning of the Amazon to migrant detention camps to gentrification and mass displacement, to the exploitation of women and children. If left unchallenged, MoMA will continue to pose a danger to humanity and the planet at large.

So what would it mean to abolish MoMA, and who will undertake this task? Such an effort requires us all. A stakeholder-led decolonization process could be a way forward to deal with this fuckery. Absent such an initiative, we encourage self-organized action so that MoMA will see the writing on the walls. Here is a Decolonial Operations Manual for people who wish to act autonomously. We remind the general public that the MoMA building is open every day of the week from 10:30 am to 5:30 pm.

decolonizethisplace
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VI  Authorship: IIAAF, in consultation with friends and comrades

* for the hyperlinked version of this document go to www.strikemoma.org
We are writing from the unceded territory of the Lenni Lenape. We stand in solidarity with Native American and Indigenous peoples leading the movement for resurgence, decolonization, and reclamation of their homelands. These lands were stolen to create settler-colonial states, and those who were dispossessed continue to live under conditions of siege, surveillance, and extractivist violence. We support land back, an imperative addressed to all settlers and settler-institutions, including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the City of New York. At its foundations, this city was established on stolen Indigenous land, and shaped and cultivated by enslaved African peoples. We support the undying fight for Black liberation and its many manifestations here and across the planet.

Subsequent layers of the city have been built by generations of migrants and refugees from other zones of the world violently impacted by colonial-capitalist modernity. Think of the Mohawk skywalkers whose labor made possible the Manhattan skyline, and the Black, Latinx, and Asian workers who maintain the urban infrastructure today even as they are displaced by real-estate developers in Chinatown, Mott Haven, East New York, and beyond. We support sanctuary for all migrant communities, and the allied movement for degentrification. We support the self-determination of oppressed peoples everywhere fighting against the imperial states, repressive regimes, occupying powers, comprador elites, and global corporations whose calculations have forced so many people from their homes in places like Puerto Rico, Haiti, Honduras, Palestine, Iraq, and Kashmir. From within the belly of the beast of U.S. empire, we acknowledge our responsibility, and act in solidarity with struggles to get free.

From the Dutch West India Company to the Rockefeller dynasty to the bankers, speculators, and warmakers who sit on the board of MoMA today, their accumulation has only been possible through our dispossession. A system of imperialism, colonialism, and racial capitalism with gendered violence at its core. We stand in solidarity with all those who strike against patriarchy every day, at work, at home, in the fields, in the prisons, in the detention centers, in the streets, in the shelters. Stolen land, stolen people, stolen labor, stolen wealth, stolen worlds, stolen horizons. This is the modernity to which MoMA is a monument.

When we strike MoMA, we strike its blood-soaked modernity. The monument on 53rd Street becomes our prism. We see our histories and struggles refracted through its crystalline structure, and foreclosed futures come into view. The museum is converted into a theater of operations where our entwined movements of decolonization, abolition, anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism can find one another. Why strike MoMA? So that something else can emerge, something under the control of workers, communities, and artists rather than billionaires.
The Case Against MoMA

Any day now, hedge fund billionaire Leon Black is likely to resign as the chair of the board of MoMA. It has been six weeks since the deep financial ties between Black and Jeffery Epstein resurfaced in the headlines. Black has already announced that he is stepping down from Apollo Global Management, but MoMA remains silent about his ongoing role at the museum. Artists and community groups have demanded that Black be removed, and calls for action have been circulating publically for a month. Last week anonymous sources confirmed to the media that Black is facing pressure from other members of the board to step down. They know his continued presence on the board is a recipe for crisis, but getting rid of him could set a precedent and put at risk MoMA’s use of his priceless art collection. The museum administration is in a classic decision dilemma.

Whether Black stays or goes, a consensus has emerged: beyond any one board member, MoMA itself is the problem. MoMA Divest offered a summary of its reasoning as follows, “Five MoMA board members — Steven Tananbaum, Glenn Dubin, Steven Cohen, Leon Black, Larry Fink — have been identified and targeted by different groups over the last year for their ties to war, racist prison and border enforcement systems, vulture fund exploitation, gentrification and displacement of the poor, extractivism and environmental degradation, and patriarchal forms of violence. Board members also have ties and donate to the NYPD Police Foundation. In short, the rot is at the core of the institution, which includes PS1.” We agree, and also point to Honorary Chair Ronald Lauder, the cosmetics billionaire who is also president of the Zionist lobbying group World Jewish Congress and a major Trump donor. Deserving of recognition as well is board member Patricia Phelps Cisneros, whose billions come from the right-wing Grupo Cisneros media-industrial empire in Latin America. Speaking of Latin America, let’s shine a light on Steven Tananbaum, Jeff Koons enthusiast and chief investment officer at Golden Tree Assets, one of the hedge funds involved in extracting wealth from the people of Puerto Rico through the PROMESA debt-restructuring program. And how could we forget Paula Crown and James Crown of the General Dynamics armaments fortune, whose Crown Creativity Lab on the second floor of the museum hosts The Peoples Studio, an “experimental space where visitors can explore the art and ideas of our time through participatory programs.” This is the condition of modernity that we find at Modernism Central: death-dealing oligarchs using art as an instrument of accumulation and shield for their violence.

At the ground level, MoMA is also a messed up workplace. Elitism, hierarchy, inequality, precarity, disposability, anti-Blackness, misogyny. Remember the back-end workers who were furloughed and fired last year while the high-ups have carried on in luxury. As an estimated two thirds of the arts and culture jobs of the city have been lost, MoMA’s “David Rockefeller Director” Glenn Lowry continues to take home 2.3 million dollars a year, or 48 times the amount earned by an educational assistant. Sources have confirmed that just before the pandemic, MoMA management dis-invited unsalaried unsalaried contract
workers from the 2019 Christmas party, including people who had been there for decades. HR posted a memo in the Operations Room. A small detail, but it says a lot. Shout out to the O Room!

This document comes from a movement perspective that deexceptionalizes the museum. We refuse to acknowledge the separation of the museum from the rest of society. We see MoMA as existing on the same plane as the violence of the ruling class that has controlled it since its inception with the oil wealth of the Rockefellers in 1929. No more rationalizing the regime. They have long enabled the killing of our people and non-human relations and they have always expected us to thank them for their philanthropy. Yes, we know that Aggie Gund read The New Jim Crow and sold a Lichtenstein to fund the Art For Justice Fund. It was a project in collaboration with Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation. The man who declared "it would be a grave error to demonize wealthy people" following the ouster of Kanders from the Whitney, and who called the cops on Ford Fellows and their friends when they protested his "nuanced" support for new jails. If any doubts remain about the connection of the Ford Foundation, liberal philanthropy, and counterinsurgency, we direct you to this classic study.

What about the art? We love art, but we have zero allegiance to the art system of which MoMA is the epicenter. Art exists beyond MoMA. Art is not a luxury, and it is a vital part of our communities and movements. Art is one of the few means of production available to oppressed peoples for the creation and sustaining of worlds in the face of death and destruction. The aesthetic forms and imaginative powers of art require material support: economies of solidarity, platforms of cooperation, infrastructures of care and mutual aid. But the political economy of the art system is antithetical to these life-affirming practices. It is predicated on property, scarcity, competition, and assimilation. One canon. One center. One meta-narrative of modernity, however diversified and globalized it may have become. It is governed by gatekeepers, critics, and canon-makers who try to create the measure by which art lives or dies, giving access to a select few while leaving the rest with the false choice between eating and making art. It doesn’t have to be this way.

As 150 artists and art workers put it in their open letter last month, "we must think seriously about a collective exit from art’s imbrication in toxic philanthropy and structures of oppression, so that we don’t have to have the same conversations over and over, one board member at a time. This thinking can only catalyze action once we state plainly: We do not need this money. Museums and other arts institutions must pursue alternative models, cooperative structures, Land Back initiatives, reparations, and additional ideas that constitute an abolitionist approach toward the arts and arts patronage, so that they align with the egalitarian principles that drew us to art in the first place." Such calls for collective exit change the terms of the conversation, and point in the direction of something beyond MoMA.

There is no blueprint for dismantling MoMA, but here is the starting point:
whatever comes after MoMA, it must preserve and enhance the jobs of museum workers, and enact reparative measures for communities harmed by the museum over time, beginning with the legacy of land dispossession. The agenda is open, but any path forward must be premised on the acknowledgement of debts owed: from top to bottom and horizontally too, between and within groups, communities, and movements. We need a just transition to a post-MoMA future. MoMA has been a toxic force, but there can be growth and healing in the aftermath of toxicity. May a thousand mushrooms bloom in the ruins of the modern museum.

* * * * *

II Their Archives Are Our Receipts

Leon Black is but the latest in a succession of predatory billionaires running MoMA since the Rockefellers. Their petrochemical industrial extraction laid the groundwork for capitalist globalization and its political, financial, and cultural infrastructures over the course of the 20th century. Standard Oil was the nucleus of the modern fossil-fuel regime. Chase Bank, the Rockefeller-led instrument by which the New York City's working class was pulverized during the 1975 fiscal crisis of the state, was an early experiment with neoliberal austerity that would soon be expanded worldwide. The Rockefeller Drug Laws were an essential mechanism of mass incarceration after the Black revolt of the 60s. As Governor, Nelson Rockefeller also called the shots of the Attica Massacre. Central to the Ford/Rockefeller presidential administration which scrambled to maintain U.S. hegemony after the victory of the North Vietnamese was strategic cooperation with the apartheid regimes of Israel and South Africa. The list of crimes by the Rockefeller dynasty against people and the planet is endless.

Throughout the 20th century, the Rockefellers and their class allies underwrote and led the museum, overtly weaponizing art in the service of empire. They enabled fascist admirer and white supremacist Phillip Johnson to become the king of Modern Architecture, a legacy which has recently become a point of action for the Black Reconstruction Collective. Well-documented collaborations between MoMA and CIA. The Museum of Primitive Art, stocked with cultural objects looted from Africa, the Pacific, and the Americas and now housed in the Met. Partnerships with the Cisneros dynasty through the Americas Society/Council of the Americas, and now the Cisneros Institute at MoMA itself.

These are just some of the connections between the history of MoMA and the history of empire. Let us peruse the archives of MoMA. Their contents are our receipts. Shine a light on them. Unseal the history whose legacies burden us today. The research has already commenced. From the Rockefellers to Fink, you will see that there is zero degree of separation between MoMA and the highest echelons of the
question the limits between productive and reproductive labor, formal and informal labor, remunerated and free tasks, between migrant and national labor, between the employed and the unemployed. The strike taken up by the women’s movement directly targets a central element of the capitalist system: the sexual and colonial division of labor.”

Striking happens every day, in ways large and small. From invisible acts of subversion to the great General Strikes that have shut down cities, states, and empires. W.E.B. Du Bois described the destruction of slavery by the enslaved as a General Strike, one whose tactics included everyday resistance, armed rebellion, and mass exodus. Strike thus has a deep connection to abolition and the Black Radical Tradition and is especially resonant at MoMA given ground-breaking shows like Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration, and Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America.

As the 220 arts professionals who signed the 2019 MoMA Divest Letter point out, the museum is adjacent to and entwined with the systems of police, prisons, and profit, exemplified by Blackrock CEO Larry Fink. Going after the oligarchs at MoMA is another way to strike at the profiteers of detention, dispossession, and death. At the museum, those who underwrite prison-industrial complex are within arm’s reach. They gather there routinely for openings, galas, garden parties, and board meetings. Their billions in assets hang on the wall, works of art twisted into ornaments of repression and ciphers of extraction. The structure itself physically...
abuts the ultra-luxury 53W53 MoMA Tower, where some of them and their best friends live.

Campaigns, actions, and letters chip away at the regime’s facade from the outside. Inside, every time workers organize, defy the boss, care for a coworker, disrespect secrecy, or enact other forms of subversion, cracks are created in the core. Cracking and chipping, chipping and cracking. As the walls that artificially separate the museum from the world collapse, we reorient away from the institution and come together to make plans. Let us strike in all the ways possible to exit from the terms of the museum so we can set our own.

* * * * *

IV Operational Terms for Striking MoMA

We proceed on our own terms, not those of the museum. We agree to organize with care, generosity, and patience as we build new relations and deepen existing ones.

1. Multiple Frames/Interwoven Struggles

No struggle is left behind as we move together and separately, but in agreement. At MoMA the frames of abolition, decolonization, anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism overlap in the course of struggle. The dismantling of patriarchy is the warp and the weft of these movement paths. Each allows us to see different things, recognize our blindspots, and to strengthen our movements. We were never meant to know each other, forcibly separated by their divide-and-conquer tactics. We commit to mutually refuse all efforts to isolate our struggles into issue silos, understanding that single-issue organizing easily falls into the hands of those seeking to undermine our collective liberation.

2. Recognize Debts/Operationalize Solidarity

No to the non-profit-industrial complex. No to the ally-industrial complex. No to the diversity-equity-inclusion complex. No to the model-minority-assimilation complex. No anti-Blackness. No white nonsense. No toxic masculinity. No heteronormative culture. No anti-poor or anti-working-class sentiments. No ableism. No “progressive except for Palestine.” Yes to collective liberation; yes to becoming accomplices, co-conspirators, race traitors, class traitors, de-assimilators; yes to all those who are ready to put something on the line, to operationalize their privileges and redistribute their resources in whatever forms these may take, from property deeds to printer ink. Solidarity involves discomfort but offers togetherness in the face of extreme alienation. If it comes easily and doesn’t require a cost, it’s probably not solidarity. Solidarity is the enactment of the social debts we owe each other. Sharing what you’ve got. Material commitments in light of unevenly shared histories of harm. Commitments to care, to act, to take risks, to speak out, to give as much one can, and then some. Working on oneself so as to not reproduce systems of harm and oppressive behavior in the process of showing up for each other. Acknowledging debts and acting accordingly forms bonds of reciprocity and healing. Building relations between movements, communities, families, friends. As we weave our struggles together by taking action and holding each other with care,
another political imaginary emerges. An intercommunalist, intergenerational imaginary that dis-identifies from the nation-state, from the museum, and its underlying myths of modernity. The experiences of our people most intimately and immediately affected by the violence of these forces must always be a central catalyzing point for our work.

3. Against Liberal Governance/Exacerbate the Crisis
No to liberal governance. Governance is the watchword of museum-reformers, inside and out. If only, they say, there were better protocols and principles, we could put our house in order. Better representation. More participation. More diversity, equity, and inclusion. An audit. A task force. More meetings. More trainings. More Zooms. More consultations. A new structure for the board. Guidelines for the acceptability of funds, separating the clean money from the dirty money. Honest billionaires rather than crooked ones. Artist involvement to keep things authentic. An art historian or two to set the moral compass with humanistic values, or maybe even to consult about the meaning of decolonization. Those who allow themselves to be included and instrumentalized in this way undermine our collective liberation. Another kind of institution is possible, but it cannot be on the terms of the existing regime.

4. Multiply Demands/Resist Cooption
No demands that further assimilation back into the art system. Demands can set horizons, shape the imagination, and amplify desires. But at present, any demand that seeks to reform MoMA without challenging its authority to control the process legitimizes the regime. They may say they want to talk, but the museum will use this to buy itself time. Conversations, dialogues, and forums about the “future of the museum” that loop back upon themselves to infinity. Strategic incorporation of this or that demand to placate this or that group, with the intent of waiting out and breaking up the formation. Invocations of the “outside agitator” to question motivations, loyalties, and tactics, deflecting attention from the harm that the museum is causing.

5. Heighten the Contradictions/Act Where You Are
No one is pure in a colonized world. We all live by our contradictions. Working at MoMA and disgusted with MoMA? Being an artist and hating the art system? Teaching at a university and wanting to tear it all down? Studying freedom in college while you go deeper into debt? Struggling to pay rent but displacing someone else? A Ford Fellow who protests the Ford Foundation? Oppressed but also contributing to the oppression of others? This is the entangled dystopia of our present. We can see contradictions as impediments and be consumed by frustration, ambivalence, and despair, or we can acknowledge and heighten them. Quiet forms of subversion, deep conversations, mobilizations, large and small: each act we take further undermines the principles that sustain MoMA.

6. Mapping Power/Addressing Workers
No to the erasure of class in discussions of the museum. MoMA has its own clear hierarchy of power. The board ponies up the money and calls the shots. Management keeps them happy. Curators, critics, and artists provide the culture and the intellectual legitimacy. Then there are the staff, unionized and not. Food service workers, janitors, guards, art handlers, installers, ticket-
takers, copyeditors, educators, those who know the operations and logistics of the infrastructure inside and out. Generations of skill, knowledge, craft, and dedication. We know there is an ongoing history of worker resistance at MoMA. To the workers, we know you have acted and continue to act. You have our unconditional solidarity. Workers are essential stakeholders in overturning the institution and creating something else in the process.

7. Refusing Partitions/Activating Platforms
No to the separation and specialization of roles that the art system expects of us: worker, artist, curator, critic, organizer, journalist. Striking MoMA requires us all, outside, inside, and otherwise. In practice these boundaries are already blurred, but the museum will invoke them in order to isolate us, demobilize us, and prevent us from sharing experiences, knowledges, resources, and power. We see that platforms at the museum are already being activated in furtherance of movement work, going against the grain of the institution. Platforms at the museum can become spaces of assembly beyond the museum’s authority, creating spaces where we can get together and figure things out.

8. Art/Memory
No to the white mythology of the museum, which claims to be a temple of memory. Whose memory? Whose framing? Who decides? Generations of artists, critics, and curators have interrogated the museum’s meta-narrative, moving the dial of representation in the direction of justice. But museums have proven time and again they want the art not the people. The people are pushing back, declaring with their actions that museums are not neutral. Artists as organizers, organizers as artists. Efforts are proliferating to hold museums responsible for all the harm they continue to cause to workers, to artists, to the communities at their doorstep, to people around the world, from Indianapolis Museum of Art, to Montclair University, to the British Museum, to the Quai Branly. We are especially inspired by the work of the Congolese comrade Mwazulu Diyabanza and his collaborators who have directly enacted the reversal of imperial plunder on which that French museum is founded. We are learning from each other, and reconnecting with legacies, promises, and lessons that came to a head in 1968, without apology. Museums and universities were activated as sites of struggle, from the Third World Liberation Front, to Women Students and Artists For Black Art Liberation, to the Guerilla Art Action Group. Proliferating groups, transgressive interventions, non-reformist reforms, visionary programs, ancestral reckonings and re-connections, demands that the museum “decentralize its power structure to the point of communalization.” These are some of the memories that speak to us today. Our memories, our art, our aesthetics exist, before, beyond, and in spite of MoMA, and the empty, linear, homogenous time of colonial modernity. The ancestors are all around us. When we strike MoMA, we’re making the worlds our ancestors deserve(d).

9. Art/Freedom
No to conflating art with MoMA. No to defending MoMA in the name of protecting Culture and Civilization from the iconoclasts and barbarians. No to the myth that freely creating art requires resigning ourselves to unfree conditions in society because we
need their money, their resources, their recognition. Yes to partisans of art. Yes to art embedded in the culture of movements. Yes to aesthetics rooted in struggle. Yes to art for its own sake, if that means we are down with creating and conspiring to get free, whatever our style, school, or medium. Meme-makers and abstract painters, monument topplers and postmodern sculptors, designers of banners and drawers of lines, unpopular musicians and obscure sound artists, live-streamers and cinephiles, wardancers and pole-dancers, dream-diviners and archive-searchers; critiques of institutions and those who never recognized the institution in the first place. Artists of all kinds that do not recognize such distinctions in their life and work. What matters is being engaged in the struggle and breaking the dependency-complex that MoMA has created for art, ideologically and materially. When we strike MoMA, we free up space for a renewal of art as envisioned in the freedom dreams of Suzanne Césaire, “And this is the domain of the strange, the marvelous, and the fantastic, a domain scorned by people of certain inclinations. Here is the freed image, dazzling and beautiful, with a beauty that could not be more unexpected and overwhelming. Here are the poet, the painter, and the artist, presiding over the metamorphoses and the inversions of the world under the sign of hallucination and madness.”

10. Diversify Tactics/Practice Creativity and Care
MoMA can be approached from all angles using numerous strategies and tools. Diversity of tactics, diversity of aesthetics. Plan and organize with care and generosity. Agitate and affirm. Work with others on the basis of trust and affinity. Anticipate counterinsurgency. Do not forget that when we strike MoMA, we are hitting an essential nerve in the global body of the ruling class.

* * * * *

V Steps Forward: A Two-Phase Process

With the above terms as a framework, this document intends to initiate a two-phase, stakeholder-led decolonization process for MoMA without the authority of MoMA. Launching on April 9th and extending to June 11th, the first phase of the process is a ten week sequence of conversations, actions, and more. These activities will lay the groundwork for the second phase of the process: a spokescouncil-based convening that can determine the shape, steps, and mechanics of a just transition to a post-MoMA future that prioritizes workers and communities.

Phase 1: Strike MoMA @ MoMA: Ten Weeks of Art, Action, and Conversation
Phase 1 launches with a day of action on April 9th. Stay tuned for details. There will be three orientations in advance of April 9th: a general orientation, an orientation limited to BIPOC folks, and an orientation for those wishing to contribute from beyond New York, including at an international scale. To participate in these orientations, contact strikemoma@protonmail.com.

The subsequent ten weeks will encompass a variety of activities, including trainings, writing projects, agitprop campaigns, and direct actions at the museum and beyond. Weaving these
activities together will be a series of movement conversations, online and in person, that will function as the intellectual and relational infrastructure for phase 2 of the process. An important component of these conversations will be collective research, archival investigation, and speculative visioning concerned with post-MoMA futures.

Working groups are already forming to participate in these ten weeks and beyond:
Curators and Educators for Decolonization (CED). For more information, contact curatorseducatorsdecolonize@protonmail.com
Artists for a Post-MoMA Future (APMF). For more information, contact artistspostmoma@protonmail.com

Phase 2: Convening for a Just Transition to a Post-MoMA Future
Shaped by a spokescouncil of stakeholders and independent of the authority of MoMA, this convening, held at the end of the ten weeks, will determine the next steps for disassembling the museum in light of its harmful history: determining the mechanics of divestment and transfer of assets, the redistribution of properties and the repurposing of infrastructure; establishing funds for reparations, rematriations, and Indigenous land restoration; sustained support for just transition of workers to cooperative self-management and solidarity economies. As MoMA winds down and we extract our imagination from its orbit, our energies, resources and labor power will be freed up for creating alternatives in its place. Alternatives controlled by workers and communities, not billionaires and their enablers. This could be a first step for a city-wide process.

VI Authorship of This Document
This living document dated as of March 23, 2021 is authored by StrikeMOMA Working Group of the International Imagination of Anti-National Anti-Imperialist Feelings (IIAAF). It is generated by StrikeMOMA Working Group in conversation with dozens of other groups and individuals, including but not limited to:
Artists for a Post-MoMA Future
Comité Boricua En La Diáspora
Curators and Educators for Decolonization
Decolonize This Place
Direct Action Front for Palestine
Forensic Architecture
Formers Employees of MoMA
Global Ultra Luxury Faction
Insurgent Poets Society
MoMA Divest
Take Back the Bronx
Wardance Collective
We Will Not Be Silent

Finally, this document does not offer signatories and does not seek to establish a coalition. This document intends to facilitate the growth of a formation in which individuals, collectives, and groups engage in shared struggle. Strike MoMA.
Yona Friedman’s sketch for La Ville Spatiale from 1958. Friedman’s visionary project imagined a city that would accommodate the free will of its citizens and would be suspended on a framework above the existing urban space, avoiding any displacement of what came before.

A charrette is an intensive period of time in which people gather to resolve a design problem. The general idea of a charrette is to create an innovative atmosphere in which a diverse group of stakeholders can collaborate to “generate visions for the future.”

In 2004, MoMA unveiled a renovation by architect Yoshio Taniguchi. Speaking to New York Magazine, he remarked, “The model for MoMA is Manhattan itself. The Sculpture Garden is Central Park, and around it is a city with buildings of various functions and purpose. MoMA is a microcosm of Manhattan.”

To this we respond: THAT’S THE PROBLEM!

MoMA has become a microcosm of a city that excludes, extracts, and exploits on occupied Lenape territory. And yet, inside the museum are the relics of our comrades in radical thought who envisioned worlds no one else could imagine until they were conveyed through form. It is time for these visions to be unleashed and wielded in the world, to breathe life into these works anew.

Take for instance the museum’s collection of visionary architectural models and drawings. Visionary architecture, while often optimistically broadcasting a wish or desire, is simultaneously rooted in inevitable failure. Often relegated to models, drawings, and other incarnations of the paper project, these proposals remain theoretical or unbuilt due to various circumstances, ranging from sheer feasibility, to political or financial circumstances. The residual idea exists as a pragmatic metaphor, a statement demanding a culture capable of enabling its existence, a poetic critique of reality.

We call for a suspension of reality. Reality has for too long been an excuse. We call for the creative will of this city’s people to imagine a dynamic, inclusive, earth-shaking, transformative, dispersed home for art that does not weaponize the care for these beloved and inspiring works at the expense of enabling systems of harm. We will wonder together, what will it look like? We will make drawings and build models. We will ask better and more beautiful questions. And we will delight in our collective sympathetic magic that will bring these visions into reality when we hold space together.

Speaking about the 2004 MoMA renovation, Taniguchi recalled his initial conversations with the then-head of Architecture and Design at the museum when it came to his proposal. “If you raise a lot of money, I will give you great, great architecture. But if you raise really a lot of money, I will make the architecture disappear,” he said. Let us fulfill Taniguchi’s vision, which is shared in the Strike MoMA Framework and Terms for Struggle document: As the walls that artificially separate the museum from the world collapse, we reorient away from the institution and come together to make plans. Let us strike in all the ways possible to exit from the terms of the museum so we can set our own.

Let not the laws of the city nor the law of gravity determine our vision!

To get involved, please write to: artistspostmoma@protonmail.com
Curators and Educators for Decolonization, A Declaration and Invitation

text by Nelson Maldonado-Torres, working group co-facilitator

Why strike MoMA? So that something else can emerge, something under the control of workers, communities, and artists rather than billionaires. —Strike MoMA: Framework and Terms of Struggle

Decolonization is a collective project that is rooted in the struggle against Indigenous genocide, settler colonialism, racial slavery, racialized gendering and modern/colonial ungendering, as well as the naturalization of land expropriation and the commodification of the environment. Decolonization is also a protest against the rationalization and naturalization of war and violence against Indigenous, Black, colonized, and racialized subjects as well as their descendants all over the world. This ongoing war targets bodies, territories, knowledges, symbols, movements, and rhythms. It expects disappearance, if it does not directly produce it in highly violent forms, as well as assimilation into the standards of the modern West. More than anything, however, decolonization might be a desire for an alternative.

Decolonization depends on generosity and creativity, without which critique becomes a ruse, if not a means of self-destruction. Decolonization involves the identification of what must be created, abolished, imagined anew, as well as reframed or reconceptualized. Curators and educators play an important role in performing these tasks. Along with artists, community organizers, activists, elders, and others who form part of decolonial movements, they help to identify and clarify fundamental problems as well as generate the most relevant questions that inform projects for decolonization.

The strike against MoMA is more than solely the rejection of the actions and financial investments of certain individuals in its Board or its Chairperson. It is a denunciation as well as an interruption of the coloniality that is embedded in the modernity that is enshrined in the MoMA itself, and that is also part of most other museums. It is not a strike against art but against its colonization and co-optation of art in the service of colonial and imperialist projects. More than anything, the strike against MoMA is a decolonial gesture, as well as an act committed to the idea that art should not be captured by oligarchs and capital, or assimilated into national myths, but rather that creative action plays a crucial role in the process of combatting war and affirming the worth of communities.

Curators and Educators for Decolonization stand up in solidarity with the strike against MoMA and the goal of promoting artistic formations "under the control of workers, communities, and artists rather than billionaires." For this, we commit to engage in curatorial and educative initiatives that seek to:

A. Identify and bring higher visibility to creative projects that already present viable models of decolonial formation. Particular emphasis will be given to projects that are part of Native American and Indigenous "land back" and anticolonial movements, projects that target antiblack racism and racialized gendering/ungendering, and initiatives that address the conditions of refugees and migrants facing racist actions. This activity involves a critical engagement with the concept of art and artistic projects on the basis of decolonial formations that challenge these concepts, along with a critical reflection on museums and museumification.

B. Generate ideas and activities that promote and anticipate the emergence of decolonial creative formations, including visual, verbal, embodied, and musical creative works and techniques.

More specifically, Curators and Educators for Decolonization are committed to engage in one of these actions from the start of the strike against MoMA on April 9th, 2021 to the end of 2022. The list provided here is not exhaustive: equivalent activities could also be proposed. Collaborations among members, including regional encounters and coordination of work (e.g., similar exhibitions and/or courses taking place at the same time or building from each other), are particularly encouraged, but individual and punctual actions are entirely adequate too.

CURATORS

A. Curate an exhibition, part of an exhibition, or a series of educational sessions that introduce audiences and participants to the strike against MoMA, and to at least some of the actions that take place during the strike.

B. Critically engage the archives of established artistic institutions (starting with those in the places where the curators find themselves) to make visible the ties between the history of these institutions and the history of empire/nation-building/capital. Use the material in publications, exhibitions, seminars, or other activities.

C. Curate an exhibition, part of an exhibition, or a series of educational sessions that feature creative projects that enact the principles of a decolonial post-MoMA formation. There should always be attention to Indigenous struggles for land in the national formation where the educational initiative or research takes place.

D. Design a class, a module of a class, or a research initiative that features creative projects that enact the principles of a decolonial post-MoMA formation. There should always be attention to Indigenous struggles for land in the national formation where the educational initiative or research takes place.

EDUCATORS

A. Design a class, a module of a class, or a research initiative exercises that introduce students to the strike against MoMA, and to some of the actions that take place during the strike.

B. Critically engage the archives of established institutions of education (starting with those in the places where the educators find themselves) to make visible the ties between the history of these institutions and the history of empire/nation-building/capital. Use the material in publications, exhibitions, seminars, or other activities.

C. Design a class, a module of a class, or a research initiative that features creative projects that enact the principles of a decolonial post-MoMA formation. There should always be attention to Indigenous struggles for land in the national formation where the educational initiative or research takes place.

Curators and Educators for Decolonization will follow up and support the 10-weeks strike by seriously engaging its contributions to the emergence of decolonial creative formations. We will also seek to follow and contribute to the Phase 2 of the movement, namely, the convention for a "Just Transition to a Post-MoMA future." This could involve the coordination of activities at museums and/or classrooms regionally and internationally, as well as the creation of a website, and the organization of a conference at the end of 2022.

Contact:
Curators and Educators for Decolonization (CED):
curatorseducatorsdecolonize@protonmail.com
To the Workers of MoMA:

Security, maintenance, wall painters, guest services, and restaurant staff. We write you this letter so that you hear directly from us, why we are here, what we came to do, to address how this affects you, and most importantly, to open up communication between us, so that we can support you as workers.

By now, you probably already heard that the board of trustees of MoMA who run this museum are all getting rich off of building the prisons that lock our people up, building the concentration camps that lock up our undocumented family and separate children from their mothers. You heard that there are board members who get rich selling guns, bombs, war planes, and surveillance technology to use against our people back home in the countries we come from the same way they sell weapons to the NYPD. Our people, who come from places like Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Palestine, Ghana, Kashmir, Armenia, Somalia, Lebanon, Dominican Republic, Yemen, Honduras, Trinidad & Tobago, Syria & Somalia. You probably heard about the hundreds of thousands of dollars they have given to the NYPD who beat and arrest us. Who set up floodlights on our block and treat our neighborhoods like open air prisons while they invest in real estate to gentrify our hoods and put our neighbors in the shelter system and make our neighborhoods so expensive that the paycheck you cash from MoMA ain’t enough, and you probably thinking about doing Uber on the side. Because that’s what some of us think about having to do too! That one of their board members was involved in shady business with sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein. That some of them were Trump campaign donors, that some of them are getting rich destroying the Amazon rainforest as if the planet isn’t already sick and dying. We could go on... but if you want to know more, we have a website: www.strikemoma.org Go check us out.

These board of trustees go out into the world and make money off the death and destruction we, and our people face, but then come sit on the board of this museum and get patted on the back for giving money to keep the museum open and to “take care of art.” Our response is...

1. What about taking care of people? They don’t give a shit about us. How they make their money proves it. 2. There are other ways to take care of art that isn’t linked to the monsters that destroy us.

So, for the next ten weeks, Strike MoMA will be in the building. We come to disrupt. We come to take up space. We know this might make your job harder in the coming weeks. Especially for security. We apologize in advance. We are not here to harm anyone or anything. We come to demand a new MoMA. We gotta fight back and this is the only place where we can touch these fools. So please bear with us. Work with us. No matter what they tell you, DO NOT LET THEM TURN YOU AGAINST US. Let us have this understanding between us. Most importantly, tell us how we can support you. Tell us the bullshit they are doing behind the scenes. Email us anonymously at strikemoma@protonmail.com

We look forward to a different future. But we ain’t waiting for it. We’re making it now. We hope you support our efforts.

Much Love & solidarity,
Strike MoMA
Transcript of some remarks made by Dylan Rodriguez as part of the Abolitionist Imaginaries One-Day Symposium at MoMA PS1 in NYC on March 26, 2021

And so what I think we've seen today and what we've heard from and the things that we've absorbed, the feelings we've absorbed, have to do with what an abolitionist art community looks like. In other words, it's actually here. We don't have to project and speculate, although we should always project and speculate in a creative kind of way. We don't have to think about abolitionist art communities being somewhere else. Sometime else. I feel like I'm a guest of an abolitionist art community right now and today. At the same time, I want to clarify that this is only a glimpse. It is only an echo. It is only a moment of feeling. And I say that because abolition is a creative infrastructure. It's a making; it's a method. If we're gonna be honest, it is a counter war.

It's a modality of community. It's not an outcome. Let's say that to everybody that will listen to us. Abolition is not an outcome. It's not an individual identity. I see far too many people that are branding themselves abolitionists who have no connection to abolitionist community, no accountability to abolitionist organizing and work. So we gotta push back against that and invite people who have that kind of neoliberal, individualizing branding tendency to actually join the work. You know, today's dialogue between Jackie Sumell and Mariame Kaba exemplifies something I've been saying over and over again to anybody that'll listen to me. And that is the historical fact that there is no such thing as an individual abolitionist. To the contrary, the generosity of abolitionist work is something that grows from the Black, and especially the Black feminist, Black queer, Black trans radical and revolutionary tradition, as a shared collective community of obligation and responsibility.

So we gotta say that over and over again to each other and to ourselves, 'cause this is what makes it. It's in this way, within this extended global tradition, that I think we can understand the importance of embracing abolition as an aesthetic, as aesthetic work. Although I also should say, following the insight of the Black revolutionary and radical cultural worker—we forget this sometimes, that Frantz Fanon was a radical cultural worker—but following Frantz Fanon, I wanna say that abolitionist aesthetics are necessarily and always an aesthetics of combat. So I wanna think about that. Maybe think about that alongside Nicole [Fleetwood] once after I finish my comments. Let me continue my comments this evening by thinking about the immediate, concrete, immediately emancipatory implications of what Nicole and all of y'all have created in the public space, at PS1 through the Marking Time exhibit and today's Abolitionist Imaginaries Symposium.

First I wanna say I have a deep sense of gratitude for what you've done. You've challenged us to come to terms with the historical violence of the dominant US and Western art world. I think it is worth repeating over and over again that what you are doing here is a direct abolitionist challenge to that world. And you are also challenging, I should not put this lightly, you are challenging a world that is inhabited by the nearby MoMA, New York's renowned museum of modern art, which, as we know, draws its historical capital and material capital from the chattel, colonial, land-expropriating violence of genocidal racial capitalism's philanthropic arm. So what does it mean if we're gonna be serious about this analysis and critique of the Museum of Modern Art in New York? What would it mean to take this exhibit at PS 1, right there in Queens, and today's symposium conversation as exemplary of what a liberated abolitionist art infrastructure would be like in the rubble of an antiblack and colonial art world's past and present. 'Cause that's what I wanna fucking see. I wanna be working with you all. I wanna be a guest of y'all's in an art world, which is dancing on the rubble of the antiblack colonial art world that still remains hegemonic and dominant. I'm fucking done with that shit. I'm tired of it. What if we take the aesthetic of Marking Time, the exhibit, the aesthetics—what if we take that seriously, what if we take the title of today's symposium seriously as an urging toward collective sustained embrace of the responsibility to be accountable to what we have called here an abolitionist imaginary…. I've been one degree separated from Adam Chan for many years, and I'm so happy that he's not incarcerated, but I'm even happier that he's not incarcerated while doing the work that he's doing. Adamu, you know, he raised the question earlier today of accountability.

So I wanna move in the spirit of that question. By making that commitment to accountability, I'm obligated to give a couple minutes to honor the imagination and intervention of a strike that was just announced three days ago, which some of y'all probably know about, many of you might not. I just learned about it, you know, not that long ago. But the strike is described with clarity at the website strike-moma.org. This is a 10 week strike. It's gonna begin, I believe, on April 9th. It's organized by the Strike MoMA working group of the International Imagination of Anti-national Anti-imperialist Feelings. The IIAAF. I fucking love the title of the organization. This is not some isolated organization's work. It has been happening in conversation with literally dozens of organizations and people, including, but not limited to groups like Artists for a Post-MoMA Future, Comité Boricua En La Diáspora, Curators and Educators for Decolonization, Decolonize This Place, Direct Action Front for Palestine, Insurgent Poets Society, MoMA Divest, Take Back the Bronx, We Will Not Be Silent, I could spend the next 10 minutes just talking about all the organizations backing this up. So I wanna continue my comments by amplifying the message of this upcoming strike. It states an understanding that museums are inseparable from the societies that sponsor and canonize them, or as the strike organizers phrase it, and I'm quoting them here: "The MoMA exists on the same plane as the violence of the ruling class that has controlled it." All right....
Introduction to Writing for Post-MoMA Futures, Part I
(April 9, 2021)

This dossier of materials is the first installation of Writing for Post-MoMA Futures, a collaborative project with the Verso blog intended to build the intellectual and relational infrastructure of the Strike MoMA initiative over the course of the Ten Weeks of Action and beyond. The release of the dossier is a real-time contribution to Week 4 of this initiative, and is interwoven with two other events this week. The first is a conversation (included below) between Ariella Azoulay, Shellyne Rodriguez, Dalaeja Foreman, and Nitasha Dhillon about the task of what Azoulay calls “abolishing MoMA” and its significance for collective liberation struggles beyond the art system. The second is the Ruins of Modernity and its significance for collective liberation struggles about the task of what Azoulay calls “abolishing MoMA” and its significance for collective liberation struggles. The Writing for Post-MoMA Futures project is woven into the Ruins of Modernity tour in coming weeks.

On April 23, an email was sent by Strike MoMA organizers to MoMA Director Glenn Lowry announcing their intent to bring the Ruins of Modernity Tour into the museum. In the email, they address a letter sent to staff by Lowry (and subsequently leaked by workers) in which he charges that Strike MoMA’s motivation is to “destroy the museum.” In response, organizers write:

"Your attempt to conflate striking MoMA with "destruction" amounts to fear mongering, as if it were us, rather than the oligarchs, who embody a threat to culture, art, and society. MoMA has been a mechanism of destruction since its inception with the Rockefellerites. Its claims for enlightenment and progress have always been in ruins; we are heightening this condition and its related contradictions. You invoke "the museum" as if it were a homogenous community with a unified interest; but everyone knows it is a site of class struggle and riven with antagonisms, however many reassuring emails you send or conversations you have with staff. The MoMA regime is a system of power and wealth that harms people, that uses art as an instrument of accumulation, and that makes empty appeals to what you call "the public good" while covering for billionaires like Leon Black, Larry Fink, and Jerry Speyer, whose names have become synonymous with patriarchal violence, the carceral state, climate destruction, neo-feudal landlordism, and direct support for the NYPD Foundation. Disassemble, dismantle, abolish. All these verbs apply when we are talking about destroying an apparatus of violence so that something else can emerge, something controlled by workers, communities, and artists rather than oligarchs.

Lowry’s fear mongering is to be expected given that Strike MoMA directly threatens the MoMA regime he is tasked with managing. However, his invocation of “destruction” finds echoes in a more diffuse sense of cognitive dissonance percolating across the art system, as we overhear the idea that Strike MoMA is aiming to “cancel” MoMA in the manner of a disgraced celebrity. The current movement strikes at the core of the art system. The struggle against settler institutions like the museum and the university is unsettling to all of our ways of being. For many artists, critics, curators, it is difficult to divest from an institution that has convinced the world of its necessity and permanence, and around which many professional profiles revolve. As stated in the Strike MoMA document, striking MoMA is not about moralizing from a place of purity. It is about "heightening contradictions" to the point that the apparatus breaks down so that something else can emerge, something based in values of care, generosity, and cooperation rather than property, profit, and imperial plunder.

Seeing the continuities between imperialism and the contemporary museum becomes all the more resonant in light of a recent development at MoMA that follows on the heels of the announcement of the tour by Strike MoMA. This past Tuesday, after months of silence from MoMA, it was officially announced that Leon Black’s replacement will be Marie-Josée Kravis, a longtime board MoMA board member. The replacement of Leon Black by Marie-Josée Kravis is a game of musical chairs. For us, the issue is not one bad board member. They are all part of the same "interlocking directorate" whose violence is accumulated in the very structure of the museum and the power grid of the city surrounding it. Kravis is deeply involved in a network of think tanks that make up the intellectual and operational infrastructure of the global ruling class. She is the vice Chair and Senior Fellow of the right-wing Hudson Institute, started by Rand Corporation executives and connected to the Institute For Advanced Study in Princeton. It has given awards to figures including Ronald Regan, Henry Kissinger, Benjamin Netanyahu, Paul Ryan, Marco Rubio, and Vice President Mike Pence. She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, the Bilderberg Group, and is active as Chairwoman Emeritus of the Economic Club of New York. This elite planning body hosted a nationally-televisioned speech by Donald Trump in 2019, and Kravis personally introduced a speech by Trump’s Secretary of State Mike Pompeo less than a year ago. At this level of the power elite, ideological lines between liberals and Trumpists break down. It is about consolidating ruling class governance in the face of heightening contradictions. The profile of Kravis only adds to the case against MoMA. Her name now appears in the limelight alongside better-known board members like Larry Fink, CEO of Blackrock and supporter of the New York City Police Foundation, and Glenn Dubin, the hedge fund billionaire who has been explicitly named as a participant in Epstein’s inner circle of sexual abuse on his private Caribbean island. The election of Kravis to the head of the board makes the stakes of striking MoMA all the more clear for our communities and movements for collective liberation.

The Writing for Post-MoMA Futures project is woven into the work of organizing against the forces of death and destruction represented by a figure like Kravis and her affiliated institutions. The materials appearing here and in future iterations are concrete contributions to developing the framework for what it means to simultaneously exit the apparatus of MoMA while imagining and building counter-institutions. They point in the direction of Phase 2 of Strike MoMA, which will unfold later this year with a Convening for a Just Transition to Post-MoMa Futures.
THE ART OF MAIMING:
A RESEARCH WORKING GROUP

text by Jasbir K. Puar, working group member

The research-intensive working group is focused on excavating and exposing the circuits of capital that make the Settler Museum possible. Through our research we intend to unravel these circuits to reveal and imagine other ways of being in relation. Warren Kanders (Whitney/Safariland), Leon Black (MOMA/Jeffrey Epstein), and Darren Walker (Ford Foundation/"humane" jails) have been rendered monstrous exceptions or benevolent "best of" capitalists in a system that relies on the wealthy washing their money through philanthropic arenas and institutions. In actuality, none of these philanthropists are exceptional. Rather their profit-making practices and ideological orientations to capitalism and exploitation are normative, typical, expected, lauded, and justified as the only way to create urban spaces of cultural value.

As a methodological approach we refuse to accept the mystification of capitalist exploitation presented by the lexicon of financialization. We labor in tandem with the Strike MOMA Working Group in the spirit of not only decolonial and abolitionist futures but decolonization and abolition now. This research is necessary tactically, to use as leverage in the media and for impact, to disseminate information in order to discredit and to educate, to demand acknowledgement of the great harms of these institutions, and to execute certain actions to solicit their dismantling. This research is in concert with movement pedagogy that seeks to unsettle everything.

In short, we do not need profit from war, economies of maiming and death, labor exploitation, land grabs, settler colonialism, and the prison industrial complex in order to have sustainable, nourishing, representative, and accessible artistic work grounded in community needs and desires.
Decolonize Ayiti Working Group (April 9)

On Friday April 9, a group of performance artists in the Dominican Republic gathered in solidarity with Strike MoMA working group in NY.

Performance artist La Gran Mawon along with Mache Mache performed in the Parque Cervantes while a projection by artists Jehdy Vargas and Zahir Ajam played in the background.

Decolonize Ayiti released this statement along with these videos:

We are interested in beginning the conversation and thoughts of decolonization of DR / HAITI. Holding MoMA accountable for the use of their blood money via the streams of Leon Black & Jeffery Epstein. The class war being raised is connected to the big money in MoMA. On the 9th artist La Gran Mawon along with Mache Mache and Jehdy Vargas want to discuss the wall that’s being built between the DR and Haiti (Fuck the wall) and question where is this money coming from, the artist want to discuss a strike against the Dominican Nationalist that are anti Haitian (Fuck Xenophobia and Fuck White Supremacy), we wanted to start the conversation of all the horrible Columbus sculptures in DR – specifically the one with Anacaona reaching up to him and how problematic it is for the true story of colonization.

Together we want to talk in solidarity about modernity, we are talking about our bodies in these spaces of big money like MoMA that have captivity and a budget to create culture change. They want our art, music, dances but they don’t want us says they want to continue to take our creativity to show white and rich people how the “abstract other” lives or minority, or person of poverty lives but yet when they bring us into these spaces we are dying because we don’t have health insurance and we are scrambling writing artist grants to even be able to make work says artist Britney from Get Dis War Dance Collective. Strike MoMA is about taking roots. It is about imagining what kind of nutrition can exist for a post MoMA future that doesn’t accept blood money and war criminals on their boards.

For 10 weeks we want to organize a group of Dominican artists in support of Haiti and start the conversation of decolonization that needs to be had out here with the Dominican Nationalist that are trying to build a wall. This strike will be in conversation with strike MoMA and calling out all of the blood money connected to the museum via Leon Black and Jeffery Epstein and many more.

As indigenous, brown, black, queer and trans artist our artwork has been made unsafe. For 10 weeks we want to raise awareness of the class war being raised around the world which is connected to the big money and blood money at MoMA. We want to facilitate multiple conversations and would love the support of the folks that are organizing right now on the ground in Haiti it reached out to some organizers to start the conversation that needs to be had out here.

Ello lanzaron esta declaración junto con el video:

Estamos interesados en comenzar la conversación y los pensamientos de descolonización de RD / HAITI. Hacer responsable al MoMA por el uso de su dinero de sangre a través de las corrientes de Leon Black y Jeffery Epstein. La guerra de clases que se está plant-ando está relacionada con el gran dinero en MoMA. El día 9, los artistas de La Gran Mawan junto con Mache Mache y Jehdy Vargas quieren hablar del muro que está construyendo entre la República Dominicana y Haití (que se jode el muro) y cuestionar de dónde viene este dinero, los artistas quieren hacer una huelga contra los nacionalistas dominicanos que son anti-haitianos (Fuck Xenophobia y Fuck supremacía blanca), queríamos comenzar la conversación sobre todas las horribles esculturas de Colón en RD, específicamente la de Anacaona acercándose a él y lo problemático que es para la verdadera historia de la colonización.

Juntos queremos hablar solidariamente de la modernidad, estamos hablando de nuestros cuerpos en estos espacios de mucho dinero como el MoMA que tienen cautiverio y un presupuesto para generar cambio de cultura. Quieren nuestro arte, música, bailes pero no nos quieren dice que quieren seguir llevando nuestra creatividad para mostrársela a la gente blan-ca y rica cómo vive el “otro abstracto” o la minoría, o la persona de la pobreza, pero aún cuando traen Nos estamos muriendo en estos espacios porque no tenemos seguro médico y estamos luchando con las subvenciones para artistas escritores para poder hacer trabajo, dice artista Britney de Get Dis War Dance Collective. Strike MoMA se trata de echar raíces. Se trata de imaginar qué tipo de nutrición puede existir para un futuro posterior al MOMA que no acepte dinero de sangre y criminales de guerra en sus foros.

Durante 10 semanas queremos organizar un grupo de artistas dominicanos en apoyo de Haiti y comenzar la conversación de descolonización que se debe tener aquí con los nacionalistas dominicanos que están tratando de construir un muro. Esto huelga estará en conversación con la huelga MoMA y llegará a todo el dinero de sangre conectado al museo a través de Leon Black y Jeffery Epstein y muchos más.

Como artistas indígenas, morenos, negros, queer y trans, nuestro obra de arte se ha vuelto insegura. Durante 10 semanas queremos crear conciencia sobre la guerra de clases que se está levantando en todo el mundo y que está relacionada con el gran dinero y el dinero de sangre en el MoMA. Queremos facilitar múltiples conversaciones y nos encan-taría el apoyo de la gente que se está organizando en este momento en Haití. Me comu-niqué con algunos organizadores para iniciar la conversación que se debe tener aquí.
Post-MoMa Futures:
Ten Weeks of Art, Action, and Conversation

Every Friday, April 9 - June 11

Urban Plaza, 31 West 52nd street, directly across from MoMA

Weekly gatherings begin at 4 PM

* * * * *

Statement of Intent

We are here, in the heart of empire, to strike MoMA. When we strike moma we strike the blood-soaked modernity to which this museum is a monument. Shout out to all those doing actions today in Chicago, Dominican Republic, Athens, and everywhere else, including to the former and current MoMA workers who have expressed their solidarity in various ways. In acting together through collective refusal, we are creating connections. We are bridging colonial wounds across movements, borders, and identities.

Every Friday for the next ten weeks, this plaza will be the site of a pop-up de-occupation. This process is grounded in the operational document Strike MoMa: Terms and Framework for Struggle. The document is an invitation to gather, to imagine, and to act in ways big and small. Inside the institution and outside the institution, in solidarity with workers and the communities harmed by MoMa’s toxic legacy. As people find each other, the artificial walls separating the museum from the city dissolve.

Today we are gathering on our own terms outside the institution to build alternative worlds, here and now. The process has already begun. We are not waiting for change to come from above. We are not making demands upon the institution. When we strike MoMa, we are allowing something else to emerge, something that values care and generosity over property and profit. Something controlled by workers, communities, and artists rather than the death-dealing oligarchs who control it now.

Men like Leon Black, the hedge fund billionaire who financed Jeffery Epstein. Men like Larry Fink, CEO of BlackRock and donor to the NYC police Foundation. Men like Steven Tennenbaum, whose firm GoldTree helped to implement the Promesa austerity package imposed on the people of Puerto Rico.

The problem goes beyond any one board member. The museum itself is the problem. Since its inception in 1929 with the oil wealth of the Rockefellers, the museum has been a technology of extraction and an apparatus of dispossession. There is zero separation between the museum and the global ruling class. It is the same people who reside in the ultra-luxury residential skyscrapers that surround us, like 35W35, the so-called MoMa Tower. Look at it! It is literally connected to the museum, and we know that board members live there. We are outside MoMA because MoMA exists outside of itself. It is more than an art museum. It is a spectacular node in a grid of power and capital extending throughout the city and the world.

Post-MoMa futures are enacted now in the space we hold, the relations that we build, the actions we take, with a diversity of tactics and aesthetics. We are creating movement-generated art, media, and education within an emerging infrastructure. As we dance on the ruins of the modern museum, may a thousand mushrooms bloom under the signs of healing, care, and solidarity. The empire is falling, and the ancestors are calling.

* * * * *

Where we are standing

We are gathering on stolen Lenape land, land that has been violently integrated into the property-grid of the settler-city. Specifically, this plaza is a so-called Privately Owned Public Space (POPS). It is defined by a zoning instrument that allows developers to build higher, more profitable skyscrapers in exchange for defining a small portion of their lot as 24-hour “public space.”

On one side of the plaza is the Deutsche Bank building. Deutsche Bank: profiteers of the subprime mortgage crisis, investors in the Dakota Access pipeline, lenders to Jeffery Epstein and Donald Trump, corporate sponsors of MoMA. On the other side, the CBS Building, headquarters of one of the largest media companies in the world. It was designed by Modernist hero Eero Saarinen. Austere architectural form and capitalist media spectacle are here joined seamlessly in a looming monument to the same blood-soaked modernity advanced by MoMA just across the street.
CBS stands for Columbia Broadcasting System. Columbia, as in the spirit of Christopher Columbus. Think of Columbus Circle a few blocks north on 59th street, where a monument to the colonizer still stands. Think of Columbia University a few miles north, founded by the British Crown and now an educational epicenter of the global elite steadily encroaching into Harlem. Shout out to the grad student workers on strike up there! Shout out to the miners on strike in Alabama! Shout out to the Amazon workers on strike all across the world!

In the middle of the plaza stands a sculpture entitled Lapsestrake (1987) by Jesus Bautista Morales (1950-2015). Morales grew up in a working class Chicano community in Texas. He stated that he was inspired to create sculptural forms that evoked those of his own ancestral connections to the pre-Columbian civilizations of Mexico. His best known work is the Houston Police Officers’ Memorial (1990), guarded 24-7 by the Houston Police Department. As we gather to transform this space, let us deepen our understanding of how they commodify our culture, how they use our art as ornaments, treat us as people to be used and trick us into assimilating into a system that is killing us.

Look around the plaza. Think of the possibilities as we gather and hold space together. The pillars. The benches. The acoustics. The lines. Even think of the soil in the planters. What seeds will be cultivated and cared for in the coming ten weeks?

In the immediate radius of MoMA relevant sites to explore are everywhere. Here are just a few that are within walking distance of the museum. More will be added as research is conducted by participants in the de-occupation over the next ten weeks. We hear that this will be part of a Pokemon game in future pop-ups.

BlackRock is located at 55 E 52nd St. Black Rock is the world’s largest asset manager and is invested in private prisons, climate-destroying corporations, and numerous other violent industries. Larry Fink is the CEO of Black Rock, a donor to the NYPD, a former Trump advisor, and also on the board of MoMA.

New York City Police Foundation: 555 5th Ave, New York, NY 10017. Many MoMA board members donate to this organization.

15 Central Park West: ultra-luxury building just north of Billionaires Row, home to Eyal Ofer and Zhang Xin, both of whom are MoMA board members.

Goldtree Asset Management is located at 300 Park Avenue. Goldtree helped to implement the Promesa austerity package imposed on the people of Puerto Rico. The CEO of the firm is MoMA board member Steven Tannenbaum.

World Jewish Congress is located at 501 Madison Avenue. MoMa honorary board chair Ronald Lauder is the president of the WJC, one of the leading Zionist advocacy organization in the United States, founded to advance the settler-colonization in Palestine.

Ford Foundation is located at 320 East 43rd. Ford Foundation is run by Darren Walker, known for calling the cops on Ford Fellows when they protested his advocacy of new jail construction. Though not on the board of MoMa, he is closely connected to its leading players. Ford Foundation has for decades deployed techniques of soft counterinsurgency against radical movements through co-optation and neutralization, most recently under the rubric of “social justice.”

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Principles and Agreements for the De-Occupation

• Strike MoMa: Terms and Framework for Struggle is the starting point for coming together to enact Post-MoMa futures through an abundance of approaches, expressions, and aesthetics. We ask that you read, study, and share this document.

• We rely on and cultivate autonomous organizing by individuals, affinity groups, and collectives. We operate independently of nonprofit organizations and politicians.

• We respect a diversity of tactics and strategies so long as they are consistent with the Framework and Terms for Struggle.

• We are not here to harm anyone or any thing. Be mindful of how your actions affect others. We are here to strike MoMa by reorienting away from the institution and towards one another.

• We must protect ourselves from counterinsurgency efforts of the police, the FBI, Fascists, and provocateurs, but also the liberal co-optations and denunciations coming from the art system.

• We are not here for purity. We want to heighten the contradictions that are used to divide us. Direct action, collective self-defense, care, generosity and patience with each other are part and parcel of the work. Trust, friendship, and solidarity is the basis of effective organizing.

• We collectively commit to developing creative and transformative ways to address conflict and harm as we move along the path of a post-MoMA future.

• We come here to learn and unlearn, acknowledging the debts we owe each other. As we do the work of refusing the institution, there is work to be done amongst ourselves as well.
Dear all,

This weekend, we welcomed about 5,000 visitors to the Museum—a strong reminder that our fellow New Yorkers continue to seek out safe, inspiring, and joyful experiences in our galleries. The news on COVID-19 in New York remains optimistic: positivity and hospitalization rates have declined and nearly one in four New Yorkers is now vaccinated. Please remember that you can find details on vaccine appointment availability at sources like New York State's Am I Eligible Website or TurboVax, we've set up computers in the Staff Caff you can use to book appointments, and you can work with your managers to take up to four hours of paid leave to accommodate each scheduled vaccine dose.

As you heard on Friday from *****, a group of approximately 20 peaceful protesters gathered in the late afternoon in Union Plaza across the street from the Museum, for about 90 minutes. MoMA respects the right to protest, and I want to thank everyone in our security, visitor engagement, membership, and retail teams who worked so well together to respect the action taking place, while staying focused on protecting the health and safety of each other and our visitors, and keeping our Museum spaces peaceful and welcoming.

We can all be proud of the Museum's long history of making space for voices to be heard. You may have read in the press that the group which gathered on Friday is calling for "disassembling" MoMA and all museums so they no longer exist, and I'd like to take a moment to speak to that. I do not agree that dismantling MoMA, or any museums, serves the best interests of the public. I believe we collectively provide an important public good that benefits millions of people, of all socio-economic backgrounds, races, and geographies. My focus is on ensuring that we, and as many cultural institutions as possible, survive the crisis of the pandemic and continue to serve future generations. I am proud that we have been able to keep all staff of the Museum employed. I am proud that we have an increasingly diverse staff and program. I am proud of our collaborative efforts to address issues of race, equity, and justice in all that we do. Do we have a lot more work to do? For sure. Can we be an even better institution? For sure. Is the protesters' call to destroy MoMA the solution?

I don't see that helping anyone. I look forward to working together, with all of you, to continue building a better MoMA for all.

Finally, as a reminder, these resources are always available to you:

Our employee assistance program, ***@************, is a free benefit to staff that can provide resources, referrals, and counseling for overall well-being. All calls are free and services are confidential. You can reach the service at 1-800-*** or online at **********.com with the code: ***. CCA's special focus for April webinars is Financial Planning and Security. You can find more details in the attached flyer.

Don't forget the helpful IT Guidance and FAQs on the Staff Site. The IT helpdesk is open Monday-Friday between 9:00am-6:00pm at 212-***-****.

For the latest health updates and guidance on the COVID-19 situation:
- NY State Department of Health: https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/home
- NYC Health Department: nyc.gov/health/coronavirus
- NY State Vaccine Eligibility: https://am-i-eligible.covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/
- TurboVax: https://www.turbovax.info/

Be safe and well,
Glenn
The replacement of Leon Black by Marie-Josée Kravis is a game of musical chairs. They are all part of the same interlocking directorate whose violence is accumulated in the very structure of the museum and the power grid of the city surrounding it. Kravis is deeply connected to an archipelago of think tanks that make up the intellectual and operational infrastructure of the global ruling class. She is the vice Chair and Senior Fellow of the right-wing Hudson Institute, started by Rand Corporation executives, which has given awards to figures including Ronald Regan, Henry Kissinger, Benjamin Netanyahu, Paul Ryan, Marco Rubio, and Vice President Mike Pence. She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, the Bilderberg Group, and is active as Chairwoman Emeritus of the Economic Club of New York, an elite planning body which hosted a nationally-televised speech by Donald Trump in 2019. At this level of the power elite, ideological lines between liberals and Trumpists break down. It is about consolidating ruling class governance in the face of movements for collective liberation.
The RUINS of MODERNITY TOUR:
From the CITY to the MUSEUM
April 30, 3pm EST, sharp, Columbus Circle, Occupied Manhattan

The walls separating the museum from the city have always been an illusion. The Ruins of Modernity Tour operationalizes this fact. We see the museum refracting the same violence as nearby places like Columbus Circle and Billionaire’s Row. Did you know that directly attached to the museum is the ultra-luxury residential skyscraper 53W53 “MoMA Tower”? Come, take a walk as we mark sites and connect struggles.

#StrikeMoMA
The RUINS of MODERNITY TOUR: From the CITY to the MUSEUM

April 30, 2021

We are on the unceded territory of the Lenni Lenape. We stand in solidarity with Native American and Indigenous peoples leading the movement for resurgence, decolonization, and reclamation of their homelands. These lands were stolen to create settler-colonial states, and those who were dispossessed continue to live under conditions of siege, surveillance, and extractivist violence. We support land back, an imperative addressed to all settlers and settler-institutions, including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the City of New York. At its foundations, this city was established on stolen Indigenous land, and shaped and cultivated by enslaved African peoples. We support the undying fight for Black liberation and its many manifestations here and across the planet.

* * * * *

Broadway

Broadway runs from State Street at Bowling Green for 13 mi (21 km) through the borough of Manhattan and 2 mi (3.2 km) through the Bronx, exiting north from New York City to run an additional 18 mi (29 km) through the Westchester County municipalities of Yonkers, Hastings-On-Hudson, Dobbs Ferry, Irvington, and Tarrytown, and terminating north of Sleepy Hollow.

It is the oldest north–south main thoroughfare in New York City, with much of the current street beginning as the Wickquasonack trail before the arrival of Europeans. This formed the basis for one of the primary thoroughfares of the Dutch New Amsterdam colony, which continued under British rule, although most of it did not bear its current name until the late 19th century.

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In solidarity

Museums and universities are the masks genocide wears in public. This tour unmask genocide to draw connections between struggles.

In 1985 Philadelphia police dropped bombs on the MOVE organization on Osage Ave. in West Philadelphia. Members of MOVE were killed and incarcerated because they dared to oppose U.S. hegemony. We are now learning that for years the Penn Museum kept the remains of MOVE children, African children, in a cardboard box for use in Princeton University anthropology classes.

This war is not isolated to Philadelphia. Penn Museum board members are here in NYC and are the killers and murderers of Haiti, Puerto Rico and Palestine.

Penn Museum board members include:

Gregory Annenberg Weingarten whose Annenberg Foundation gave $20 Million to the Metropolitan Museum. The MET is full of ancestral objects plundered from Africa, Asia, and the Americas by the Rockefellers who also founded the MoMA.

Ghislain Gouraige, an executive at UBS Services a bank born from Swiss financing of slavery and colonialism.

Peter G. Gould, is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations at East 68th street. CFR is the premier foreign policy think tank created to back up U.S. empire supported by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations.

And Mayor Bill De Blasio the head of the NYPD, is on the MoMA board!

These capitalists are the arms dealers and prison builders of empire that use museums to mask their sins.

Penn Museum owes African peoples a debt deeper than finances.

The MET owes.

MoMA owes.

U.S. Universities, Museums, & Banks Owe African & Indigenous Nations Everything.

We have a responsibility to unmask the genocide at the heart of modernity. Honor the Traditions & Sovereignty of communities facing the brunt of this war and commit your life to building organizations that sustain this struggle.
The Red Deal/Red Nation Preamble

This below excerpt from “The Red Deal: Indigenous Action to Save Our Earth” is shared in solidarity.

“In this era of catastrophic climate change, why is it easier for some to imagine the end of fossil fuels than settler colonialism? To imagine green economies, carbon-free wind and solar energy, and electric, bullet-train utopias but not the return of Indigenous lands? Why is it easier to imagine the end of the world—a zombie apocalypse—than the end of capitalism? It’s not an either/or scenario. Ending settler colonialism and capitalism and returning Indigenous lands are all possible—and necessary.

The question of restoring Indigenous land to Indigenous people is thoroughly political, which means the theft of it was—and is—not inevitable or beyond our current capacities to resolve. The same goes for Black reparations, ending the hardening of the US border, defunding US imperialism, and stopping the continued exploitation of resources and labor in the Global South by countries up north.”

“We seek not just challenge power, but to build power. We are not simply a negation of the nightmarish colonial present—colonialism, capitalism, hetero-patriarchy, imperialism, and white supremacy—we are the embodiment and affirmation of a coming Indigenous future, a future in which many worlds fit.

We believe that all oppressed nations have the right to self determination—to decide their own destinies. We, The Red Nation, are self-determining peoples. We enact the principles of freedom and integrity in how we seek to live as good people of the Earth. We organize through education and agitation for revolutionary change. We encourage our relatives and comrades to believe in revolutionary change. We advocate for global decolonization. We agitate among the poor, the working classes, the colonized, and the dispossessed to instill the confidence to fight back and take control of our destinies.

We believe in pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will. We remain accountable to our people and our nations. We do not have “perfect” politics. We do not believe in factionalism or rigid ideology. We can die having had the “correct positions” but having accomplished nothing and freed no one. The desire to be “right” or “perfect” is the highest form of cynicism. Our role as revolutionaries is to cheerlead the movement at all turns. Above all else, we desire to be free and believe we will win. Optimism will thrive so long as we struggle for freedom.

We believe in correct ideas, which only come through revolutionary praxis and struggle. Our power and judgment comes from the labor of our struggle.

We are not “above” the people. When the people move, we move with them. We are the “permanent persuaders” who believe revolutionary change is not only possible but inevitable. Like our hearts, our politics are down and to the left. And because we are the “five-fingered ones,” our fists are the size of our hearts. We raise our fists to lift the hearts of our people. We give everything and take nothing for ourselves.

We uphold personal and organizational integrity at all turns of the movement. Change is dialectical and full of contradictions. It often comes without notice or without being noticed. Reactionary tendencies and contradictions will seek to destroy our momentum, diminish our optimism, and test our integrity. They will come in many, and oftentimes unexpected, forms. Even when in doubt, we pledge to remain faithful to our political principles and steadfast in our commitment to revolutionary struggle and optimism.

We are The Red Nation.”
Read Lowry’s email to staff on May 3, 2021 reproduced in full here:

Dear all,

I have an update to share with you about the events caused by the protesters at the Museum on Friday. First, and most importantly, I want to let you know that the two security officers who were injured by the protesters’ attacks and required immediate medical treatment have received care and are recovering.

You may have seen press reports over the weekend of protesters’ allegations that the Museum refused to allow them to enter and provoked the violence which occurred, and that one of them was attacked by a security officer.

As we confirmed to the press before the activists arrived onsite, we anticipated a peaceful protest, and we were prepared to respect and accommodate their activity so long as they respected New York State’s and City’s COVID-19 requirements of masking, social-distancing, and temperature screening.

When our frontline colleagues asked the protesters to all wear masks and enter safely, they outright refused. They repeatedly threatened to “walk through” MoMA staff and force their way in, while they verbally and physically assaulted our security officers. Following our established safety protocols, it was decided to close the Museum doors because the protesters chose not to act safely or peacefully.

Despite the closure of the Museum, a splinter group of protesters breached the staff entrance at 11 W 53rd Street, repeatedly assaulted security officers there, and trespassed by forcing entry into the Museum.

Our security officers acted with professionalism in the face of unwarranted harassment and assault. Any physical contact that occurred on Friday was the result of protesters’ actions. At no time did a security officer attack a protester. Neither the Museum, nor the security officers, caused or deserved the violent choices made by protesters on Friday.

We owe our security colleagues an enormous debt of gratitude for protecting us, our visitors, and the Museum on Friday afternoon with dignity and restraint, despite the horrible pressure they were under and the abuse they faced. They have earned and deserve our respect and support.

Friday was a harrowing day at the Museum. The violence by the protesters left everyone who witnessed it in shock. There is no condition under which we will allow anyone’s health or safety to be put at risk. We will always do everything possible to keep everyone safe.

Glenn

We condemn MoMA leadership’s attempt to distort the nature of the confrontation at the museum yesterday. Strike MoMA gave Glenn Lowry advance notice of our intention to stage a peaceful protest against the questionable ethics of its board members, and we clearly requested for guards to be non-confrontational. In response, MoMA turned itself into an aggressive high-security fortress, typical of Midtown’s sanctuaries for ultra-luxury wealth, and consciously placed its own guards and protesters at risk. The supposed threat was a group of artist dissidents, acting in the spirit of creative revolt that the museum loves to celebrate on the walls of its galleries. It’s time to put an end to this hypocrisy. Too many in our arts communities have learned to turn a blind eye to the gruesome capture of the art world by financial high-rollers with low morals. It’s not too late to stop the plunder, and remember, the fish rots from the head down.

Strike MoMA working group of IIAAF,
May 1, 2021

Glenn
We extend our deepest gratitude to MoMA staff and workers across departments who have reached out to us, and who have been sending us information, despite the fact that Glen Lowry and the board of trustees have created a fearful and hostile environment. We recognize, as you have, the charade Glen concocted during the all staff meeting on Monday, May 4th. We understand that the Director of Facilities and Safety does not speak for all of you as it is often the case that the boss sticks close to his superiors, and identifies with his masters. Therefore, he could never accurately represent the rank & file.

We are enraged at the racist weaponization of the mostly Black & Brown persons who Glen Lowry attempts to use as pawns. We know, as you do, that you are not the private army of the Board of Trustees. That is not in your job description. We urge you to use your union power to demand that Lowry and the board of trustees not make you their shields and protectors. We know it is difficult for you to speak out. That Lowry and his loyal subordinates have publicly shamed you for showing support to Strike MoMA.

We know this because we have studied Malcolm X and Frantz Fanon.

We want to reassure you that you are not alone. Find each other. Find us, across the street every Friday. When we hand delivered our letters to you, informing you of our intent to Strike MoMA, we urged you to not allow them to turn you against us. We reiterate that again, now. For those who never received our letter on April 12th, we provide screenshots at the end of these slides...

For those of you who do not entirely understand why we are Striking MoMA, please see the Strike MoMA link in bio as well.

Solidarity always.
Glenn D. Lowry
The David Rockefeller Director
Read Strike MoMA’s response, reproduced in full:

Glenn Lowry: Gaslighter-in-Chief of MoMA

Following our action at MoMA last Friday, we are hearing from workers inside the museum that David Rockefeller Director Glenn Lowry and the MoMA regime are creating an environment of fear, intimidation, and confusion among the staff. We let Lowry know a week in advance that we would be assembling inside the museum, and stated our expectation that we be allowed to enter without incident. Contrary to the museum’s account, we were not offered safe passage, and in fact were met with physical force by security in front of the museum.

We will be releasing video to this effect. The regime has constructed a false narrative of the day, attributing violence to our movement in order to distract from the actual violence of the billionaires who own and control the museum. This is more than a PR crisis for the museum. It amounts to a counter-insurgency campaign, with psychological operations at its core. Outright distortions, lies, Fabrications. Emotional manipulation. Gaslighting. Fearmongering.

Every word and action that emanates from the museum leadership should be understood as part of a class war being waged from above: their endgame is to prop up the interlocking directorate of power, wealth, and authority that Lowry is sworn to protect. This includes newly elected board president Marie-José Kravis. She is Chair Emerita at the right-wing Economic Club of New York, and a donor and friend to Donald Trump.

Kravis exemplifies the ruling class interests which Lowry serves. He lives rent-free in a luxury apartment in Museum Tower next to MoMA given to him by the museum board, supplementing his two million dollar salary. He is their agent and class ally. His words are their words. Imagine them spoken by Kravis, Leon Black, Larry Fink, or even the billionaire whose name his directorship is literally named after: David Rockefeller. Lowry is no more a friend of workers than Rockefeller or, for the matter, Trump.

Lowry is the gaslighter-in-chief of MoMA. He appeals to the virtues of free speech on one hand. On the other, he creates a siege mentality at the museum, sows fear and division among the staff, and demonizes dissidents. Glenn the Gaslighter is not to be trusted. We will not stand for Lowry’s Lies. Against his attempts to silence and terrify staff, we are now determining ways to support MoMA workers emotionally and materially who are ready to cross the threshold of fear. Platforms are available to speak out against the current counter-insurgency campaign and the bigger goals it serves in protecting the power of the board at the expense of workers, artists, and communities. Stay tuned for further direct communications on our social media, and as always, we will be holding space every Friday at 4 PM at the plaza across from MoMA, as well as online. Our solidarity with workers and staff remains unconditional.
The letter aims to build decolonial solidarity across borders by drawing attention to MoMA’s entanglement with the institution of the art system, namely the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). This letterCaller hereby sends a request to the MoMA board to respect the human rights of Palestinians. We call upon our friends, colleagues, and communities to join the struggle for a free Palestine.

For those who love Palestine, we have waited too long for this moment to not say what needs to be said despite the fear, the risk, the cost, of speaking out and naming things for what they are. We stand with Palestine, or we stand with silence, aiding and abetting the disaster. We unequivocally denounce the continuation of the Israeli settler colonial project, its apartheid regime, and the interlocking technologies of power and violence that enable it. We unequivocally support the right of return for all Palestinian refugees. We call upon our friends, colleagues, and communities to join the struggle for a free Palestine.

This Friday, May 21 at 4 PM EST, people will gather at MoMA. We call on the museum to respect people’s right to protest, and to refrain from involving the NYPD, which creates an unsafe environment for everyone involved. For those who are not in New York City or who otherwise cannot participate in person, an online assembly will also be held. We encourage and support autonomous parallel actions, wherever they may take place. To join the online assembly or to share information about parallel actions, write to freepalestine_strikemoma@protonmail.com.

FREE PALESTINE/STRIKE MOMA

Signatories
Zarouhie Abdalian
Jaishri Abichandani

Why show up at MoMA? Why now? Because many members of the MoMA board are directly involved with support for Israel’s apartheid rule, whitewashing not only the occupation of Palestine but also broader processes of dispossession and war around the world. Consider Steven Tananbaum, CEO of Goldman Sachs, a hedge fund known for profiting from the Puerto Rico debt crisis. Tananbaum’s foundation donated 1.8 million dollars to “support Israel by sending young adults to Israel” via the Art Institute of Chicago, dwarfing his $400,000 contribution to MoMA itself that year. Daniel Och, CEO of Och-Ziff Capital, also known for his plunder of Puerto Rico, is a current member and former chairman of the Birthright Foundation, which is also partly funded by the Israeli state. Birthright tours aim to recruit Jewish youth from around the world, especially American Jews, to the Zionist cause while sanitizing the occupation and erasing Palestinians. Leon Black, best known for his connections with Jeffrey Epstein, has donated more than 1 million to Birthright as well. Paula Crown’s wealth comes from her husband, James Crown’s armaments company General Dynamics, whose Land Systems division works closely with Israeli military technology companies, and the Israeli Occupation Forces themselves (General Dynamics products have also been used in the bombing of Yemen by the Saudi government). The MK-84 bombs being dropped on Gaza by the Israeli air force are made by General Dynamics. The Paula and James Crown Creativity Lab on the second floor of the museum is part of homes, schools, hospitals, and media offices in Gaza are Rattled. Finally, MoMA’s Honorary Chair Ronald Lauder is president of the World Jewish Congress, which has ironically fuelled the growth of real movements for white supremacy and anti-Semitism in the U.S.

Movements and all other movements for land, life, and liberation, from Puerto Rico to Kashmir and beyond. Violence against Palestinians has intensified in recent weeks, first with the ongoing forcible displacement of families in Sheikh Jarrah, then with the violent incursion into the Al-Aqsa Mosque, followed by the carpet-bombing of Gaza, and a series of organized settler attacks across occupied Palestine. This has included attacks on spaces for media, culture, and art, most recently Dar Yafna Nasi Jadir for Art and Research in Bethlahem. At the same time, these attacks have united Palestinians both on the ground and in the diaspora, with resistance proliferating in a diversity of forms: yesterday, a General Strike shut down the entirety of historic Palestine, and massive marches have taken place in cities throughout the world, with #PalestineStrike as a shared declaration of agency, dignity, and solidarity. Cultural institutions are part and parcel of struggles against settler-colonial violence. 600+ cultural workers have announced a boycott of Zabludowicz Art Trust in London on account of that organization’s ties to the Israeli military. The Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement is gaining momentum, including the affiliated Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel. As part of the Palestine mobilizations in New York last week, hundreds gathered at MoMA, where a young man was arrested and beaten by the NYPD. The police had been called to the scene by the museum, which on the same day announced that it would be permanently banning five organizers from stepping foot in the museum.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:


The WMF’s open-call for nominations listed climate change as one of the key factors threatening cultural sites around the world. In their application, A4PMF state:

“The museum’s Board of Trustees is explicitly connected to industries that contribute to ecocide and climate change. But let us also consider the climate change in the museum and how it affects artworks and apply the same analogy to the artists and to the public. A museum would never compromise the physical integrity of an artwork by showing it in conditions (high temperatures, low relative humidity) that are deemed unsafe. Why then would they compromise the integrity of an artist by asking them to show in a place that makes conditions unsafe for others?”

“As artists, art workers and stakeholders engage in protests against the museum, they are painted as iconoclasts and barbarians at the gate. Yet, it must be argued that the stewardship of important cultural heritage by those profiting from ecocide, human trafficking, inequality, precarity, anti-Blackness, militarism and misogyny poses a direct threat to the integrity of the artwork. For example, when someone like Leon Black, who sits on the MoMA Board of Trustees and whose Apollo Holdings owns Constellis, a private ‘security’ company formerly known as Blackwater, also owns Edward Munch’s ‘The Scream’, it is hard to not see the blood spilled in Baghdad’s Nisour Square in 2007 when looking at this painting. That kind of damage cannot be fixed by a museum’s conservator or mitigated by better climate control conditions.”

A4PMF’s application also reiterated several key points in Strike MoMA’s Framework for Struggle as a call to imagine something new that can emerge when exiting MoMA’s untenable institutional model.

“A departure from the museum’s imbrication with toxic philanthropy requires abolition of its current billionaire class Board of Trustees and donors. This in itself is a radical act, but the beautiful thing about this is that many of the inspiring works in MoMA’s collection are themselves radical acts. Being able to restore the vision imbued in many of these works will benefit the public at large in showing that art needn’t only be symbolic. We can mean what we say. It would no doubt improve stewardship if we were to collectively draft a model in which the museum could truly be a site shepherded and cared for by communities who are otherwise displaced and disenfranchised by the economic and political forces that allow for the museum to grow and expand in a needlessly monstrous manner.”

The WMF application called for 12 images to illustrate the threats to cultural heritage site. A4PMF included portraits of the members of the Board of Trustees with the descriptor “Damage to the artwork, examples 1-12.”

“Our current plan of action is to gather as a global community of artists, art workers, curators, conservators, scholars, and citizens that adore art and the artworks in this historically essential museum,” the group stated in their application. “We will collectively imagine, write, draw, model new ways and pragmatic strategies for loving and caring for these works in a way that abolishes elitism and the entanglements with profit generated from industries of harm.”

Yet another example of these toxic embroilments occurred shortly after the application was submitted, when Israel launched deadly ongoing attacks on Palestinian civilians in Gaza. The MK-84 bombs currently being dropped on Gaza by the Israeli air force are built by the armaments company General Dynamics, owned by Paula and James Crown, for whom MoMA’s Creativity Lab (located on the museum’s second floor) is named. Paula Crown is also a member of MoMA’s Board of Trustees.

“If MoMA is included in the 2022 World Monuments Watch, it would allow for people to see that there are ways in which art and culture are damaged that are less visible than iconoclasts wielding sledgehammers or acts of nature like erosion,” the working group wrote in the application’s conclusion. “We have the capacity and collective intelligence to change the status quo. Should the World Monuments Watch take this application seriously, it would deepen our conversation about these issues in a manner that is unprecedented.”

For more information or to see copies of the WMF application, please contact Artists For A Post-MoMA Future at artistspostmoma@protonmail.com
A POST-MoMA FUTURE

In response:

To me, a Post-MoMA future looks like...

A whole new civilization.

A world where imagination and creativity are cherished.

A world where everyone is free to explore their own unique path.

A world where diversity and inclusivity are valued.

A world where knowledge and ideas are shared.

A world where museums and libraries are accessible to everyone.

A world where people live in harmony with nature.

A world where art and culture are celebrated.

A world where technology is used to enhance human experiences.

A world where education is free and available to all.

A world where communities are strong and supportive.

A world where people work together to create a better future.

To me, a Post-MoMA future means...

A world where everyone has access to quality education.

A world where people are treated with respect and dignity.

A world where everyone has the opportunity to pursue their passions.

A world where the environment is protected and preserved.

A world where diversity and culture are celebrated.

A world where art and culture are cherished.

A world where technology is used to enhance human experiences.

A world where museums and libraries are accessible to everyone.

A world where communities are strong and supportive.

A world where people work together to create a better future.

IG @lessonsandlines
Why MoMA?

Steven Tanenbaum, CEO of GoddenTree, is a hedge fund known for profiteering from the Puerto Rico debt crisis. Tanenbaum’s foundation donated $1.8 million dollars to “support Israel” by sending young adults to Israel via the Art Institute of Chicago, dwarfing its $400,000 contribution to MoMA itself that year.

Many members of the MoMA board are directly involved with support for Israel’s apartheid rule, artwashing not only the occupation of Palestine but also broader processes of dispossession and war around the world.

Leon Black, best known for his connections with Jeffrey Epstein, has donated more than 1 million to Birthright as well.
DECOLONISING THE MUSEUM

There is a growing movement in the West to divorce art museums from big money.

Jasbir K. Puar and Andrew Ross, Al Jazeera (July 21 2021)

The current rage for decolonisation affects every corner of our lives, but it has been most visible in the demands being made on art institutions. Pressure on large museums in Europe and the United States in particular is growing because their history of acquiring and collecting is so entangled with colonialism.

But decolonising the museum has to go far beyond removing plagiarised artefacts or tinkering with exhibition displays to present a more accurate version of history. The object dependence of museums on corporate sponsorship and super-wealthy donors is increasingly coming under fire.

The crisis is most apparent in the operations of the more prominent museums. These institutions are the public face of the art world but their trustee boards are stacked with corporate freebooters whose business values are starkly at odds with those of the cultural creatives whose names and works they buy and sell.

A movement is afoot to root out “artwashing” – the custom of using art and culture to launder ill-gotten gains and predatory practices. These profits often stem from industries that harm the very communities that are supposed to enjoy and benefit from museums: prison expansion, weapons manufacturing, and development projects that gentrify neighbourhoods, among many others.

Several activist groups have sprung up to administer the strong medicine. In recent years, Liberate Tate and BP or Not BP have lobbied to “free art from oil” at leading British museums; PAIN (Prescription Addiction Intervention Now) targeted the patronage of several museums by the Sackler family, who profit from the opioid crisis in the US; Gulf Labor Coalition succeeded, for several years, in stopping the Guggenheim Museum in New York from building a new Abu Dhabi branch on the backs of abused workers; and Decolonize This Place ousted arms manufacturer Warren Kander from the board of Whitney Museum of American art.

Strike MoMA – a direct action initiative by artists targeting New York’s Museum of Modern Art – is the latest and most advanced effort to call out the unholy pact with big money. An all too cosy relationship with the disgraced Jeffrey Epstein forced financier Leon Black to step aside as board chair, and the museum has tried to ride out the scandal, hoping to avoid further scrutiny via the “bad apple” thesis. But the row has proved to be a catalyst for Strike MoMA’s invitation to reimagine a utopian version of the museum – based on the need to divorce the super-rich and more directly serve as a common meeting house for art communities and the public.

Expanding the meaning of decolonisation, Strike MoMA is unsettling the normalisation of an art world that has been captured for ultra-luxury consumption by tycoons, oligarchs, and speculative market investors. Through a multaweek series of virtual and on-site protests, workshops, panel discussions, mixed-media messaging, and a recent “Ruins of Modernity” tour of midtown Manhattan corporate buildings affiliated with board members, Strike MoMA is tapping into a growing dissatisfaction with the increasingly frequent cosmetic responses from institutional leaders to their critics.

These responses range from diversifying the art on display, curators, and staff, to vetting board members for “good” philanthropists, and amping up charitable investments – in other words, replacing actors while keeping the structures of power intact. Instead, Strike MoMA proffers a vision of people and community-centred public art and control of relevant infrastructure which would be of, by, and for the people, including workers, artists, and communities. In keeping with this people-centred vision, the art activist group has sought to build alliances with low-wage employees in the museum including security, service and maintenance workers.

The actions of Strike MoMA appear to be amplifying the crisis of philanthropic legitimacy in New York City and other metropolitan centres of culture. A standard refrain coming from these circuits of the wealthy is that museums cannot exist without big money, appended with the conclusion that, on balance, this seemingly unchanged reality is more good than bad.

MoMA director Glenn Lowry has responded to the weekly on-site demonstrations by accusing Strike MoMA of wanting to “disassemble” MoMA and all museums “so they no longer exist”. In contrast, Strike MoMA’s rhetoric varies from agitating for a “new MoMA” to a “post-MoMA museum” to a banner stationed outside MoMA during protests with the words “Post-MoMA Future” that presumably signals the possibilities of public art in formation. Nowhere, however, is there a vacuous call for the end of museums, nor a fixed blueprint for what might come next.

What is clear is that the art world, increasingly besieged by demands to dismantle longstanding hierarchies, cannot return to business as usual. Museums are no longer perceived as exceptional cultural institutions devoid of capitalist exploitation, neutral entities servicing only the public good, nor are they exempt from scrutiny of their histories of colonial extraction and complicity with corporate profiteering.

The contradiction between the expressive humanism at the heart of art-making and the woffish appetites of these collectors has reached a breaking point. Agitation about the intimacy between culture and lucre is hardly new. But now that it is proceeding under the banner of decolonisation, the terms of engagement are shifting.
Since early April, artists and workers have occupied the public square across from the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in Manhattan. Under the name Strike MoMA, they are protesting the financial entanglements of the museum’s wealthy patrons as well as the institution’s labor practices, including the furloughing of many employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. Building on the momentum of the past year’s social justice movements, Strike MoMA has pushed back on half measures offered to placate protesters. Organizers claim that only a radical readjustment will resolve their concerns about the museum’s ties to policing and crony capitalism. The coalition recently garnered support from artist groups such as Guerrilla Girls and Decolonize This Place, as well as activist-intellectuals including Angela Davis, Fred Moten, Sandy Grande, and Gayatri Spivak. Demonstrations were propelled into national news again in recent weeks when activists clashed with museum security guards, despite director Glenn Lowry’s assurance that MoMA would respect peaceful actions.

“I envisioned myself as a rank-and-file worker who was demystifying the museum. My approach was to point out that these artworks and their creators are our allies, but this space is not.”

For Shellyne Rodriguez, an artist and writer based in the Bronx, this protest is a natural progression. As a community organizer, she helps call attention to the relationships between art, real estate, and gentrification. As an educator at MoMA for nearly a decade, she did work that was in many ways an extension of her activism: running programs for teens to get them involved in the arts, but for folks who were no longer teenagers. There are always programs, which connect schools and nonprofits with the museum's art workshops. I helped out with the Alzheimer’s project, the Touch Tour for the visually impaired, the Primetime Initiative for senior citizens, and much more.

I also worked in community partnerships with Kerry Downey, who has written extensive critiques of community education in museums. These initiatives to bring arts education into the community are generally administered through contracts between the museum and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which is pretty problematic. NGOs do not really represent a community; they are an extension of the welfare state. They provide services that used to be public goods—picking up the pieces that the state has neglected or let go due to austerity—through the same kinds of questionable philanthropy as museums. But the communities they served really interested me and kept me there. I worked with Passages Academy, which is the education wing of the youth detention system in New York, including Crossroads and Horizon Juvenile Centers—basically jails for minors. I got to work with incarcerated kids, sex workers, undocumented children waiting to be reunited with their families, all in different locations. These programs were carved out long before I got there, and I inherited them.

Additionally, I started a whole new initiative in the museum called Night Studio. I’m a GED kid who sort of fell through the back door of art school and managed to get some degrees, but I really wanted to create something for folks who were no longer teenagers. There are always programs for teens to get them involved in the arts, but I was interested in collaborating with people in their mid-twenties and thirties who were just coming around to getting a high school-equivalency diploma, and who self-identified as artists but did not have any avenues to be supported in that. I started this program with the museum's money, of course. It was intensive with lots of resources, and we taught them a great deal.

I envisioned myself as a rank-and-file worker who was demystifying the museum, but not necessarily trying to make people “of” the museum. My approach to education was pointing out that the collections are relics that artists originally made to say something, but which are now captured in this space. These works and their creators are our allies, but this space is not. I often used the museum for political education, because that is just my approach to teaching. In general, I tried to spend as little time there as possible. Art institutions try to pay in social capital, but I wasn’t interested in that.

"The museum used underpaid contract positions to make itself seem more committed to community initiatives than it in fact was.”

BA: Given that your employment by MoMA was so contingent, it seems bizarre that the museum expected you to be so heavily invested in the company culture. But it seems clear that the museum used these underpaid contract positions to make itself seem more committed to these initiatives than it in fact was.

SR: Oh, I was basically operating as a program director, but, in reality, I was a gig worker. When the museum laid us all off, I was pissed that I no longer had a job, but I wasn’t shocked. Of course education goes first; this is Neoliberalism 101. I have always seen the museum for what it is, and I did not expect some kind of benevolent action to occur. Glenn Lowry, the museum’s director, is basically a corporate CEO after all.

I was more offended the year before COVID-19 hit, when all the freelance educators were disinvited from the annual holiday party. Human resources reminded us that we were technically not museum employees, so we could no longer attend. I had been there for more than seven years, and others had been there for as many as thirty years. We were all appalled. Our immediate supervisors, who had no real power, said they would organize a dinner just for our...
department. I felt more insulated by this incident than anything else, but it was merely a liability issue for the museum. They wanted to avoid any circumstances in which they appeared to acknowledge we were actual employees of theirs. It was the most honest thing they ever did.

**BA:** It feels necessary to contextualize the educators within MoMA’s broader labor structure. Museums tend to keep their workers as separate as possible, and they often form out front-facing positions to third parties (including to private security companies, temp agencies, and catering companies), all while poorly compensating these workers and offering them no potential for union representation. But there is also more than one union at the museum, with different ones for blue- and white-collar workers, right? This is a business model that has been broadly adopted by museums (and with clear parallels to the neoliberal university), with a professional class of administrators and curators, then laborers who execute much of the museum’s daily operations and work under precarious conditions.

> “There is this mythology around museums that needs to be debunked. They are corporations like any other, except that their businesses accrue around a bonfire of fetishized art.”

**SR:** There is this mythology around museums that needs to be debunked. They are corporations like any other, except that their businesses accrue around a bonfire of fetishized art. I am not sure why we ever expected any better from a corporation. Of course they treat their workers terribly and carry out union-busting tactics.

Union workers comprise a small percentage of employees at MoMA, but the fact that there are unions gives the public a false impression that the museum’s workers have a seat at the table. In reality, business decisions are all happening multiple tax brackets above the vast majority of both unionized and nonunionized workers. Security at MoMA is unionized, but that is a whole other dilemma. Management always wants to make sure the cops are comfortable.

**BA:** The directors and trustees are not really beholden to every department, and many white-collar workers may not even know some departments or positions exist. That is a known tool of union-busting: a portion of employees are given recognition while everyone else is left scrambling, thereby disrupting worker unity. In one sense, you have a unified group of workers agitating for short-term solutions, but can unions also wind up extending the life of longer-term issues?

**SR:** Well, the problem is that unions cannot solve everything. If we clamor for more unionization in the museum, then what do those contracts look like? I am thinking about how many times public sector unions bailed out New York City. The pensions of teachers and multiple city workers get invested into the bonds that keep the doors of state and federal prisons open. It’s all intertwined. This is something that is addressed in Strike MoMA’s “Post-MoMA Futures” platform. We are not going to fix these big problems by unionizing; that would just get us more of the same. Where does the money come from? Where do the pensions go?

Once unions are involved in upholding the structure, because their pensions are on the line, they can actually start working to uphold the very people and structures Strike MoMA is protesting. Yes to collective bargaining power, but the devil is also in the details.

> “Once unions are involved, because their pensions are on the line, they can actually start working to uphold the very structures Strike MoMA is protesting. Yes to collective bargaining power, but the devil is also in the details.”

**BA:** Can we talk more about Strike MoMA? How have the last few months shifted the conversation around museum futures?

**SR:** One idea that fascinates me is interconnected struggle, or an “interlocking directorate.” This term is loosely defined as the networks of oligarchs, multinational corporations, and defense industry profiteers—the cluster formed by those holding executive positions at companies while sitting on museum and university boards.

Strike MoMA recently highlighted MoMA trustee Gustavo Cisneros, who pretty much embodies the Latin American art empire; there is no bigger name than that. He also happens to sit on the board of Barrick Gold Corporation, which is the world’s largest gold mining company. They have committed atrocities all across the world: bodies piled up in East Africa, natural reserves decimated, loads of problems in South America.

**BA:** In the last five years, Barrick Gold has come under fire for its backdoor deals with Tanzanian police—who subsequently murdered more than sixty villagers—as well as a controversial Chilean project shut down by that country’s environmental regulator, and cyanide spills in Argentina. Now there’s talk of another mine project and tailings dam in the Dominican Republic, despite organized opposition on the ground there.

**SR:** Yes, and New York City makes up a huge portion of the Dominican diaspora, so this is of great concern here, too. Cisneros’s company wants to build a dam on a river that more than 4 million people depend upon, including people living in the capital, Santo Domingo. Cow and rice farmers, along with other people in that region, are engaged in guerrilla tactics to stop this, fighting against officials and police who are backing Barrick Gold. Cisneros is also building a sustainable luxury resort in the Dominican Republic while all this is going down.

Then we have James and Paula Crown. They funded the Crown Creativity Lab at MoMA, and even named one of its programs The People’s Studio. The Crowns own General Dynamics, which manufactures and sells the weapons used to carpet-bomb Gaza. They have been selling these same bombs to the Saudis, who have used them to ravage Yemen, and they sold battle tanks to the Colombian military forces that are now all over the streets raining hell on Colombians.

**BA:** Another MoMA board member, Steven Tananbaum of GoldenTree Asset Management, owns a significant portion of the sovereign debt of Puerto Rico. Tananbaum once boasted to Reuters about how forcing a restructuring of the commonwealth’s debt—in effect guaranteeing it remain

poor—could turn a fantastic profit for investors. And he is not even the only MoMA trustee working with the hedge funds enforcing Puerto Rico’s debt. There’s also Leon Black, who recently stepped down for his associations with Jeffrey Epstein, as well as billionaire investors Daniel Och and Glenn Dubin. The global impact of this museum board alone feels insurmountable.

**SR:** These folks all work in solidarity together. They control their own domain, but they also wield significant power in our civic spaces where we go to work. And if they are working together, then we need to do the same. As someone who worked at MoMA for a long time, I can’t sit this out.

> “These board members all work in solidarity. And if they are working together, then we need to do the same.”

**BA:** I read your 2018 essay in the New Inquiry, titled “How the Bronx Was Branded,” and thought it was one of the most succinct explanations of how art and real estate work together. You showed that at the heart of the Bronx’s redevelopment was a lofty public relations campaign that allowed artists, developers, and city officials to profit off the displacement of low-income families. Do how museums contribute, and can you speak about the PR war they wage on the media and ordinary people?

**SR:** When I organize with Take Back the Bronx—a volunteer grassroots collective centered around community control—I try to bring in how art contributes to gentrification here. This is how I first connected with Decolonize This Place, because they were thinking about museums all over the world in similar ways. The Bronx is the poorest borough in New York, with two of the poorest congressional districts in the country. We have a huge Yemeni community and a lot of Palestinians, too. We have spent so much time bridging the gaps in our communities to enrich conversations and inspire people to feel empowered by the spirit of interconnected struggle.

Museums exist in a market, just like real estate, and we are all somewhat in denial because they happen to be tied to something we love. I would never deny the levels of spirituality and poetics we all experience through art;
that is the reason I’m here. But we cannot conflate art with museums. They are not synonymous, nor are art and for-profit art galleries synonymous. We let these millionaires and billionaires convince us that their spaces are the only ones that legitimize art, and suddenly no other alternatives seem possible.

However, we are starting to see this all break down a little bit. While other museums were getting a lot of bad press for taking money from the Sacklers and oil companies and the like, the MoMA managed to stay off the radar for a long while. But recently there was an open letter signed by quite a few prominent scholars and artists denouncing the museum’s position on Palestine. It’s the beginning of a conscious shift. I think people still feel some sort of religious feelings toward MoMA, you know? That’s our mistake. There is significant power on that board that cannot be overlooked.

“We let millionaires convince us that their spaces are the only ones that legitimize art, and suddenly no alternative seems possible.”

BA: I think many of us have only recently had our eyes opened to the myriad ways that money laundering factors into museum leadership—how wealthy philanthropists can basically art-wash their wealth to uphold a positive reputation centered around humanity and creative expression.

SR: And this is part of a larger question: Are we, as artists and cultural workers, willing to engage with this problem? Are we willing to make it so the structures we have relied on, which hold these museums together, are rendered obsolete?

I remember during the first days of protests at the Whitney Museum in 2019—we were protesting Whitney vice chair Warren Kanders, who owns weapons manufacturer Safariland Group—when a well-known art critic stopped by. He sauntered over and started yelling at some of the young people putting up banners, saying they had no respect and that we need these philanthropists—and that we were not old enough to remember the Culture Wars. I think the argument he was trying to make was that the government

People say, “How will we take care of art?” or “How will we take care of the museum?” To me, those are classist questions. How much of a museum collection is extracted? I am thinking of the MOVE bombing victim whose remains recently were revealed to be in the collection of the Penn Museum, and the price our communities pay because people want to keep the museums doors open. It’s a bait and switch, like bombing a city and building a school.

BA: Yes, it feels as though this corruption and exploitation are inevitable outcomes of institutions founded on colonialist practices.

SR: A hundred percent. I have gotten so much out of speaking with and reading Ariella Aísha Azoulay, particularly her book Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism (2019). Ariella could be a battle rapper; she’s got bars. She makes an example of the camera shutter, the action that locks a historical moment into place and crystalizes its story. You will see photos in the newspaper of rappers like DJ Kool Herc and Sylvie Beatz applauding a new hip-hop museum. That captured image of the museum, the crowds, and the applauding does not capture the periphery, which is the bulldozing of communities and gentrification occurring outside.

This is also how an imperialist project is born, and how art replaces humanity inside the museum. When the vitrine goes in, we go out. It’s rooted in a death; once they put the shell-top Adidas behind the glass, they don’t need the people anymore. They have the fossil, the souvenir, the head on a spike. That is the violence of modernity—as Arthur Schopenhauer used to say, that art “plucks the object of its contemplation from the stream of the world’s course, and holds it isolated before it.” The museum wrenches the object from the world and holds it up for us. What gets left behind is murder, extraction, pillaging, and colonialism.

“...the museum wrenches the object from the world and holds it up for us. What gets left behind is murder, extraction, pillaging, and colonialism.”

BA: I feel particularly drawn to this quote of yours from that New Inquiry essay: “How would an artistic practice that aims to disrupt alienation appear in our hallways, elevators, and all the spaces we share in our communities?” Have you found an answer to this?

SR: When we reweave the social fabric, the middleman is clearly what needs to be abolished, and abolishing the mediator means we talk to each other again. And when we talk to each other again, we can break down the alienation. One thing I have always admired about immigrant communities is how tightly knit they are, because they have not yet experienced the alienation of the metropolis. In contrast, for Black and Puerto Rican communities that have been here since the 1950s, it is much more difficult. Have we gone through too much, been broken apart and separated to an extreme degree. We are an expendable labor force that experienced the first wave of the neoliberal project, which is why we also make up so much of the prison.

Alienation affects everybody in the city, though, and makes us all exist in separate worlds with our shared grievances. This came up during the 2019–20 FTP protests, when protestors challenged the New York police in the subway. Everyone was mad in their heads, but nobody was vocalizing it. How do we continue to crack that? I think it might require dialing back before all the organizing work, before knocking on doors, before galvanizing around the problem—how do we see each other? It’s about locating that beginning point.

BA: In applying an abolitionist critique to museums, do we risk taking away from the contemporaneous prison/police movements? Or are they all interrelated?

SR: Abolition as a principle is not just about police. The museum is the police precinct, as Stefano Harney said in a recent talk, meaning these institutions are the well-funded gatekeepers of culture within a city of aesthetically minded people. They are involved in community policing, sending patrol cars in the form of curators and community outreach. We need to stop thinking about the police as the person in the blue uniform. That is just one pawn, not the whole picture. The police is the structure, and that structure takes many forms. Nonprofits and NGOs are police. We are talking about structures of power, and if we are undoing these structures, then that is abolition by definition.

Abolition as a principle is not just about police. The museum is the police precinct, meaning these institutions are the well-funded gatekeepers of culture.

How do we put this critique into practice and build toward these institutions being obsolete? This is why Strike MoMA is so categorically different from the Whitney Museum protests. Back then, it was about shining a light on one board member, to make an example of how one person touches all of our struggles. Warren Kanders’s weapons were in Ferguson, in Palestine, in Puerto Rico, and at the border. With Strike MoMA, there is something growing in the park right across the street from the museum. We have been so conditioned to have the state mediate our every move and conflict, from loud music complaints to applying for welfare. A mediator is present at all times. Pushing that middleman out is abolition in practice; struggling to eliminate the need for the mediator is abolition. We call them no-cop zones. We do not need the police if we can handle the disagreements ourselves. We just need to learn how to talk to each other, and how to undo systemic problems for ourselves.

We apply this same principle to the museum. No one needs to stay awake at night, stressed out and ruminating over what will happen to art and artists if we drive out all the toxic philanthropists—as if philanthropy isn’t toxic in and of itself. This is art we’re talking about, after all. The lack of imagination really kills me sometimes. This is supposed to be our space. What are we going to build next?
Dancing in the Rubble: How Strike MoMA Began
Marz Saffore

On March 26, 2021, my comrades rushed down the stairs of their Brooklyn home to show me a snippet of the "Abolitionist Imaginaries One-Day Symposium" streamed live by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) earlier that day. My friend Amy sat down next to me on the couch, queued up the video, and hit play. When the clip starts, Dylan Rodriguez, a great thinker and organizer around abolition as a collective project, opens the conversation for the panel of the 6+ hour symposium. As he talks about how an abolitionist art community could look like, he imagines "an art world which is dancing on the rubble of the anti-black, colonial art world that still remains hegemonic and dominant." Although, Rodriguez points to Nicole Fleetwood’s curatorial exhibition "Marking Time: Art in the Age of Incarceration" at MoMA PS1 and MoMA’s one-day symposium as abolitionist challenges to the dominant, US and Western art world, he also critiques MoMA itself, which "draws its historical capital from the chattel, colonial, land expropriating violence of genocidal racial capitalism’s philanthropic past." What Rodriguez makes clear in his speech is that as MoMA reigns supreme in today’s "anti-black, colonial art world," it, too, must be included amongst the rubble. In giving space to other abolitionist imaginaries, Rodriguez also takes time to announce the upcoming peoples strike at MoMA. This immediately caught my attention, as my friends and I are core organizers of the strike. Three days before the "Abolitionist Imaginaries One-Day Symposium," the StrikeMOMA Working Group of the International Imagination of Anti-National Anti-Imperialist Feelings (IIAAF) released "Strike MoMA: Framework and Terms for Struggle." This document is a call to strike MoMA and build post-MoMA futures in the here and now—it’s a call to dance in the rubble.

In building the case against MoMA, IIAAF both calls attention to the ways in which the museum and the billionaires who founded and have since governed the museum have historically and are currently exacting their wealth from the genocide, imprisonment, displacement, and dispossession of peoples. "Strike MoMA" references a tweet by MoMA Divest, one of groups working alongside IIAAF to strike MoMA, to highlight the corruption of just five of MoMA’s board members. MoMA Divest tweets:

Five MoMA board members—Steven Tananbaum, Glenn Dubin, Steven Cohen, Leon Black, and Larry silverstein—have been identified and targeted by groups for their roles in the current year for their ties to war, prison and border enforcement systems, vulture fund exploitation, gentrification and displacement of the poor, extractivism and environmental degradation, and patriarchal forms of violence. Board members also have ties and donate to the NYPD Police Foundation. In short, the rot is at the core of the institution, which includes PS1 (@MomaDivest, February 6, 2021).

Importantly, the call to strike MoMA also reaches beyond the museum itself. A strike against MoMA is a strike against blood-soaked modernity. A strike against MoMA is a strike against the hegemonic, dominant regime, which continues to kill our peoples on a daily basis. This document comes from a movement perspective that de-exceptionalizes the museum. We refuse to acknowledge the separation of the museum from the rest of society. We see MoMA as existing on the same plane as the violence of the ruling class that has controlled it since its inception with the oil wealth of the Rockefeller family in 1929. No more rationalizing the regime. They have long enabled the killing of our people and non-human relations and they have always expected us to thank them for their philanthropy.

Due to this lack of separation of the museum from the rest of society, MoMA’s historical and ongoing atoicides committed against our peoples provides grounds to mark it as a target for our movements. Undoubtedly, MoMA is a soft target for our movements, but it is a strategic target nonetheless.

The monument on 53rd Street becomes our prism. We see our histories and struggles refracted through its crystalline structure, and foreclosed futures come into view. The museum is converted into a theater of operations where our entwined movements of decolonization, abolition, anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism can find one another. Why strike MoMA? So that something else can emerge, something under the control of workers, communities, and artists rather than billionaires [emphasis in original]." Targeting MoMA makes it a meeting point for multiple struggles to cross paths, converse, and create new worlds and possibilities together.

It is no coincidence that the IIAAF along with 13+ other working groups and collectives are calling to strike MoMA at the present moment, during the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. As COVID-19 leaves millions dead worldwide, it continues to exacerbate and expose systemic inequalities plaguing our communities such as white supremacy, colonization, racial capitalism, imperialism, ++. In the wake of hundreds of years of pandemic after pandemic, crisis after crisis, our movements are left asking "What time is it on the clock of the world?" Strike MoMA is loud in proclaiming this is the time to strike. "To strike is to exercise the power of refusal, a negation that is coupled with affirmation." Or following in the teachings of the Zapotistas, one need not look at the many yeses. We say no to MoMA. We say no to the policing and surveillance of our communities. We say no to land theft, to the regime. We say no to the people’s lands and labor. We say no to medical apartheid. In saying no, how can we imagine and live otherwise? Ashton T. Crawley discusses the otherwise in Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility, writing that there are "infinite alternatives to what is. And what is is about being, about existence, about ontology. But if infinite alternatives exist, if otherwise possibility is a resource that is never exhaust ed, what is, what exists, is but one of many [emphasis in original]." There are infinite otherwise ways of living, being, and relating outside of modernity, policing, colonialism, capitalism, imperialism. Once we refuse what is and tap into these otherwise possibilities, we can begin to dance in the rubble. We can begin our post-MoMA and otherwise post-pandemic futures.

Strike MoMA is infused with an abolitionist aesthetics of possibility, and also an "aesthetics of combat," as Rodriguez put it in his remarks. These energies were powerfully manifest in a singular work of dance that took place on Friday, April 9, 2021, the first day of the first phase of StrikeMoMA, which involved ten weeks of conversation, art, and action taking place internationally. Every Friday, a de-occupation is held in the belly of modernity, across the street from MoMA in a plaza that’s part of a Privately Owned Public Space (POPS). We closed the first de-occupation with a choreographed piece by Brittany from Wardance Collective, another group working with the StrikeMoMA Working Group of IIAAF. Brittany’s outfit was nothing out of the ordinary for a rainy Spring day, except she was wearing a gold, metal grate over her face and carrying a machete kept in a black sheath. Brittany began the piece by twice circling the 1987 Jesus Bautista Morales sculpture titled "Lapstrake" in the center of the plaza. She then stood in front of the sculpture facing the crowd and began to acknowledge and summon the histories and legacies of the unceded Lenape land in which we were standing. She said, "We stand on Lenape land to recognize the genocide that has happened on this land, to recognize enforced labor that has happened on this land, to recognize the violence that continues to happen on this land." She then took a water bottle and poured out libations for the ancestors and the land as well as what she called "the inhabitants of the space called and brought into the space. After a series of movements, Brittany began her slow, deliberate march towards the museum from the plaza, holding her sheathed machete in both hands. Her movements towards the museum are best described with a choreographed piece by Brittany from Wardance Collective, another group working with the StrikeMoMA Working Group of IIAAF.

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I COUNT EIGHT NYPD SQUAD CARS in front of the Time Warner Center and another van by the Trump Hotel. It’s April 30, and two concentric circles of metal barricades lashed together with zip ties—erected during last summer’s rebellion and removed this past March—are back, surrounding the Columbus Monument. I’m half an hour early and the sky looks ready to open up into a tempest. I hustle outside a temporarily shuttered Maison Keyser to keep dry and skim the Strike MoMA Framework and Terms for Struggle, on the lookout for others attending the group’s tour.

Strike MoMA emerged after artists and activists demanded private equity magnate Leon Black leave the museum’s board due to his ties to the late billionaire pedophile human trafficker Jeffrey Epstein. Some of the organizations that made these calls, such as MoMA Divest, the Arts Union (who authored a statement signed by some 150 artists and arts workers), and Decolonize This Place, further noted that to see Black as a trustee with Epstein ties, Glenn Dubin.

At times with considerable pathos, protest rhetoric resonates on the basis of shared ethnic/class identifications. “Glenn doesn’t pay you enough for this!” someone implores, while Hussein speaks to one of the guards in Arabic. Hancy, a member of the Kiskeya Solidarity Committee, appeals to one man through their mutual Dominican heritage, invoking how “[Dominican] people have a long history of struggle.” Later, I learn that two employees working in visitor services walked off during the standoff and that Rodriguez, who was employed by the museum until it laid off its education staff at the start of the pandemic, entered the building security. While the lobby is normally open to the public, in advance of our visit director Glenn Lowry instructed staff to check tickets outside of the museum due to “risk of gun violence.” Shellyne Rodriguez, an artist and activist affiliated with the activist group Take Back the Bronx, distributes a two-color risograph pamphlet headlined “THE RUINS of MODERNITY TOUR: From the CITY to the UNIVERSITY / UNDER THE CITY | THE LAND”—a reference to May ’68—while another asserts “CLIP THE LOCKS, BETRAY EMPIRE,” a request seemingly addressed to building security. While the lobby is normally open to the public, in advance of our visit director Glenn Lowry instructed staff to check tickets outside of the museum due to “risk of gun violence.” Shellyne Rodriguez, an artist and activist affiliated with the activist group Take Back the Bronx, distributes a two-color risograph pamphlet headlined “THE RUINS of MODERNITY TOUR: From the CITY to the UNIVERSITY / UNDER THE CITY | THE LAND”—a reference to May ’68—while another asserts “CLIP THE LOCKS, BETRAY EMPIRE,” a request seemingly addressed to building security. Their infiltration is not to focus on individuals but to confront the institution in its entirety.

A ragtag crowd of about forty-five has assembled at the base of the park. DTP’s Amin Hussein beckons us closer for some remarks issued in a vaguely pedagogical tone: This is not a protest. This gathering is for us to learn what’s happening in the city, and where power is concentrated within it. Rodriguez follows with a provocation: What does an anti-imperialist political program look like for those living in the heart of a global empire? Sandy Grande of NYSThink with Standing Rock issues a land acknowledgment and directs our attention to the recently published Indigenous climate justice platform the Red Deal. The speakers offer some practical tips for avoiding arrest—stay tight around corners, that sort of thing—and then we’re off, marshaled by three cops on mopeds.

The confrontation doesn’t last longer than fifteen minutes, after which we begin the “deoccupation,” hoisting a banner that reads “POST-MOMA FUTURE” across from the museum. Off to the side, I spot O.K. Fox and Sarah Crowe of the Art & Labor podcast interviewing artist William Powhida. The crowd grows to about eighty people, all seated in the plaza and listening to an unplanned speaker series offering a taxonomy of the institutional rot and labor militancy that characterizes the university and the museum today. DTP’s Marz Saffore expresses solidarity with MOVE’s campaign against the University of Pennsylvania, recently revealed to have been storing the remains of Black children killed in a 1985 police bombing. Andre from Comité Boricua en la Diáspora introduces himself as a Puerto Rican refugee and accuses board member Stephen Tananbaum of exacerbating and exploiting the territory’s debt crisis. NYU sociologist Andrew Ross updates us on the ongoing Graduate Students Organizing Committee strike and the group’s commitment to leverage their labor power to end the NYPD’s presence on campus.

On Strike MoMA’s Ruins of Modernity Tour
Vijay Masharani, Artforum (May 5, 2021)
Decolonize Ayiti: Action Report

On Friday, April 16th we called a peaceful action in front of the hideous Parque Colon sculpture in Santo Domingo. This was part of week 2 of 10 weeks of action and striking the big money and blood money that is killing us all at MoMA. We call an action to Decolonize Ayiti or “mountainous land”. This is what our Taino brothers and sisters once called the island of Quisqueya.

There is power in a symbol like this and that power needs to be taken away. While we meet our local governments with demands to reform the police and end unjust killings of indigenous, black, and brown people; we must also eliminate the symbols that allow us to view the most racist act of violence in our nation’s history in a heroic light. How sad it makes us to see our Queen Anacaona at the feet of Colon. We must free her from this symbol of genocide and rape.

Colonization continues through the stories told to protect the legacy of Columbus’s voyages to the so-called “New World” and “Americas”. These voyages, in reality, inaugurated a long history of exploitation, enslavement, eradication, and erasure of indigenous and black culture. Some brush off colonization as something of the past. Do not get it twisted— brown and black people are dying every day because of these false stories that protect colonization and enslavement. These stories hide the fact that cops were first put on these lands as slave patrols. The racist roots of policing tensions between brown and black communities are nothing new and it is why we must put an end to the racist police system and end to the celebration of Colonizers such as Colon.

We as Dominicans, as Americans, and first-generation Dominican Americans, must remind ourselves that we are on stolen land and we must act accordingly. This means that we shouldn’t spend Dominican tax money to fund the military to surround the Parque Colon to protect a fucking sculpture of a man that only brought disease, genocide, and various assaults to Native communities. We shouldn’t be celebrating a figure who is upheld in modern society as the “founder” of the New World… what the fuck were the Natives doing? Did they not find the land first?

We’re taught very early in elementary school the false story that the theft of our continent’s land was entirely legitimate because the people already there were not “civilized”. Having this statue removed to reclaim the true story of colonialism and genocide of our Taino culture is a demand, not a request. To this end, we call to Strike MoMA, and with that which we call “modernity”, and call for the decolonization of Ayiti. Let us come together to free Ayiti’s Taino Queen Anacaona from her rapist and murderer Colon. Anacaona died fighting to free and preserve her people’s independence and culture. It is up to us to respect and honor her by taking action to decolonize the land and the removal of the Colon statue and the name Parque Colon.

Do not get it twisted— brown and black people are dying every day because of these false stories that protect colonization and enslavement. These stories hide the fact that we shouldn’t spend Dominican tax money to fund the military to surround the Parque Colon. We called upon activists and other people of the island to come together peacefully in protest against a statue that should no longer exist. The police and the military were completely surrounding the park. We had to leave the location to come back later in hopes that we could approach the monument without the military and police interference. We came around 5 pm with sunflowers. As we approached the monument, the police got closer and closer to us. We placed the flowers at Anacaona feet, at our own risk, to honor the motherland and to make light that Colon was nothing but a rapist and murderer.

Our other actions include making banners that say “COLON FUE UN VIOLADOR - STRIKE MOMA”. The banner was made via a live stream on artist @sithdyvaraqas IG account on the day of action to start to make some noise via the internet. As we walked to place the banner in the park, we found the park was completely surrounded by Dominican military and cops. To avoid confrontations we didn’t take out our banner. I’m sure they understood our wonderful message of how Anacaona should behead Colon. We shared our intentions via our flyer to call to action for the day via several IG platforms.

Anacaona should have Colon’s head taken off for the genocide of our Taino people. During 10 weeks, we are creating a new space to allow for a new way of thinking and for the work of Decolonization to begin with our culture. Let us come together as a collective; decolonize our minds, our hearts, and souls. We are all one and we should educate our children against celebrating a mass murder and rapist of the land that never belonged to him.

We are demanding the removal of the Columbus Monument en el Parque Colon. We are a city built on the invaded and occupied territory Ayiti or Quisqueya to the Native Taino people that have always called this land home and which they continue to inhabit today. We despise such a symbol of Indigenous genocide and erasure in our city. To uplift BIPOC around the world, we must recognize that it has no place in our Art history and Culture History. We Strike MoMA and what we call modernity and all the blood money used by MoMA’s board members. Blood money has no place in the arts, and sculptures celebrating rapist and mass murderers have no place in art history.

That is why we are asking for the removal of the Columbus Monument located in the Parque Colon. It represents racist acts of violence through the forceful removal of people from their ancestral lands. We ask that these racist acts also be condemned by the Dominican government as they condemned the behavior of police violence against our people.

Removing statues will not solve the problem of police brutality or racism, but it will send a message that rejects racism, rape, and colonization of past and present. Let us change art history by suggesting to put Anacaona at the top of the sculpture and completely removing el violador que era Colon.

Golden Sunflowers para madre Tiera y para la Reina de la Tiera Ayiti Anacaona.
COLON FUE UN VIOLADOR
STRIKE NO MÁA
Over the last few years, an increasing number of art and cultural institutions have come under sustained attack for what to some may have appeared as a range of disparate reasons: a racist stature; labor issues; or a weapons manufacturer, opioid peddlers, prison profiteers, gentrifiers sitting on the board. However, these instances are part of a growing, global, and coherent set of revolts against finance feudalism and the global oligarchy, beneficiaries from the afterlives of colonialism and slavery. Where as much of protesting in the art world has historically concerned matters of representation (what kind of art by what kind of artist expressing what kinds of concerns get to be included in the spaces of its reception and exhibition), some current spates of protests are challenging social structures and cultural imaginaries, rather than the art on display. Board members have been the main targets, for the boards of these hallowed institutions, it turns out, are full of unsavory characters who make their money from selling drugs, peddling arms, and putting regular folks in cages. That money gained from dispossession, displacement, and detention is then donated (4Ds) in the tens and hundreds of millions of dollars to museums and non-profits. The protestors have been clear: the cycle of these four Ds has to stop. That is, actions won’t stop once a particular board member is removed because that does not stop the violence of the oligarchs. It merely shifts its location; they are interchangeable. In that case, actions will move to another site in the chain of art washing and philanthropy subterfuge.

None of this comes as too much of a surprise. What we know today as “The Museum” has always been written by ill-gotten wealth and power, from colonial ventures and slave plantation profits to miliary expeditions and Gilded Age robber barons. Without these adventures in violence, theft, and barbarism, there would have been no institutions of high civilization or high art in the modern, Western world. The money’s been dirty for a few hundred years. So has civilization.

Today’s protests—following on the heels of a few earlier fights like Gulf Labor’s face off with the Guggenheim and unionization efforts at the New Museum—have gained momentum because they are not about art. Or, put differently, they are not about art in the way the museums have come to delineate art, as a restricted domain of production over which they hold the monopoly of value. Rather, the protests are about that very monopoly; they are about the museum in the structural sense, about the financial capital that underwrites, and benefits from, the cultural capital of museums, universities, and institutions of knowledge in general. Accumulated through its originary violence of colonial dispossession and enslavement, Western capital and power hid behind the idea of the mission civilatrice (the civilizing mission) of the White man, bringing education, art, and “progress” to the rest of the world. Today’s concentration of capital keeps lubricating the gears of civilization that gave rise to these institutions in the first place. We have to understand museums as a function in the machinery of racial capitalism. Profit from every part of a historically-shaped cycle of dispossession, displacement and detention ends up as Picassos on the wall where we are taught to stand mouths agape and feel awe about the human spirit. A highly creative project indeed, a fetish of the highest order.

Another important feature is that these actions are not only led by the artists and intellectuals who have a vested interest in the institutions and want to change them for the better. The coalitions are joined or led by groups fighting a wide range of issues imposed on vulnerable communities by the oligarchy and its security state—from anti-extractive movements to prison abolitionists and sanctuary activists to movements for indigenous land restoration and Black liberation. Positioning itself from the beginning at the intersection of these currents, Decolonize This Place (DTP) has been the exemplary platform that started with arts institutions and then joined major mobilizations against gentrification and police brutality in collaboration with local groups around the city. DTP, like MoMA Divest, understands and promotes the view that these are linked, international struggles.

But against and for what? All this is about global politics and economics, then why focus on museums like MoMA and non-profits like the Ford Foundation? Because, political and economic systems of power are concentrated in the museum and non-profit worlds. Wherever the money comes from, the museum or non-profit acts as the laundromat for the global oligarchy, sanitizing the money and giving it the stamp of culture’s approval. This is the political ecology of art and the flow is clear. Today, The Art World—when in caps—which designates includes the design, fashion, creative non-profit, and museum industries—is the distillation of the processes of global capital which is moving towards greater concentrations of wealth and value in fewer hands: the oligarchy.

The financial capital of the oligarchy is accrued as a result of the particular forms of describing Chase Manhattan Bank”—we say Bank of America is another name for MoMA. And vice versa. So is General Dynamics, the weapons giant, whose director, James Crown, has his name emblazoned on the newly-minted “People’s Studio.” There are others—Leon Black, Larry Fink—but the point is structural and not personal: to fight MoMA is to fight inequality. To fight the Whitney is to fight the security state. The distinction is part of a fictitious habitus we are asked to accept and inhabit.

But, some might say—as the directors and curators of these institutions have—that we cannot vilify the wealthy! Or that we cannot tell them where to invest their money, as remarked by Glenn Lowry, director of MoMA. Those are plainly false and deliberately dumbed-down replies to legitimate demands. Of course you can. That is precisely what we all need to do. The problem is the wealth and where it is invested, the immense inequality of it, the ways it is working to amass itself whilst causing harm to the communities that prosecutors, the voting machines. Why are we being asked to let them be? We can’t address white supremacy or climate change protecting the open flow of big capital and its owners, whilst restricting and criminalizing the flow of people, even as that extractivist capital displaces them; d. the aesthetic, humanitarian, and philanthropic apparatus that makes it all feel nice (progress!), and allows those of modest privilege to feel like change is happening whilst the oligarchs can feel good about their great heist and cleaner money. Luncheons hosted by those in the oligarchy—like the one at MoMA in 2019 that was protested by MoMA Divest and protected by NYPD—are in honor of the CEOs of the big banks and corporations, in that case Bank of America which got to graffitti its name all over the art. That is why—in an echo of James Baldwin who said “White is a metaphor for power and that is simply a way of describing Chase Manhattan Bank”—we say Bank of America is another name for MoMA. And vice versa.
or mass incarceration without dismantling the ideological, financial, and state apparatuses that facilitate the accumulation of wealth and power. That includes the museums.

Since 9/11, we have indisputably seen inequality grow to extremes, and even more so after the 2008 crash. The most recent Oxfam report on global inequality states: “While the poorest half of humanity saw their wealth dwindle by 11%, billionaires’ riches increased by 12%. Last year, the top 26 wealthiest people owned $2.75 trillion, or as much as the 3.8 billion poorest people.” Whilst people are struggling to pay rent, to pay for food, to pay for public transport in New York, the world’s billionaires increase their fortunes by $2.5 billion per day. Meanwhile, the racial wealth gap has been increasing and pandemic billionaires have made more than $400 billion during a time when people have lost livelihoods, not to mention their lives.

Research cited in a pre-pandemic HuffPost article showed that annual fraud by America’s largest corporations cost Americans up to $360 billion annually which amounts to roughly two decades’ worth of so-called street crime every single year. Yet, in 2018, nearly 19,000 people were sentenced in federal court for drug crimes alone, the majority black and latino, whilst prosecutors convicted just 37 corporate criminals.

Along with this immiseration of the poor and the fattening of the oligarchs, we have seen public funds, money for health, education, housing, the arts decrease. While the prosecution of white collar crimes (by the SEC, IRS, or EPA) is hampered and underfunded, the budgets of those arms of the state that mainly punish the poor—the police, prisons, and the military—keep growing.

There is no ethical world I want to be part of, in which an institution that raises and spends over $450 million dollars on renovations in one year and a year later fires uncontracted workers whose cumulative salaries are a fraction of the kinds of sums it has access to the next. MoMA has finance capital and social capital but is ethically bankrupt. The whole modern civilization for which it stands, as one of its highest exemplars, is bankrupt.

The case of BlackRock and its CEO Larry Fink, who sits on the boards of MoMA and NYU and donates to the NY Police Foundation, is emblematic but not unique. From its Manhattan perch a few blocks from MoMA, BlackRock manages assets of over seven trillion dollars. That is more than the entire collective GDPs of Mexico and South and Central American and Caribbean nations combined. Those assets are invested in all sorts of things—mainly large global companies, including weapons manufacturers like Lockheed Martin, fossil fuel extraction companies such as ExxonMobil and BP, mining companies like Vale and Rio Tinto, and prison companies like Core Civic and Geo Group. A large number of such companies have been found to be in violation of human rights, labor rights, and indigenous rights. For example, both Vale and Rio Tinto, sometimes through local subsidiaries and always with the help of local states and security forces, have privatized large areas of land in places like Mozambique, Brazil, and Colombia for resource extraction, thereby displacing people, often through forced evictions. After setting up operations, they have been accused of poor working conditions, sometimes even forced labor; pollution and contamination; corruption and illegal licensing; and attacking environmental activists. There have been local protests, contestations, and, obviously, violations. Securing these extractivist ventures, then, requires weapons, in the production of which BlackRock also owns shares. People dispossessed and displaced by these securitized financial ventures go on the move, and people on the move are vulnerable to all sorts of things, including detention at borders. It’s a good thing, then, for BlackRock to also own shares of prison companies that detain people on the move. There is profit at every point in the cycle of dispossession, displacement and detention. They call it a diversified portfolio. And thereby also shirk blame. With one decision, Larry Fink could seal the fate of the prison company Core Civic, yet somehow we are to not blame the directors and owners of these funds and these companies, who protect themselves by being seated here whilst their profit-driven atrocities take place elsewhere.

Most large funds and billionaires inevitably invest in the same cycle, including most US pension funds and banks, many of which also have large art collections run by smiling art curators. Vanguard, securing the future of America’s employees in their old age and one of the largest asset managers in the world, has a very similar investment profile and directors that serve on various boards, including the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. It can’t be otherwise.

The state, and its security apparatus, from police to the military, are hijacked by these imperatives—they call it development or economic growth, but it’s really just profit. In this situation, all corporate heads will defend the arrest and incarceration of indigenous and environmental activists who know that another pipeline will only increase oil leaks and pollution. The oligarchs will trigger and defend the arrests in the name of growth, as they are appointed to serve on the boards of museums around the country. No wonder then, that despite repeated requests by activists and artists, not one of the major museums has stood up to declare what position it holds vis-a-vis funds linked to war, dispossession, displacement, or prison profits.

And that translates to the curators, writers, and artists, only a handful of whom have stood up and confronted the horror. This is not to blame curators or artists, for what the struggles at the Whitney and MoMA have shown is that the administration will be punitive.

As for the artists, they worry that without the valuation of the accumulated wealth and power of the big institutions, they will never get anywhere. That is not the case, of course, and to think so is to be caught in the colonial fiction of the metropole, the metropolis, the center. But the point here is to highlight the regime of fear, to recognize that we are working under the repressive regimes of these institutions which pretend to operate in the name of artistic freedom and freedom of expression but enact the security regime’s tactics of producing insecurity, financial or otherwise. Producing fear. As MTL+ and FTP wrote last year, the tactic of becoming ungovernable is precisely to come together to get over that fear.

Oligarchic institutions don’t abide by reform. They need breaking up. Getting rid of Warren Kanders from the board of the Whitney may or may not have decisively changed the conditions on the ground in Palestine, Ferguson, Standing Rock, the US-Mexico border, or any of the other places where Safariland weapons were used. But it was useful because it shifted the frame and showed a surging power in cultural activism, positioning it as part of a larger social and political mobilization addressing not just what art belongs on what wall, but the material and structural conditions underlying the decisions about what a wall is. All these actions—naming harm, forcing accountability, bringing down monuments, claiming reparations, reclaiming stolen land—have been and continue to be about those walls, borders and barricades that get erected to ensure the security of the state. They were and continue to be about the evasion and dismantling of those walls, and the making of other worlds—plural, many, multiple, non-standard worlds—without those borders.
Growing Up on 53rd Street: MoMA, Midtown, Modernity
Andrew Ross

Midtown is not simply a neighborhood sector of Manhattan, it is the home of a Central Business District (CBD)—typically the area in a city with the highest land value, and with the highest concentration of commercial and financial capital investment. Over the course of the twentieth century, Midtown supplanted Wall Street as the city’s primary CBD. Large landowners, like the Rockefeller family, played an outsized role in “curating” the land markets of both of these CBD’s, with the Rockefeller Center complex, in particular, playing a key anchoring role. That MoMa became the premier museum of Midtown (geographically and conceptually distinct from the Museum Mile of the Upper East Side) meant that it was more centrally aligned with the engines of real estate growth and capital accumulation. MoMa grew up in the same neighborhood as America’s corporate titans headquartered in the Midtown’s CBD. These kids on the block know each other very well—they went to the same school of capital accumulation. MoMa’s cultivation of “modern art” is indissociable from the corporate aesthetic of the American century because it is rooted in the same epochal mode of production.

As the FIRE (finance, insurance, and real estate) industries began to supplant manufacturing as New York’s base economy, Midtown and its homegrown museum went with the flow, expanding upwards and outwards. Townhouse rows morphed into canyons of glass and steel. During the Bloomberg years, Midtown was the primary destination for foreign investment in the city’s real estate, most of it dirty money in search of a tax avoidance haven or money laundering opportunity. Billionaire’s Row was the inevitable outcome of tycoons, princelings, and oligarchs from Russia, Asia, and the Middle East looking for a place to park their surplus capital. Purchased with cash or through shell companies or LLCs, their owners have good reason to shield their activities from public and legal scrutiny—they are as crooked as the day is long. These palaces in the sky were not built to be lived in; they are safe deposit boxes for the plunder of global capitalist speculation. At nighttime, you can tell that entire, darkened floors of the Row’s superblocks lie empty while the city’s homeless shelters are overflowing. The gulf between ultra-luxury speculation and existential need is an extreme symptom of the capitalist production of housing crises.

MoMa officially jumped into the real estate business with the construction of Museum Tower. This white glove condominium, designed by Cesar Pelli, was part of the museum’s upward expansion, executed in the early 1980s. But this de luxe venture was only a preview of things to come, when an adjoining lot was sold to developers in 2007 for construction of an even more lavish cloud buster—the Tower Verre. 53 W 53, as it is now known, is often claimed as part of Billionaire’s Row on account of its soaring elevation and unit prices. Unlike Museum Tower, it is a stand-alone real estate play, but it is still an integral part of the MoMa scenescape. Perpetual benefactor membership of the museum is one of the perks of residency, which also include a 65-foot lap pool, golf simulator, squash court, private theater and restaurant. For the occupying class, the museum is just another bundled amenity on its doorstep.

That MoMa plays an adjunct role in Billionaire’s Row is no coincidence. The art collectors and donors in MoMa’s orbit are the same people who invest in the superblocks, just as the composition of its board overlaps with the board membership of many of the large corporations headquartered in the surrounding blocks. MoMa and its adjoining tower are at one with the predatory system of accumulation that built the superblocks just as the stately Met is at one with the older money of the Upper East Side. Their contents rotate between the private collections of townhouses and condos and the exhibition galleries, just as their larger spaces serve to host the grander social functions of the art-collecting bourgeoisie. Both museums are open to the public in the same spirit that the British aristocracy open their carefully curated mansions to the public.

If 53 W 53 is a trophy of class war, MoMa is its theater of operations, where the strategies of extraction and speculation are planned and staged through the medium of art. Appreciation is demanded, whether from the architectural critics who fawn over Jean Nouvel’s tower, the art critics who are groomed to separate the strategies of extraction and speculation are planned and staged through the medium of art. Appreciation is demanded, whether from the architectural critics who fawn over Jean Nouvel’s tower, the art critics who are groomed to separate arts from the sordid economy through which they circulate, and the mass tourist, checking off their list of must-see destinations. Considered as a single complex, the combo of MoMa, the Museum Tower and 53 E 53 is the concrete expression of the interlocking interests of the ultra-luxury capitalist class and the artworld’s professional-managerial class, each serving the other in close proximity to their high-security precincts. Nowhere else is the architecture of power and greed so clearly and shamelessly displayed as on this midtown block.
Johnson's life, the facts of the matter are hardly in dispute, of biographers and historians combing through the details of their success at Harvard is almost certainly that, after years Design to remove Johnson's name from the house he designed at the Museum half a century ago, the Study Group has now...
Abolish MoMA: The Case of Palestine
-Ariella Aïsha Azoulay

As we watch the violence organized and backed by the Zionist state against Palestinians all over occupied Palestine, reminders are not unnecessary.

'We are not seeing a "civil war" inside Israel,' writes Lana Tatour (Tatour, 2021), 'but rather, the Israeli settler state declaring war on its colonized "citizens" and Palestinians fighting for their liberation.'

Settler-colonial geography is intentionally confusing. Let's set the record straight once again. Palestine is there, where it always has been. (Figure 1) It seems obvious, but imperial geography is deliberately confusing. Much violence is used to bend geography and also people's perception of it.

First, a demographic war was waged, aiming to manufacture a new body politic. Palestinians were expelled and denied return, and millions of Jewish babies born in Palestine-turned-Israel were assigned an imperial identity that proclaimed that Palestine does not exist. Identity operates as a light weapon as it reflects the new colonial geography. These babies grew up to believe that they were 'Israelis.' This identity was assigned to them as part of a broader transformation of 'Israel' from a contested fact into a fait accompli.

Art cleansing facilitated this imperial transition from Palestine to Israel. Once again, MoMA's self-documentation of its crimes are our receipt: Strike MoMA. (Figure 2)

In 1964, MoMA, together with its International Council and the American-Israel Foundation, whose aim is to 'impact the way the world embraces Israel by creating the next generation of ambassadors for Israeli culture,' were determined to assist in this mission. MoMA organized an exhibition of Israeli Art that toured the US. 'Art Israel,' reaffirming what the state of Israel sought to proclaim: that Palestine does not exist. A MoMA senior curator determined (Seitz, 1964), and I'm quoting: 'The intensity of human compassion, pride, intellect, and creativity that gave form to the State of Israel itself is still the prime source of energy that activates Israeli art and gives it a distinctive aura, whatever the style.'

The partition of Palestine, the erasure of Palestine, was a Euro-Zionist plot. In opposition to the partition plan resolution, Palestinians took to the streets. Here, they are in a precious moment of potential reversibility. (Figure 3) This is not the beginning of the so-called 'Israeli War of Independence,' as the official caption indicates. This is a mass protest against the Euro-Zionist plot. We are attending a moment before the fabrication of the 'two sides.' Palestinians are not protesting against Israel. They are rather opposing its creation against them.
This kind of document was recognized by international law (and other imperial organizations created over centuries by imperial actors) and privileged over the pleas of indigenous peoples who were targeted by it. By declaring the establishment of the state of Israel, this document actually proclaimed that Palestine no longer exists. Palestine never existed.

This was in 1948.

The Nakba.

But none of it is history. This is the ongoing Nakba. This is a political regime led first by Zionists and European powers interested in finding solution for the undesired ‘Jewish people’ Europe, and later backed by the U.S. and the international community. However, robbery of lands, expulsions of the land claimants, system of borders, and a declaration of sovereignty were not enough for this organized crime to perpetuate itself.

Carceral technologies known as cultural institutions were created, taking part in the normalization of this large-scale organized crime.

How do these institutions operate? These institutions are technologies. They turn imperial violence into discrete objects, photographs and documents included, and endow them with precious value and designate them for study, enjoyment, and display.

These are the major faculties of these ‘institutions’:

- Archives: producing, destroying, and preserving documents in service of legitimizing the robbery.
- Museums: handling discrete objects through which imperial temporality and spatiality are reaffirmed.
- Academic disciplines: maintaining a mandatory distance between scholars and ‘their’ objects of research in a way that relegates these objects to the past.

Imperialism operates through a Regime of Objects. Objects kept apart from people and handled by different experts. Objects used in and mobilized for the dispossession and weakening of the resistance of people who are directly or indirectly targeted by them.

This imperial regime of objects may not seem to enact violence. However, recall... without it, colonized people could have succeeded in preventing imperial regimes from materializing and reproducing themselves.

After 500 years of imperialism, after 73 years of colonization in Palestine, no one can continue to underestimate the role of the regime of objects (objects defined as private property for the benefit of the ‘public’) in imperialism’s crime.
We have already mentioned documents and archives. Let’s continue to photography and photographic archives. (Figure 5) These Palestinians are not refugees. They are being expelled from their homes. The photographer is trained to capture history. Hence, for him, these Palestinians are already refugees. The archive, too, records them as refugees. The museum, too, shows them as refugees.

These Palestinians are not refugees—they are being expelled from their homes.

They are not refugees, but rather peoples being expelled. They can still succeed in their refusal to be expelled. Those who expel them could still be incriminated and held accountable for their crimes. Under the regime of objects, the photographer is instructed to anticipate ‘history’ and capture them as already refugees.

The imperial origins of photography lure photographers to capture ‘what is’ in its historical grandeur. Photographers are guided by the assumption that nothing can stop history, including the opposition of those targeted by it.

The violence required to turn plunder and appropriation into ‘history’ was taken out of the photographers’ realm of expertise. If not, why already in 1948 would photographers have ‘documented’ Palestine and captioned it ‘Israel’?

History as an ideology, practice, and discipline played a major role in this organized international crime of destroying a place and substituting it with a manufactured colony.

Under the imperial regime of objects, every object in the settlers’ colony has its own history, a history that is coeval with the history of the colony. Histories that confirm that there is, for example, such a thing as ‘Israeli art’, an object that exists independently from its role in the plunder of Palestine.

In 1964, 16 years after the Nakba, during which Palestinian expellees were in refugee camps and denied return, MoMA organized ‘the first major exhibition of contemporary Israeli art’ in the U.S. Here is the press release for the book that was published by MoMA. (Figure 6)

With the help of discrete art objects, this ‘major exhibition’ normalized the crime and provided the public a palpable narrative of the history of ‘Israeli art’ as a matter of fact. Alongside the reification of an ‘Israeli’ unique style, MoMA also approved the appropriation of the Palestinian landscape. As you can read here, the curator, relates these themes to the recent trials of the Jewish people and to a pervasive celebration of the Israeli landscape. (Figure 7)
At the same time, MoMA also reified a construction of the ‘Jewish people’ at the expenses of a Jewish diversity that reflected its diverse histories and experiences, eclipsing those crimes that Zionists perpetuated against Jews in the Arab and Muslim world. But this will have to wait for another day...

Let's conclude today with Salman Abu-Sitta (Abu-Sitta, 2021) on the lasting consequences of partaking in the erasure of Palestine and agreeing to its robbery by Israel, and I'm quoting from Salman Abu-Sitta:

To bombard two million people in 360 square kilometer by air, land, and sea is genocide. It will not, should not be forgotten. It must be accounted for.

As experts, you may know why to million people are packed in a huge concentration camp in Gaza Strip. But you may not if it has been hidden from you.

Those two million people are the victims of the original ethnic cleansing of 247 villages who lived in the southern half [50%] of Palestine in 1948. They were attacked and depopulated and pushed into Gaza Strip, a name that was coined for the remaining 13% of Palestine. That could not have happened without dozens of massacres of civilians, after occupation of the villages, in Bureir, Beit Daras, Simsim to mention a few. The massacres did not stop since.

For 70 years, those Palestinians were attacked in refugee camps. Many were killed on numerous occasions in 1953, 1956, 1967, 1971, not to mention constantly since 2006 till today.

Why?

Because their genocide in 1948 was not complete. The old did die but the young did not forget that they have a home and they demanded the right to return to it. Their mere survival is anathema to Israel. So, their genocide must be complete. That is what Israel was and is doing.

This is, however, also a moment of potential reversibility. Palestine is there, where it always has been.

Free Palestine.

Notes:

1. This is a transcript of a spoken presentation by Ariella Aisha Azoulay, presentation design by Jina Alhawani.

References:

Abu-Sitta Salman (2021) A Message to so-called Middle East Experts, Pittsburgh Palestine Solidarity Committee. 17 May.


Tatour, Lana (2021) This isn't a civil war, it is settler-colonial brutality. Mondoweiss. May 13.
Mikinaak Migwans, “Thoughts on the Indigenous Struggle in the Art Museum, As Seen From the Struggle in the Ethnographic Museum”

1. What is it to be freed from objecthood in the ethnographic museum? Indigenous people know what the struggle is about in the ethnographic museum. By now—one hundred years after William Halliday arrested forty potlachers in their regalia for the crime of dancing and sent them to the prison and the museum respectively, seventy years after the law used to do it was removed from the books, and a quarter of a century seventy years after the law used to do it was removed from the books, and a quarter of a century respectively, seventy years after the law used to do it was removed from the books, and a quarter of a century after repatriation became policy in both Canada and the United States—we know what this kind of colonial theft is about, and we know how to arm ourselves. Elders in this fight like G. Peter Jemison and Gloria Cranmer Webster have given us the tools of repatriation, revitalization, and re-creation in order to reforge severed ties, and I find it no coincidence that so many of these Indigenous cultural leaders are also artists. For them, this ongoing struggle has been about bringing back into the realm of presence, life, and futurity the Indigenous peoples that they have been attempting to exclude. By now, we demand admittance. Inclusion in the art museum was about overcoming a strategic colonial exclusion that neutralized our political power by confining us to objecthood. Artist and cultural theorist Ipleene Rickard asserts that “the global visible presence of Indigenous art and makers is critical for the resurgence of Indigenous knowledge, asserting our sovereignty as discrete political and cultural communities and nations.” To reclaim the possibility of speaking (let alone being heard) as sovereign subjects, we demand that the colonizer cede the vaunted plinth. Our advances into this area, however, seem to meet familiar barriers. Commenting on the increasingly global circulation of Indigenous art in international exhibitions, Rickard notes that even on this lofty world stage, inclusion has been compromised by selecting the individual out from the collective, and the artwork from its larger frame of ideas. This “reveals the suppression of the recognition of Indigenous nationhood within settler states, while simultaneously acknowledging the resurgence of hundreds of Indigenous worldviews as ‘art.’” It may be that the art object presents the same structural challenge as the ethnographic object, and that the lessons learned in the ethnographic museum are needed here too.

2. What is it to be admitted into subjecthood in the art museum? The struggle in the art museum (we thought) was different. Here, we demanded admittance. Inclusion in the art museum was about overcoming a strategic colonial exclusion that neutralized our political power by confining us to objecthood. Artist and cultural theorist Ipleene Rickard asserts that “the global visible presence of Indigenous art and makers is critical for the resurgence of Indigenous knowledge, asserting our sovereignty as discrete political and cultural communities and nations.” To reclaim the possibility of speaking (let alone being heard) as sovereign subjects, we demand that the colonizer cede the vaunted plinth. Our advances into this area, however, seem to meet familiar barriers. Commenting on the increasingly global circulation of Indigenous art in international exhibitions, Rickard notes that even on this lofty world stage, inclusion has been compromised by selecting the individual out from the collective, and the artwork from its larger frame of ideas. This “reveals the suppression of the recognition of Indigenous nationhood within settler states, while simultaneously acknowledging the resurgence of hundreds of Indigenous worldviews as ‘art.’” It may be that the art object presents the same structural challenge as the ethnographic object, and that the lessons learned in the ethnographic museum are needed here too.

3. What is the difference between the art museum and the ethnographic museum? The art museum elevates and isolates its object and calls it a “masterpiece,” while the ethnographic museum crowds it with context and calls it a “specimen.” Both pieces were looted from the Haudenosaunee wampum belts and other tools of sovereignty as discrete political and cultural communities and nations. To reclaim the possibility of speaking (let alone being heard) as sovereign subjects, we demand that the colonizer cede the vaunted plinth. Our advances into this area, however, seem to meet familiar barriers. Commenting on the increasingly global circulation of Indigenous art in international exhibitions, Rickard notes that even on this lofty world stage, inclusion has been compromised by selecting the individual out from the collective, and the artwork from its larger frame of ideas. This “reveals the suppression of the recognition of Indigenous nationhood within settler states, while simultaneously acknowledging the resurgence of hundreds of Indigenous worldviews as ‘art.’” It may be that the art object presents the same structural challenge as the ethnographic object, and that the lessons learned in the ethnographic museum are needed here too.

4. The struggle is still about resisting the colonial claim of property relations. The ways that the ethnographic museum creates its object are not fundamentally different to the ways of the art museum. We can read the evidence of that ongoing claim in the museum exhibition or display (as many have fruitfully done), but the key mechanism of extraction is in its acquisition of objects, and in the wider kinds of acquisition that it makes possible in the world. When the state came for the Kwakwaka’wakw potlachers’ masks, it wasn’t because they needed something to fill out their dioramas; it was because Kwakwaka’wakw were dancing instead of working, and dancing to pass on land rights within Indigenous law rather than ceding it for development. When the state refused to return to the Haudenosaunee wampum belts and other tools of governance that should not have been sold, they weren’t interested in rescuing “relics” from obscurity; they were trying to make sure that Indigenous governance became a relic itself. Both of these object types have appeared as specimens or as art in this or that museum, and in neither style of display has the violence of their acquisition been transcended. They remain objects, trimmed to fit the glass vitrine, docile, trackable, and (ultimately) insurable.

5. Indigenous artists as leaders in the struggle. When our artists and knowledge holders encounter these same institutions now, are they to believe that this time, it will be different? It might be different, but not because the institutions have changed—it will be because we are prepared. We know that the state continually extracts from us, in the realm of culture as in land and labor. When it comes for pieces of us, calling it inclusion, how do we resist the finality of its claim? How do we keep from making trophies of our relations all over again, and using them to puppet our complicity in more sinister claims? I don’t have answers yet. But I look to the yields of our struggles in the ethnographic museum, and their successes in reasserting relations within sites of violence. Repatriation gave us the language of cultural property and collective ownership, which we will need in order to resist the state’s hold on the individual. It also gave us the power to reclaim objects and bring them back as relations. Revitalization showed us the value of our Elders’ knowledge, and the will to hold onto it. These practices complement those being used in the art world. Here, our leaders in the struggle for Indigenous presence in the art museum (Jemison and Rickard among them) gave us the tools of organization and advocacy, and showed us how to lift each other up despite the isolation and alienation of the institution. To this day, the work of decolonization in art spaces is done primarily by Indigenous people for Indigenous people (often on part-time, contractual, or some other precarious basis). It is this site of ongoing collective labour, in the gap of a constantly deferred state of “inclusion,” where the real project is being carried out.

6. What is the struggle? We as cultural workers labour to reclaim objects as kin, and to resist ongoing processes of colonial accumulation in the art museum, as in the ethnographic museum, as on the land and within the settler state.

Mügwech. That’s all for now.

Mikinaak Migwans, member of Wiikwemikong Unceded Territory, Assistant Professor in Indigenous Art at the University of Toronto
MOMA, CISNEROS, AND BEYOND: Artwashing and Extractivism in the Americas

Macarena Gómez-Barris, Global South Center (June 2, 2021)

Museums are colonial projects as much as nation-building ones. They are also the result of monocultural schemes of urban planning and gentrification. If the colonial art museum is filled with desacralized stolen objects as a measure of territorial and cultural conquest, then the modern art museum collects the contemporary arts as an accumulative measure of capitalist market value. In these ways and many more, museums reflect dominant political economies and their social relations, which makes them powerful sites for decolonial political contestation as well as emergent protest cultures that work to build counter-institutions. The ten weeks of art, action and conversation “Post-MoMa Futures” disentangle what we might call the museum industrial complex that embeds and expresses dominant market forces. The recent struggle over Barrick Gold, and the fact of Gustavo Cerón’s ties to the gold mining company as a board of trustee member, brings forward how deep connections between art and extractivism in the Americas go. [1]

Within the global ecology that is New York City, and specifically within the colonized Lenapehoking Indigenous territories known as Manhattan, museums have been meaningful architectural sites of modern imperial world-making. For instance, MoMA’s self-narrated history does not exaggerate when it declares itself “the greatest museum of modern art in the world.” With more than 200,000 works of art and extensive film and photography archives, MoMA has conducted research within. MoMA has one of the most significant global collections of modern art anywhere, both collecting and occluding other traditions of art making. Its location at the intersection of 53rd Street and 6th Avenue represents a power center within Midtown Manhattan, surrounded by the Rockefeller Center, BlackRock, the New York City Police Foundation, and the Golden Tree Assets management. [2] The Museum of Modern Art is therefore both a symbol of an urban and historical architectural power grid, and a nexus of hierarchical and accumulative relations of conquest.

Extractive art washing, as I define it here, is the recurrent capitalist practice that invests in art and art collections as a fungible commodity, normalizing colonial and modern relations of biodiversity resource theft.

This was true during the European Arts Renaissance funded by overseas war and colonial ventures as much as it has been during the rise of US imperialism and the building of major art and cultural institutions across the United States. The US is not exceptional, as Canada, Norway, and many other countries in the world depend upon the entangled web of oil and art. [3]

Given that they accrue, exhibit, and program in the long shadow of petroleum empires and their new frontiers: What are the submerged relations of colonial and modern extractivism in the museum collection? What below-the-surface carbon entanglements and other sources of primitive accumulation make the museum possible? And, more generally, how does the museum strike a way to imagine a post-extractive future and a decolonized world otherwise?

Black Gold and Art’s Fungibility

The original US robber barons of the nineteenth century were oil men, some of whom later switched their investments into gold and minerals. These barons became known for their ruthless practices that gave rise to American industry based on extraction. Even as movements for divestment from petroleum are currently gaining momentum, the very foundation of Standard Oil, Chevron, and Exxon is built upon black gold that continues to undergird the carbon dependent global capitalist economy. [4] In this key way, petroleum monopolies and their wealth transfers have not been a sideline to the story of modernity, but its extractive protagonist.

In an oil dependent capitalist world, art and art collections are the extractive profits from fungible commodities; Powerful agents then grant authority over what Jacques Rancière calls “the distribution of the sensible,” where aesthetic value is organized to elevate particular art works of critical acclaim. [5] In this distribution, non-fungible tokens are the latest abstract use of art as fodder for the vertical capitalist machine. [6]

The great Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano rendered these capitalist relations visible in his discussion of the “resource burden” of Latin America and the Global South:

No other magnet attracts foreign capital as much as ‘black gold’. Petroleum is the wealth most monopolized in the entire capitalist system. There are no companies that enjoy the political power that the great petroleum corporations exercise on a universal scale.

Standard Oil and Shell lift up and dethrone kings and presidents; they finance palace conspiracies and coups d’état; and they dispose of innumerable generals and ministers; and in all regions and languages, they decide the course of war and peace... The natural wealth of Venezuela and other Latin American countries with petroleum in the subsoil, objects of assaults and organized plundering, has been converted into the principal instrument of their political servitude and social degradation. This is a long history of exploits and of curses, infamies, and defiance (Galeano, 2004:203-6; 1997:156-59). [7]

In the subsoil of museum possessions is a long history of exploits and plundering, where oil, hydroelectric damming, investments in the punishment industry, and militarization link the billionaire class to condemning resource rich regions of the world to what Galeano terms “their political servitude and social degradation.”

Within the underworlds of class museums is also the curse of resource wars, the below the surface deposits that have historically given rise to militarism and control over natural commodities such that the dynamics of resource scarcity and its hoarding also organize global currents of peace and war. [8]

Indeed, Guggenheim made most of his profits from silver mining and smelting in Colorado, and one of MoMA’s earliest patrons, Alfred Goudstikker, made his fortune from investments from oil wells in Pennsylvania and Ohio in the latter half of the 1800s. Forays into Latin America by modern carbon barons became commonplace to a petrol imperial expansionist imaginary. As Greg Grandin’s book on Henry’s Ford’s excursions into the Amazon Basin shows, rubber dreams were pervasive to the extractive vision that extended across the hemisphere, interconnecting the oil economy to the rubber boom, to Americanization of the world’s largest biodiverse region. [9] Further, the expansion of the prison industrial complex in the Americas has deep connections to Rockefeller’s direct political influence and the Cold War ripples that criminalized the Latin American political left, its intellectuals, and activism. [10] There is no innocence in these cultural substrates, just fasas comunas.

By the 1930s, both John D. Rockefeller and Paul Getty funneled their oil profiteering into art collections, creating the foundation of major US cultural institutions, and the creation of a particular form of modern art to serve US imperial interests. During the Cold War, MoMA inaugurated a new program of hemispheric art and culture among twenty-one republics, sourcing art to build out Pan-Americanism in an effort to sway Latin American and Caribbean hearts and minds. [11]

At the end of his life, John D. Rockefeller had become not merely the world’s richest man, but also its greatest philanthropist. Yet, in Latin America the Rockefeller family name continues to be not a benevolent symbol, but responsible for the wreackages of American empire and its political interventionism through its acquisition of black liquid gold. After discovery of deep petrol reserves in the Andean foothills, Standard Oil’s competition with Shell Oil in South America led to the Chaco War (1932-1933), a militarized conflict between Bolivia and Paraguay with lasting and profound consequences. Though competing accounts exist about the degree of interventionist corporatism, this unnecessary war between the two nations was at least in part fueled by Rockefeller’s greed. [12]

The enduring connections between American empire, extractivism, and art are not always visible. Recently, the Whitney Museum’s show Vida Americana exhibited a mural replica of “Man at the Crossroads,” the 1934 fresco Diego Rivera commissioned for the Rockefeller Center. This powerful work was whisked off the wall because Rivera painted Lenin’s figure in direct opposition to Rockefeller’s demand. Influenced by New York Leftist groups to make stronger visual connections to power hierarchies in his work, Rivera also painted in the figures of the peasant and the worker to envision directions for a communist future. This rare overt inscription to Cold War relations, and role of Rockefeller as a kind of heteropatriarchal figure of hemispheric capitalism, is an important art archival trace of US economic and military domination.

There are also gendered implications throughout these imperial histories of extractivism, war, and architecture that are then returned as liberal philanthropic motives to establish uniquely American cultural institutions. Empires are forcefully taken and built and then given away through tender gestures as the museum collection. When Mrs. Rockefeller funded MoMA with other millionaire wives, it was not merely a platform to record, collect, and display art, but as the design for an institution of hegemonic cultural influence. And, John D. Rockefeller who initially opposed experimental modern art came to see that abstraction could be championed as free expression, which was pitted against...
the social realist art coming from material realities in the Americas. The history of museum collecting, then, must also be told through the wiles of powerful barons as institution-builders of US white art hegemonies, as well as through modern/colonial distributions of cultural distinction.

**Extractivism and Art Washing**

New York art galleries and their collections have historically operated as repositories for investment bankers and multibillionaire international conglomerates. And, as I have discussed, art ownership is a form of control over political and social value through the fungibility of art as a commodity. This is not to take away the significance of particular exhibitions such as Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America, which makes explicit oil economy connections to anti-Black gentrification, or the countercuratorial work of (Walker) Art Alliance and curator of color, or even the diverse value and patrimony of collections themselves. My point is instead to ask: How does art address the uneven political and social practices of global capitalism?

The Collectors Patricia Phelps de Cisneros is a privately held collection that, based in New York and Venezuela, and it archives Latin American contemporary art. And, the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Research Institute for the Study of Art from Latin America, established by MoMA in 2016, is yet another influential site of philanthropy, empire, and even the practice of influence that is art washing. Mr. Gustavo A. Cisneros, Cisneros’ husband, as the New York Times reported in 2018, is “a multibillionaire whose international conglomerate of 70 companies relies on unfettered access to high-ranking political and economic officials in nearly 40 countries.”[13] Such unfettered political access, as Galeano noted, is never innocent in the accumulative practices of global racial capitalism?

Cisneros made his fortune through diverse assets, with an astounding consumer audience that reaches more than 600 million Spanish and Portuguese-speaking peoples throughout the hemisphere as well as in Europe. The Cisneros group is also one of the largest investors in Univision, which is broadly known as a conservative media organization with massive global cultural and political influence upon Latin America and European markets.

The Cisneros MoMA collection was founded by Mrs. Cisneros, a powerful patron and nexus figure of art patronage in her own right, who by all accounts has an impressive record of explicit connections to the machete of war, empire, and Indigenous, including Palestinian dispossession. Even as it is always difficult to speak truth to powerful actors and institutions, the MoMA Strike crystallizes for me the importance of our transversal and coalitional work in creating new spaces for solidarity in an increasingly authoritarian, skewed, and unjust world.

In Verónica Gago’s book *The Feminist International* (2020), the author points to the state as the target of new formations of political power as potency. Gago builds upon the work of Marxist Anarchist Rosa Luxemburg to ask, among other critical questions, “whom is art washing?”[2] Gango builds upon the work of Marxist Anarchist Rosa Luxemburg to ask, among other critical questions, “whom is art washing?”[2] Gango builds upon the work of Marxist Anarchist Rosa Luxemburg to ask, among other critical questions, “whom is art washing?”[2] Gango builds upon the work of Marxist Anarchist Rosa Luxemburg to ask, among other critical questions, “whom is art washing?”[2] Gango builds upon the work of Marxist Anarchist Rosa Luxemburg to ask, among other critical questions, “whom is art washing?”[2] Gango builds upon the work of Marxist Anarchist Rosa Luxemburg to ask, among other critical questions, “whom is art washing?”[2] Gango builds upon the work of Marxist Anarchist Rosa Luxemburg to ask, among other critical questions, “whom is art washing?”[2]

The ability of the Cisneros Group to accumulate billions of dollars of net worth through media conglomerates at a time of widening immiseration around the world is evidence of this new boundary line. Such investments into art and culture, particularly in New York, are part of the return upon extracted value, as appreciation, rent, and a rise in capital gains. And, cultural expansionism exacerbates and further solidifies the inequalities of the race/class/gender and sex order in the Americas, an order that has had permanence since the sixteenth century.

**Decolonial Futures**

Important struggles in East Los Angeles and in Boyle Heights upon Gabrielino and Tongva Indigenous occupied lands over the past few years against art washing have shown the intimate connections between real estate capitalist investment and an extractive art industry that displaces to take over. In the case of MoMA, as in the case of other museums like the Whitney, the target is often the board of trustees where the entanglements of the matrix of coloniality remind us to follow the money.

Over the past several decades and with particular intensity since Strike MoMA, I have thought a lot about the complexity of what it means to confront liberal institutions for their historic power grab, their complicity and involvement in petroleum and carbon induced dispossessions, and the consequent waves of art from the Americas cannot fully hide the structural conditions that produce a billionaire class, its outsized privileges, and its new destinations of imperial control.

Plundering petroleum-rich biodiverse Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous territories, as I’ve discussed in my book *The Extractive Zone*, is at the core of colonial modernity. Perhaps, then, communications and digital media empires, as well as real estate, have become the future of extractive capitalism? Media and communications, like oil wells and gold mines, make for powerful accumulative source materials that can be abstracted in ways that racialized capital thrives upon.[14] And, new technologies depend upon the same language as resource extraction, such as mining big data, prospecting and collecting biomatter, tracking users through surveillance, and normalizing dispossession through right wing agendas. Further, the military state is both the originator of, and thoroughly ingrained within, this new media matrix.

So far, a genocide of the Palestinian people; it connects to study of tri-continental alliances and decolonization movements, it organizes working groups that learn from and struggle on behalf of Black freedom, against the carceral state, for Immigrant rights and Internationalism, as well as several other current struggles. This transversal and revolutionary activity has made me reflect further on how the museum and art collection are sites of extractive modernity and art washing, as well as how the capitalist power complex fully coheres in the museum.

Maybe targeting carbon centers and media empires is precisely what Stuart Hall referred to as the project of articulation in particular historical junctures. Maybe striking in every way possible is exactly what we have to do to build the colonial planetary and think towards the wider pronoun, the We of our non-extractive future.
**BLOOD ON THEIR HANDS:**
Barrick Gold, Gustavo and Patricia Cisneros, and Imperialist Networks of Extraction in the Dominican Republic

By Sandy Plácido

Barrick Gold Corporation is a mining company headquartered in Toronto, Canada that, in addition to its silver and copper mines, operates 15 gold mines in Argentina, Canada, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Dominican Republic, Ivory Coast, Mali, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania, and the United States. After its mine in Carlin, Nevada, Barrick’s second most productive gold mine, which it co-operates with Newmont Goldcorp, is the Pueblo Viejo mine, located on 4,800 hectares of land near Cotuí, Dominican Republic. 542,000 ounces of gold were taken out of the mine in 2020, 590,000 ounces were taken out in 2019, and Barrick notes on its website that another 6.2 million ounces of gold are “proven and probable,” notes on its website that another 6.2 million ounces of gold are “proven and probable,” and has been steadily draining the mine since developing the project under the presidency of Leonel Fernandez and being expanded under the presidency of Danilo Medina.

Since Barrick has mined much more gold than they should have in the last decade, they have run out of space in Cotuí to store the wastewater from mining operations. Thus, Barrick has plans to build a tailings dam in Monte Plata where twelve rivers congregate, including the Ozama, the Dominican Republic’s fourth largest river which originates in the mountains of the Hatillo Dam (the country’s largest), running rice crops; contaminated the Maguaca and Margajita rivers; led to increased cyanide and other metals in people’s urine and blood; and led to at least twenty-seven deaths by 2015. For twenty years, 450 families that live near the Pueblo Viejo mine have been demanding for the last twenty years that they be relocated, since they are forced to rely on just twenty 20 gallons of water per week provided to them by local authorities via Barrick. One woman I met at the encampment sent me dozens of links to recordings and articles about Cotuí’s struggles against Barrick, as well as a voice note from her home where I heard unbearably loud clanking in the background, since there’s a mining workshop located right behind her yard.

The fight against Barrick has grown to other parts of the country where the mining conglomerate has expanded or is intent on expanding. One of these communities is the municipality of Yamasa, in the province of Monte Plata, about an hour north of, and up the mountains from, Santo Domingo. Since Barrick has mined much more gold than they should have in the last decade, they have run out of space in Cotuí to store the wastewater from mining operations. Thus, Barrick has plans to build a tailings dam in Monte Plata where twelve rivers originate, including the Ozama, the Dominican Republic’s fourth largest river which starts east and south for ninety/90 miles before cutting through Santo Domingo and drilling into the Caribbean Sea. The rivers in the region are important resources for a country that is ranked eighth out of 183 countries in terms of vulnerability to natural disasters, has experienced “165 drought events in the last 35 years,” and where “two-thirds of the population will face acute water shortages within four years.” In addition, tailings dams in particular are one hundred 100 times more likely to fail compared to other types of dams, and these failures are exacerbated by heavy rains, of which the Dominican Republic is increasingly subject due to climate change, and which would be particularly disastrous in the case of a tailings dam in Monte Plata, since water from that community will travel downstream and affect millions. The people of Yamasa have been organizing and they often say that they are not afraid to lose their lives if it means protecting one of the most historic and important rivers in the country.

The current struggle of the people of Yamasa is all the more meaningful when we remember that it is the same place where Mamá Tingó, one of the most beloved and revered figures in Dominican militant history, struggled for her land fifty years ago. Mamá Tingó was a farmer and organizer who worked and raised her family in Yamasa, and was killed in 1974 at the behest of Barrick. Barrick representatives had insisted on driving into the community in order to hold talks and negotiations with them, since they are forced to rely on just twenty 20 gallons of water per week provided to them by local authorities via Barrick. One woman I met at the encampment sent me dozens of links to recordings and articles about Cotuí’s struggles against Barrick, as well as a voice note from her home where I heard unbearably loud clanking in the background, since there’s a mining workshop located right behind her yard.

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the vehicles. These Barrick and governmentt representatives were accompanied by armed forces who began to shoot tear gas and bullets into the crowd.

The video of this confrontation between the ruling elite’s militarized enforcers, and the courageous water, air, and land defenders, was created by my friend and colleague, Saudí García, an anthropologist who is one of the experts on the history of, and current day struggles against, the Barrick mining crisis in the Dominican Republic. The people who run Barrick and the people allowing Barrick to operate in the Dominican Republic are part of imperi­alist networks of extraction that perpetuate the human and environmental exploitation that has ravaged the Americas since 1492. These imperialist networks of extraction depend upon the ideological and material support of members of the transnational ruling elite such as Gustavo Cisneros, and his wife, Patricia Phelps de Cisneros.

Gustavo and Patricia Cisneros are prominent players in the imperialist networks of extraction that link institutions such as the MoMA to the genocidal practices of global corporations such as Barrick. As has happened before in Latin America, with companies such as the United Fruit Company, connections between capitalists, politicians, and surveillance and enforcement entities lead to the destruction of lives and countries. Gustavo Cisneros is a billionaire from Venezuela whose money comes from running the Cisneros Group, which has a monopoly over “consumer goods, broadcast, media, technology and telecommunications holdings” in Latin America and Spanish-speaking communities. Cisneros serves on Barrick’s Board of Directors, as well as its International Advisory Board. When Cisneros was appointed, Barrick Founder and Chairman Peter Munk said, “our Board will benefit from Gustavo’s extensive business experience and knowledge, particularly involving Latin America where we have significant assets.” A wolf in sheep’s clothing, Cisneros hides behind a white, elite Latin American identity, and uses his prior experience in capitalist exploitation to advise a global corporation still responsible for the lives and environments of impoverished communities today, in the midst of a pandemic.

Meanwhile, Cisneros’s wife, Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, also born and raised in Venezuela, found a particular place within the dynasty she inherited and married into: the abstract art world. The great-granddaughter of a white man who left Harvard to study birds in Venezuela at the end of the nineteenth century and proceeded to become a businesswoman, Phelps de Cisneros was inspired by the modernist architecture of Caracas, and began collecting abstract geometric art from Latin America. A long-time supporter of The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City, her collection became the basis of the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, partly housed at the MoMA. Phelps de Cisneros and her husband also founded The Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Research Institute for the Study of Art from Latin America at the MoMA in 2016, and they run various foundations, such as Fundación Cisneros and Fundación Tropicalia, which fund educational programs in the Dominican Republic and Venezuela that will never close the socioeconomic gaps in the region as long as intergenerational capitalist exploitation continues. As Phelps de Cisneros gazes at abstract art from Latin America, and sets the agendas for her foundations with her husband and daughter, she seems unable to see what is right in front of her face: the imperialist networks of extraction that she actively participates in alongside her husband and the rest of the global ruling oligarchy, who shroud their deadly business practices and political interventions (Gustavo Cisneros pushed for the overthrow of Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez in 2002) behind sinister cultural and social programs that exacerbate inequalities and humiliate our people even further so that the ruling elite can feel less guilty about killing us in the first place.

Gustavo Cisneros and Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, and all imperialist capitalists like them, are engaged in material and as ideological violence. The Phelps de Cisneros Research Institute at the MOMA, due to its practices as well as its association with Gustavo and Patricia Cisneros, promotes a white supremacist, capitalist, and imperialist perspective that simultaneously determines which artists and art are seen as worthy, while poisoning the people and places where the art comes from. As Phelps de Cisneros upholds a particular cultural and social agenda, her husband advises fellow capitalists on how to deal with pesky activists, perhaps passing along the business card of the people who operated the drones that were flying over us when we visited the brave people of Cotuí at their encampment against Barrick.

The Dominican Republic, and everywhere else where Barrick is mining, needs us to be on the lookout for the imperialist networks of extraction that violently loot minerals and metals, as well as ideas and artistic creations, from our communities. The imperialist capitalists steal and kill to build their worlds and currencies with our gold, in cities where we clean, cook, and take care of them. This cycle will come to an end as more of us wake up to who actually has the power and the resources. May the Cisneros family and all the other imperialists and capitalists sweating due to the waves of world revolution read this and shake with shame and fear. The exploited ancestors who have fallen over the last 500 years are fueling today’s movement, and we will not stop until the mountains, rivers, oceans, lands, plants, people, and animals of the world are restored to their dignity and integrity.

[2] “Mina de Oro de Pueblo Viejo: Primer Campamento Minero de República Dominicana y América: Evidencias de Asentamientos Humanos de Época Colonial Estudiados por el Museo del Hombre Dominicano. La Mina se Explotó desde el Segundo Viaje de Cristóbal Colón (1493-1496)”https://www.laromanabayhihbnensual.com/2013/05/mina-de-oro-de-pueblo-viejo-primer-campamento-minero-de-republica-dominicana-y-americ-a-evidencias-de-asentamientos-humanos-de-epoca-colonial-estudiados-por-el-museo-del-hombre-dominicano-la-mina-se-ex/
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
Megawealth and its Entanglements with Art and Colonial Aesthetics by Kency Cornejo

It is no secret that Patricia Phelps de Cisneros is a hegemonic force, not just for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, but across Latin America. Cisneros is a longtime member of the board of trustees and of several acquisition and funding committees at MoMA, where artists and activists are denouncing the board members connections to imperial crimes against humanity.[1] Her foundation has donated 230 artworks over the last forty years to MoMA, drastically shaping the collection and further increasing the family name’s influence over the museum. Board affiliations and artwork donations to other major art institutions further spread the Cisneros Foundation’s authority across borders.[2] Moreover, the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Research Institute at MoMA, a key funder for research and curatorial projects on Latin American art, is designed to be the leading research center in the field.

Beyond their influential power in the museum institution that is MoMA, one can understand that the Cisneros dynasty has a monopoly over the Latin American art field in general. Through its influence and monetary support the Cisneros directly shape and control the canon of Latin American art by dictating which artists are worthy, what projects get funding, who gets residencies, exhibited, collected, published, and whose careers will be validated and accepted by the institutions of the art world. This economic investment is possible with the cumulative wealth of Cisneros and her husband, Gustavo A. Cisneros, whose media empire and multibillion dollar conglomerates further grant him global political access, a political and economic wealth Macarena Gómez-Barris reminds us is not innocent in producing inequalities.[3] Meanwhile, many countries in Latin America do not have the financial resources to support artists or cultural workers, and even within the mainstream US and Eurocentric art worlds, Latin American art is still seen as marginal and devalued in some cases. This creates a situation where precarious artists and cultural workers both in the US and Latin America are dependent on the philanthropy of the Cisneros. What this reveals is that the Cisneros collection and foundation is truly “the MoMA” of the Latin American art world.

Additionally, the Cisneros’ overarching power extends into arts education, since the curriculum that determines which artists and geographies are worthy of study and research is often based on the existing collections of museums like MoMA. Relatedly, the Cisneros collection favors certain aesthetics and geographies, meaning that there is a geopolitical aspect to the ripple effect of the Cisneros power in the art world that has centered whiteness. A well-known anecdote is that Patricia Cisneros’ fascination with collecting Latin American art began with her love for the Venezuelan city of Caracas, which she viewed as a cosmopolitan city in Latin America that was emblematic of modernity, an idea that has since fueled her mission to include Latin American art into the canon of modern art—a canon that is already Eurocentric, anti-Black, and anti-Indigenous. With such a mission then, the question is what to do with those sides of Latin America that do not reflect that modernity, as with the communities in Pueblo Viejo resisting Barrick Gold Corporation, a multinational mining company with Gustavo A. Cisneros on its Board of Directors.

The Dominican Republic’s Pueblo Viejo mine is the largest gold mine in the Americas and the first to be exploited by a multinational mining company with Gustavo A. Cisneros on its Board of Directors. It is thus not just the artists that are instrumentalized by hegemonic institutions in the process of artwashing, but the curators, scholars, and producers of knowledge who are commissioned to give value to the collection through tenure-track and curatorial positions. Yet, funneling money into art institutions is a clear way to detract from their entanglements in imperialist crimes against humanity. Large monetary gifts to cultural institutions help overshadow and impede suspicions or inquiries, into where these philanthropic gifts come from, and is a form of corporate PR. It creates a persona of generosity and credibility, one solely invested in increasing accessibility to the arts for the betterment of humanity and increasing the representation of marginalized artists. In other words, it is a white-savior industrial complex for the arts. But as we know, representation is not social justice, representation is not decolonization, and representation is not liberation. In fact, philanthropy donations are often designed to increase the financial value of the collectors’ collections, it is often a self-serving gift. It is thus not just the artists that are instrumentalized by hegemonic institutions in the process of artwashing, but the curators, scholars, and producers of knowledge who are commissioned to give value to the collection through their labor, thus augmenting the collector’s financial and cultural capital. That is, we art historians, art educators, and curators are entangled as well and have a respon-
sibility to call out and intervene in the violent practices of art institutions, of which the Cisneros’ affiliation with Barrick Gold is just one example. The art world is drenched in blood, drenched in colonial ideologies, and is built to uphold white supremacy as we see with other MoMA board members.[8]

Because of the power that the Cisneros dynasty has on not just MoMA, but over arts sphere and arts education, there is an almost palpable fear among fellow art historians, curators, cultural workers, and artists when it comes to calling out the hypocrisy of a powerful, genocidal, and colonizing institution. And of course, just like there are vulnerable folks in university spaces, we can understand that there are few to no protections for those in the art world in Latin America. That just means it is urgent to critically question these hegemonic institutions and entities who are so powerful that they would instill fear and self-censorship among the collaborators they depend on. This is something we normally attribute to the policing practices of the academy, but clearly it is a normal practice among large museum institutions that function like capitalist corporations. It is thus important for those willing or able to speak out on behalf of those who cannot in cultural and education sectors, but above all, for those whose health, livelihoods, and ways of living are directly affected by the Cisneros’ entanglements with extractivist, imperialist, and colonizing practices. This extends beyond including the word “decolonization” or “decolonial” in curatorial projects.

Strike MoMA shows us that focusing on MoMA is just a point of departure to address a system of coloniality that has used art as its own tool of colonization. By first exposing how museums are entangled with the prison industrial complex, militarization, displacement, extractivism, and land theft, it is then impossible to continue to see the museum as an innocent and exceptional institution that only brings beauty and culture to us. Yet, holding on to the myth of this colonial narrative is what still leads some people to ask, “why MoMA?” It is here that understanding that the museum is a colonial product that beyond gate keeping enforces colonial aesthetic is also important.

The museum is a Western colonial invention. The history of Western aesthetics shows it was founded on the idea of inferior and superior races and that racial hierarchies determined appreciation for beauty and artistic abilities. Undermining the creative expression of subjugated peoples as a way to reinforce hierarchies of human civilization further justified enslavement, pillage, and colonial violence. Just as art continues to be a form of resistance, including for Indigenous and people of color, artists and curators currently challenging the colonial logics of the museum, so do art institutions continue to be a tools of the colonial project. So when we continue to ask why peoples with histories of enslavement, subjugation, and dispossession are not represented in major museums, we should remember that the museum was originally designed to uphold white supremacy by dictating standards of who is capable of making art, who is “authentically” creator and who is disposable.

Importantly, beyond philosophical categories or definitions, this colonial aesthetic has come to violate humanity in tangible ways. We know of countless examples, from photography used to categorize and criminalize Indigenous peoples, to the abduction of families for exhibition in human zoos, to the visual extractivism of Indigenous systems of knowledge through the theft and display of textiles or spiritual objects, and even the theft of human remains for display or as subject of study. This has been going on since the inception of museums to the present as we just learned with the Penn Museum holding remains of children killed in the 1985 MOVE bombing.[9] These practices fueled by colonial aesthetics, have caused pain and suffering to those placed outside the Western categories of art and aesthetics, outside modernity, and contributed to the dehumanization of racialized peoples.

The urgency, therefore, in breaking with colonial aesthetics cannot be seen as an individual task for artists, or curators, but has to be entwined with parallel struggles to abolish prisons, to abolish borders, to end extractivism and dispossession, for the liberation of Palestine, for decolonization and land back, since colonial aesthetics and the museum as a colonial institution are part of the system that contribute to white supremacy and that has led to this ongoing colonial violence. We must continue to hold art institutions accountable, despite how wealthy and powerful its trustees may be. There is no one all-encompassing path, but we already have multiple models from our interconnected struggles where we can begin to imagine—from boycotts, to defunding racist institutions and redistributing funds to community-based models, to community governance, to building completely new spaces and ways of organizing.

As we collectively determine what a post-MoMA future will be there are questions, but there is also consensus: art must not be a sphere for the megawealthy to shape, control and profit from; art must not uphold colonial aesthetics; art must not be a guise to distract from imperial crimes against humanity. We must also create anticolonial reconfigurations of visuality, art, and its principles and spaces from the perspective of those by whom default of colonial logics were placed outside the realm of Western art histories, theories, and practices, and thus outside humanity. This anti-colonial reconfiguration of art needs to be part of other visions for decolonizing struggles, abolition struggles, immigrant right struggles, etc. Strike MoMA is already making these links in unprecedented ways and as it enters the next phase, moving these conversations beyond MoMA, and beyond New York, and beyond the US, will continue to show how our struggles are truly globally interconnected. It is through a familiar interconnectivity of our struggles that we can collectively plan exit strategies and imagine and design other ways of co-existing in a post-MoMA future.[10]


[2] These include: The Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas Austin, The Bronx Museum in New York, El Museo de Arte de Lima in Peru, El Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid Spain, and el Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires in Argentina.


[10] This essay is a slightly expanded version of points I addressed in conversation for week nine of Strike MoMA along with panelists Saudi Garcia, Macarena Gómez-Barris, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Mónica Ramón Rios, and facilitated by Shellyne Rodriguez, and Nitaisha Dhillon.
UNASE A LA LUCHA DEL PUEBLO DOMINICANO CONTRA LA BARRICK GOLD Y CAPITALISTAS COMO GUSTAVO Y PATRICIA CISNEROS QUE QUIEREN USAR AL MUSEO MOMA PARA OCULTAR SU EXPLOTACIÓN DE LA ISLA

VIERNES 11 de JUNIO
4PM EST
11 W 53 ST
#FUERABARRICK
#FUERACISNEROS
#LUCASCONECTADAS
#STRIKEMOMA
Notes on the Modernity and Extractivism in Dialogue with Strike MoMA!

Nelson Maldonado-Torres (Frantz Fanon Foundation)

It is tragic that coloniality, anti-indigeneity, and anti-blackness play a foundational role in the formation of the modern world and that they continue to normalize practices of land dispossession, plundering, and multiple forms of extractivism in large parts of the planet today. However, the discourse of modernity—that is, the rhetoric that gives meaning to the modern nation-state, the modern Western university, and modern museums, among a vast number of institutions, ideologies, and practices that, together, establish the dominant common sense in contemporary societies globally—not only seeks to establish global dominance and hegemony; it also aims to obtain the highest form of praise, distinction, and respect. This hybris of modernity helps to explain the imperative behind its expansion through conquest and colonization—the civilizing mission of the West—as well as the desire of many to be part of modern institutions.

To generate this desire, modernity must appear not only as the most powerful order in history, but also as the most rational, the most righteous, and the most civilized. Far from considering itself merely an expression of raw power and might, modernity claims to best serve the interests of the nation-state and corporations, or between nation-states and corporations, on the one hand, and universities or museums, on the other, but these tensions take place as part of a larger set of shared commitments that serve to naturalize coloniality, and, therefore, to solidify practices of plundering, dispossession, and extractivism. The same is true about modern debates. Modernity is not homogeneous, but that does not mean that it lacks dominant trends. These trends and tendencies are inscribed, embedded, and reproduced in institutions, disciplines, and canons, which in turn set standards and expectations as well as open the field for what they deem acceptable differences.

The dynamics of domination that sustain the modern/colonial world are as clear in the functioning of the nation-state with the corporate world—as the university, and the museum, on the other, provide an aura of acceptability and inevitability to modernity/coloniality. The idea and the structure of the nation-state validates the museum, which in turn validates the university, and vice-versa, while they all obtain validation and direction from dominant modern Western conceptions of ethics, epistemology, and aesthetics. These elements and their connection conform an impressive architecture of domination and apparent epistemic justification that normalizes coloniality at a global scale. It is true that there have been and continue to be tensions between the interests of the nation-state and corporations, or between nation-states and corporations, on the one hand, and universities or museums, on the other, but these tensions take place as part of a larger set of shared commitments that serve to naturalize coloniality, and, therefore, to solidify practices of plundering, dispossession, and extractivism. The same is true about modern debates. Modernity is not homogeneous, but that does not mean that it lacks dominant trends. These trends and tendencies are inscribed, embedded, and reproduced in institutions, disciplines, and canons, which in turn set standards and expectations as well as open the field for what they deem acceptable differences.

Basic presuppositions about ethics, epistemology, and aesthetics, as well as belief in the intrinsic connection between the highest ideals of goodness, truth, and beauty, on the one hand, and the nation-state—including a complicated relation of the nation-state with the corporate world—as the university, and the museum, on the other, provide an aura of acceptability and inevitability to modernity/coloniality. The idea and the structure of the nation-state validates the museum, which in turn validates the university, and vice-versa, while they all obtain validation and direction from dominant modern Western conceptions of ethics, epistemology, and aesthetics. These elements and their connection conform an impressive architecture of domination and apparent epistemic justification that normalizes coloniality at a global scale. It is true that there have been and continue to be tensions between the interests of the nation-state and corporations, or between nation-states and corporations, on the one hand, and universities or museums, on the other, but these tensions take place as part of a larger set of shared commitments that serve to naturalize coloniality, and, therefore, to solidify practices of plundering, dispossession, and extractivism. The same is true about modern debates. Modernity is not homogeneous, but that does not mean that it lacks dominant trends. These trends and tendencies are inscribed, embedded, and reproduced in institutions, disciplines, and canons, which in turn set standards and expectations as well as open the field for what they deem acceptable differences.

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The Extraction behind the Abstraction:  
A Cisneros Family Photo-File

Cisneros and President Ronald Reagan, who "buried" the Soviet empire, at Walter Annenberg's residence (July 1989). The Cisneros couple maintained a close friendship with the late President Reagan and his wife, Nancy.

Images in this photo-file are taken from Gustavo Cisneros: Pioneer (2002). Below are the Cisneros, Barbara Walters, and Glenn Lowry celebrating the launch of the book at MoMA. MoMA's Water Allies is visible in the background.

Gustavo and Patty Cisneros with British Prime Minister Margaret and Denis Thatcher in New York (November 1994). Cisneros respects the "Iron Lady" and recognizes the effort she made to modernize the
Cincinnati at the White House with Lord Peter Carrington, former British minister of foreign relations and leader of the House of Lords, David Rockefeller, President George Bush, and Henry Kissinger, former U.S. secretary of state, discussing the goal of free trade in Latin America (1990). The North American Free Trade Agreement was enacted during Bill Clinton's first term as president.

King Juan Carlos of Spain during a private visit to the Cisneros residence in "Los Roques," Venezuela. Cisneros shows the king a map of the archipelago (April 1992).

Henry Kissinger and Carlos of Spain during a meeting of the Council on Foreign Relations in New York (1996). Cisneros is a founding member of the Council's International Advisory Committee and he and Kissinger share a long friendship and an ongoing exchange of opinion.

Cisneros with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and his wife, Sara, at a reception at the King David Hotel in Israel (May 17, 1998). This visit gave rise to two strategic alliances with Israeli groups in the area of cutting-edge technology.
MoMA and/as Fossil Capital

TJ Demos

If modernity is an imperial crime, then MoMA is its fossil capital. We know the score. MoMA, inaugurated decades ago by Rockefeller oil wealth, goes deep today with BlackRock, the multinational investment management corporation overseeing trillions of dollars, thanks to the latter’s CEO Larry Fink, member of the boards of MoMA (and NYU), also financial supporter of the NYC Police Foundation. The web expands further—shockingly—to the late billionaire serial sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, courtesy of his financial associate, MoMA trustee Leon Black, co-founder and former CEO of the private equity firm Apollo Global Management. The CEOs and corporate asset managers that sit on MoMA’s board administer massive investments in fossil capital, linking extraction firms ExxonMobil and BP, to Vale’s and Rio Tinto’s mining interests, to private prison corporations Core Civic and Geo Group, and to weapons manufacturers Lockheed Martin and General Electric. Leading violators and Geo Group, and to weapons manufacturers Lock- heed Martin and General Electric. Leading violators of human rights, workers’ welfare, and Indigenous sovereignty, worldwide, all are perpetrators of climate chaos and crimes against the earth, its peoples, its biodiverse forms of life.

Within MoMA’s board, we glimpse the overarching nexus of racial and colonial capitalism. We can also call it the fossil capital complex, which names the dominant global economic order that runs on climate-destroying fossil fuels and extends outward toward virtually all facets of society—from conservative media empires and Trumpist propaganda engines to funders of Israeli settler colonialism, from supporters of repressive policing and the prison industrial complex to the profiteering armaments industry. Its extractive, deathly interests are grounded in colonial conquest, requiring access to any and all lands, territorial, aquatic, atmospheric, and virtual. Its massive profits—accumulated through violent, racialized dispossession, and generating obscene levels of economic and sociopolitical inequality—depend on the militarized security state in order to surveil multitudes, suppress dissent, and monopolize violence against counter-insurgency threats, including mass movements for social and economic justice. The death star that is MoMA is toxic not because of this or that board member alone, but because its structural composition is continuous with the all-encompassing system of plutocratic inequality, racial violence, and lawlessness corporatism. In MoMA we can perceive the cultural logic of extractive capitalism, which is bringing livable existence to the brink of ecosystem collapse.

Like all museums of colonial modernity, MoMA constitutes an apparatus of enclosure, one founded upon dispossessive accumulation and predatory inclusion, even as that enclosure depends on the destruction of life-worlds elsewhere, particularly in the Global South. Part of its logic is to encourage, solicit, acquire, and profit from the radical dreams of revolutionary emancipation, invoked in countless works of artistic imagination contained within its walls. Preserving these dreams as the framed, objectified, and insured jewels in its ever-expanding collection, MoMA enlists and capitalizes on aesthetic challenges to its very rule, challenges to everything it represents, forcing radical visions into its largely depoliticized narratives of modern and contemporary art. Is burning the earth’s fossilized organic remains from hundreds of millions of years ago akin to extracting art’s freedom dreams that envision and even practice alternative forms of life beyond the reign of racial and colonial capitalism? Is the exploitation of anaerobic decompositions of dead and buried organisms, once alive and thriving, equal to those liberated worlds captured and reified as the luxury possessions of billionaires and sold back to us as ticketed entertainment? Not just that, for sure. Because now those freedom dreams—from the aesthetic joys of revolutionary Soviet communism to the rapturous art of Black Liberation, from stunning visions of Indigenous decolonization to the urgent projects for anti-sexist and anti-capitalist abolition—inspire StrikeMoMA.

We—those who find our shared politics and values in this movement of movements—recognize the traces of those past and ongoing struggles for liberation contained within MoMA’s walls. Yet our fidelity can never be to this or other institutions that enclose them, with their hierarchical leadership, their anti-democratic practice, their ruling class corporate boards enmeshed in the networks of earth-destroying corporate globalization. The strike must be general: against the entire edifice of modernity’s imperial crimes, past and present. That means de-exceptionalizing MoMA. We know it’s neither one institution, nor one trustee or regent. It’s structural, with all corporatized bodies participating in, and benefiting from, the terms of capital’s reproduction, accumulation, and securitization. This need not mean evacuating modernity of its innumerable oppositional formations—all of the anti-colonial struggles, movements against racism and all forms of discrimination, anti-capitalist uprisings, and solidarity strikes against modernity’s crimes. It remains urgent and necessary to research the traditions of the oppressed, to uplift the freedom struggles through our writings, to teach radical histories of and beyond the arts, to program and exhibit artworks that testify and give rise to these and further moments of rupture (even as we may work within these very institutions, acknowledging the conditions and working to overcome them). That work keeps alive all contributions and sacrifices, recruiting the past as avenger in what’s-to-come.

To bring other worlds into being, to infuse existing forms of life long colonized with new energy, to inaugurate a post-MoMA future premised upon climate justice—where a just climate expands to the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural, as much as to the biogeophysical and the multispecies—takes organizing. Engaging in the active labor of building power requires solidarity, the sometimes frictionful form of political belonging that socializes precarity and debt, collectivizing our resources in shared resistance, and operating in movements across social difference. Solidarity stems from the recognition that we’re stronger together than apart; that none of us will be free until all of us are free. The cult of competitive individuality, expressed through endless critique and the fetishization of originality—as exhibited in MoMA’s approach to fossilized artworks and through its extractive art-historical narratives—is nothing but politically disabling, functioning as the divisive operating principle of the neoliberal arts and academy. By organizing, we challenge and reject that debilitating logic. We engage in world-building otherwise together, generating and growing the capacity to struggle for our common interests (even if not always identical), and in so doing, transcending the differences that capital uses to divide us.

In the face of current threats of world-ending fascisms—those of neoliberal authoritarianism as much as rightwing populism and white supremacy—we cultural and educational workers can no longer afford to operate merely as radical content providers to exploitative institutions. The present conjuncture demands nothing less than doing all we can to build collective power within anti-capitalist and socialist organizing, and doing so wherever we are based, within and beyond these institutions. That means joining the forces of multiracial working-class solidarity, dedicated to decolonization, abolition, and the structural transformation of the dominant sociopolitical and economic order that is presently destroying the world: fossil capital. Radical cultural production’s measure of value will be found in the degree to which it contributes to that goal. We may face seemingly insurmountable obstacles, but there is an antidote to despair: joining our social movement for transformation.
Every Friday for the past nine weeks, artists and activists have been gathering in front of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City, building on earlier organizing work inspired by the Black Lives Matter protests and the death of George Floyd. A flashpoint in a broader national and international struggle to decolonize, reimagine, and, in some cases, even abolish institutions like the museum during a time of intensifying racial and social crises.

Teach-ins in front of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York for the first stop in what organizers called the Fourth Anti-Colonialist Framework Document. The initiative will culminate on June 11 with a gathering at the statue — although it remains standing today.

The Strike MoMA campaign is a flashpoint in a broader national and international struggle to decolonize, reimagine, and, in some cases, even abolish institutions like the museum during a time of intensifying racial and social crises.

As artist and activist Luna Picart puts it, “taking aim at MoMA, the crown jewel in what cultural critic Macarena Gómez-Barris has called ‘the museum industrial complex’” is a “way of thinking about the way in which oligarchs ‘artwash’ the profits of extractivism. The Strike MoMA protests have helped weave together resistance to multiple forms of oppression, with protests in recent weeks focusing on the complicity of members of the MoMA board of trustees in Israel’s apartheid policies toward Palestinians and in the brutalization of communities resisting mineral extraction in the Democratic Republic.

As is true for natural history museums, this toxic legacy of colonialism and extractivism is an integral part of museums’ very nature. This is true for natural history museums,functioning from the very beginning of the 19th century as repositories for the objects and specimens collected on European colonial expeditions around the globe. Most of these objects are still on display, while the museums themselves remain organized around paradigms of power and privilege that they were built. Museums as institutions are thus deeply connected to settler colonialism and forms of scientific knowledge, production and display that provide a key in legitimizing this racial and social genocide.

This ugly legacy is not just a bit of detritus from the past. The origin of the museum in colonial-capitalist extractivism continues to shape how most contemporary museums function — what gets displayed in their halls, who makes curatorial decisions, and who sits on the governing boards that subtly shape the orientation and future of these institutions.

In recent years, artists have agitated to spread awareness of the history that has shaped museums, and the ways in which extractivist capitalism continues to determine the status and value of objects. This has led to a shift away from end to gentrification and displacement, for abolition of racist policing and prisons, and for climate justice, social movements have called out museums as sites where many of the world’s most powerful institutions are entwined forms of oppression coalesce.

The turning tide, the American Alliance of Museums recently gave its approval to a project exploring the potential role of museums as community-based spaces for decolonization and social change. In an indication of the political and economic dynamics in the 20th century and beyond. As is true for natural history museums, this toxic legacy of colonialism and extractivism is an integral part of museums’ very nature.

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Is the Museum Obsolete?

Andreas Petrossiants and Jose Rosales

Advocating a position that sees the "material world" as more necessary for changing social relations than the assi-

fied aesthetic regimes of art, Guy Debord wrote something to the effect of: that which changes our way of seeing the

street is more important than that which changes our way of seeing a work of art. On its face, this Situationist provo-
cation is an invitation to reject participation in the art system and to suspend social relations embodied in the street—that

is, a space of revolt, of riot, of looting, and perhaps, of critique. However, if read in the context of Strike MoMA—a

durational period of collective action fostering a space from which new modes of public and private relations could

become reimagined, Strike is an invitation to make sense of the mechanics of post-MoMA futures—another meaning emerges. It becomes a call for the abandonment of the illusory supposition of art's autonomy from labor or political economy, from the street. Or, to use the terms of the Strike MoMA Working Group, it is an invitation to engage in a "diversity of aesthetics."

After decades of political antagonism that has taken the museum as a site of contestation, whether through the

artworld or otherwise, it is more widely understood that the museum is not an institution that should be reformed, re-

staffed, or even critiqued, but rather one that has failed its historical claims to curating art and publics. Even Daniel

Buren, a central progenitor of institutional critique—the historical precedence for art that explicitly targets the museum

in the artwork itself—wrote in his canonical 1970 text "Function of the Museum" that the museum’s historical role has

always been a "careful camouflage undertaken by the prevalent bourgeois ideology, assisted by the artists them-

selves."

Following after decades of the institution folding critical art into a performative self-reflexivity, Marina Vishmidt argues that

much critical artistic practice today functions as a kind of "reconciled realpolitik not all that different from the kind

that anointed liberal democracy as the least-worst form of government still standing after everything else has ostensi-

bously been tried." In light of this, we also see that beginning in the late 60s, if not earlier, a shared sensibility began to

establish itself among various, dissident currents of the left paralleled by critiques of the art system: the rejection of

the inherited institutions of historical communism including the union, the worker’s council, cultural propaganda in the

service of building class consciousness, the party-form, or the state itself. In other words, in certain spheres of militant

theory and art practice, there emerged coterminous rejections of the museum and the organizational forms character-

istic of previous cycles of struggle.

The task now is to continue developing strategies and tactics "inside" and "outside" of the museum to unravel its con-

nections to global systems of violence; to do this means to cease being precious about our movements or our institu-

tions, and to acknowledge that to abolish capitalism, the police, and settler colonialism may also mean to abolish the

foundational terms of the modern museum as such—what has historically been a receptacle for the spoils of colonial

looting on the one hand and a vehicle for legitimizing nationalist prestige on the other. That said, if we do in fact ac-

knowledge that the boundary between the street and the museum (or the political party, the supermarket, the airport)

is a false one, then on the level of strategy, we can also ask: when is it better to look out and see the street and when

better to maintain the illusory spaces of (aesthetic) autonomy? How to enter or exit the spaces and functions of the

institution and act in such a way that cannot be recuperated, or wherein the recuperation is beneficial to abolition

and struggle?

Over the last few months, we have been thinking with comrades and friends about similar questions. In solidarity with

the Strike MoMA initiative, the ten week pop-up de-occupation taking place across from the museum, and MoMA

workers, we would like to share the three lines of inquiry for collective research that we have been following (the

results of which will be published as individual pamphlets in the coming months).

Inside and Outside, an Infrastructural Critique

In some recent organizing efforts targeting cultural institutions for their material connections to the carceral and

surveillance apparatuses, to displacement, to occupation and (neo)colonial violence, an important characteristic has

been the involvement of organizers and militants from outside the realms of cultural production. Contrary to efforts in

the past, many of these recent struggles have attempted to delegitimize the boundaries between ostensibly autono-
mous art and other forms of waged or unwaged labor and their incumbent forms of exploitation, even as they strate-

gically aside by them when necessary. With that in mind, where can we isolate spaces conducive to collectivity, and

do they need to ready the lines sketched by power and its opposition? How can groups activate the MTL-

collective's call for an "arts of escalation" in and out of those realms considered part of the art system?

Value and the Destituent Potential of the Human Strike

Could Mario Tronti’s claim that the working class is simultaneously the articulation and dissolution of capital be

rephrased for thinking cultural production and cultural workers, even as art production is falsely considered to be

an exceptional form of work? Insofar as value remains a fundamental social relation, ever efficient at recuper-
ating activity, it gives the lie to the relative autonomy of the aesthetic as a privileged type of activity under capi-
tal. From what we have seen thus far, the various attempts to reappropriable its institutions have shown themselves to

be short-lived at best, reactionary at worst. If that’s the case, then the question would be what to do with that social

relation, value, and how to abolish it?

Looting (convened by Vicky Osterweil)

Of the various images from Nanni Balestrini’s reconstruction of NYC and Italy in 1977, it is the scene of a fifty-

year-old woman who, upon entering a store, announces that “today we shop for free” that remains especial-
dy dear to us; if second only to the poem’s autonomist refrain: “we’re going to take what we want and what we

want is what we need.” Balestrini’s poetic dictum of want and value has been renewed during the George Floyd

Rebellions of last summer. In a video from an “autonomous zone” in Minneapolis, someone says: “people just

came and shopped for free.” No longer valuable given their subtraction from exchange, and no longer useful vis-à-vis the requirements of the production process, commodities are devalorized and their functions recom-

posed. In the spheres of art’s custodianship especially, the value of art has historically been produced through the

colonial looting and violence of Western capital. How then, to loot back without enshrining art’s value? If only to prove the anarchist dictum that property is in fact, and has always been, theft—though the ideologies of modern art have attended to its foundationality to/in capitalism—the foundations of modern art in Indigenous and working class dispossession make that exceptionality seem overstated at best. Given this historical context, could we say that looting is the theft of property that no longer presupposes the property-form?

The legacy of Adorno’s claim to the problematic nature of the autonomy of art finds echoes in the neoliberal art

world today, one that agrees with critical positions so long as they are articulated mimetically. In his 2018 remarks,

director of the Whitney Museum Adam Weinberg defended (former) vice chair of the board Warren Kanders, not-

withstanding his career as an investor and weapons manufacturer, as follows: “Even as we are idealistic and mission-

ary in our beliefs in artists ... the Whitney is not a museum. It cannot right all the ills of an unjust world, nor is that its role. Yet, I contend that the Whitney has a critical and urgent part to play in making sure that unheard and unwanted voices are recognized.” (The italics are ours) Today, Glenn Lowry employs a similar counterinsurgency tactic to discredit Strike MoMA, pointing to the museum’s commitments to “equity, diversity, and inclusion.”

The irony of this PR strategy—to open MoMA’s archives and wallets to historically oppressed and marginalized com-

munities from whose exploitation they have also profited—is not lost on us. If only for the simple fact that the museum’s

staff is already diverse, though many of those workers of color are concentrated in security, sanitation, and human

resources. MoMA appears to be making the preparations necessary for the terms and stakes of this confrontation, wherein a diaspora of diversity is both one element in a strategy of counter-insurgency. Seeing that decolonization is not a discourse on the universal, and that there is little point in engaging in a debate with MoMA’s current stewards, we détour Marx and Engels in reply:

You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property. But in your existing society, private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population; its existence for the few is solely due to its non-existence in the hands of those nine-tenths. In one word, you reproach us with intending to do away with your property. Precisely so; that is just what we intend. Just as you view the disappearance of class property as the disappearance of aesthetic production itself, so the disappearance of class culture is, for you, identical with the disappearance of all culture. What you call culture is simply the place where power always finds accomplices.
the university: last words

I am a black man number one, because I am against what they have done and are still doing to us, and number two, I have something to say about the new society to be built because I have a tremendous part in that which they have sought to discredit.

C. L. R. James

The epigraph stays the same. Let's review. There's a figure, now as much digital avatar as analogical body, that sometimes we call the subversive intellectual and other times the critical intellectual. We try to have sympathy with him because he is us when we are torn apart in the lonely complicity of the university relation. We don't dog him, because he's us; but he ain't us because us ain't Him, which is to say one, that one, that sovereign intellectual figure/shadow/glitch, tenured or untenured, adjunct or held, serially liked in his sad, self-acknowledged unlikeliness, unloved but desired by those he abusively desires but cannot love. There's a question this over-representative man can't ask, let alone address, even when she's under-represented. It is a question concerning the general and differentiated impositions bearing down on workers in the university before and after the current crisis, whatever the current crisis may be. The question is this: How much of the academy's libidinal political economy is predicated on the fantasy of a liveable (individual) intellectual life? Such predication is both normal and normative. How could it be otherwise? That's the training; that's the discipline; that's the fucking model that administration and in/of the professors and their apprentices give, not that we live it, because it's a fantasy for us even in our subversive criticality. Assertions of someone else's absolute privilege absolves no one who imagines they should be paid to study, as if the wage were half an honorific and half a right rather than all anti-communist insult, imposition and theft. The various misprisions of subversive criticality have as much to do with why we do ain't fun as they have to do with why we can't make ends meet. The regulation of pleasure is essential to the war on subsistence. Fleshly and spiritual unsustainability, which are not so much imposed on the reality of individual bodies and minds but given in the very idea of them, form a range of common differences, hierarchically arranged. It's not that the hierarchy isn't important to understand and analyze; it's just that it's not a physical condition so much as an effect of a metaphysical fantasy—the lonely moral-intellectual agent—and its various derivative and supportive institutions.

Let's keep reviewing by dusting of the antiquated phrase "job of work." When did a job of work become a job? What happens when the work and the job are disentangled? Is a job a unit of work? Is it a means to an end or a point in the direction of an end? Is it the end that means disrupt and defer? What do job and/or work have to do with labor and/or labor power? How do we keep the job from taking play out of work and work out of play? How do we keep work from rising to the status of "the work" or, higher still, "my work"? They regulate our work by owning and immiserating our jobs. And then they eliminate our jobs (the jobs being ours only insofar as we are theirs). The line between regulation and elimination is ever more insistently transgressed with every so-called crisis in the ongoing trajectory of the state of emergency. The elimination of the job comes hard on the regulation of work, but we see that hard coming as brutal counter-revolution only after it's gone, work having slipped through the fingers of our hands, which are shackled by grasping, doubly imposed upon us as inheritance, disease, job-related injury. Sadly, our feel for work, for practice, is lightened, obsessed as we all are and must be with the mechanics, economics and metaphysics of the job. The debt we owe but never promised is disappeared for credit. We merely pass and fail unless we keep practicing and reviewing.

The institution (the university, the prison, the hospital, the state) is regulatory; and regulation tends towards elimination. The university regulates certain kinds of theoretical and empirical, intellectual and sensual, study; the prison regulates mobility; the hospital regulates health; the state, of which these other institutions are apparatuses, regulates sociality, in general, by imposing the individuation it implies. These institutions do what they do unto the elimination of what they regulate. They lure those of us who are interested in these things into their regulatory snares by saying those snares are here to protect these
things, to provide them refuge within a general politico-economic structure/idea that neglects and abandons these things, while desiring and consuming the fruit of their own instrumentalization. These dispositions are themselves effects of metaphysics, separability, or the metaphysics of separability. We gladly accept the invitation of Abigail Boggs, Eli Meyerhoff, Nick Mitchell, and Zach Schwartz-Weinstein to abolitionist university studies, by which we take them to mean, as well, study in and the study of the abolitionist university, and we recognize, along with them, that an abolitionist university would be kinda like an abolitionist prison or an abolitionist plantation. It would be where the generation of knowledge in the university—at the level of its form, content and practices—tends towards the knowing degeneration, disorganization and disequilibrium of the university.

When Arendt saw black studies, soul studies, as a threat to the university, she was giving our approach a (decidedly backhanded and dismissive) compliment it must continue to strive to deserve. Perhaps what she saw and feared in black studies was the animating, corrosive force of black study. What we want for black studies is that they aim for the degeneration of their object—which is western civilization and/as the shadow/specter of (even “our”) natal community—in the ongoing generation/approach of blackness (as anti- and anter-natal undercommonality). Now, we have to come to grips with the fact that what we want is seldom what we get. When we said that it can’t be denied that the university is a place of refuge for the subversive/critical intellectual, what we were saying is that the university is more like a refugee camp than a writers’ colony. We go there when it feels like there’s no place else to go, not because we have no people but because we’re looking for more of them, who are ours in different ways, through other texts, in deviant styles; but the fact that one fills out an application to get in doesn’t make it any less a non-resort of last resort. The destination imagined in individuated flight is a field of embattled futility where looking for your people becomes learning to be (by) yourself. Let’s call the good student, who excels at elinguent, runaway self-discovery and self-expression, the fugitive intellectual, too. It’s just that this re-nomination doesn’t save the critical subversive from himself once he discovers how he went to the university to be free from freedom’s carceral impositions, and/or that he was specially sent there to fight the man, and the drones he sends, and the drive that sent him. The university is a fortress whose various appearances—refuge and refugee camp, writer’s colony and colony—betray its deep, various, nefarious functions as well as the black operations we enact when our fallenness breaks through the floor of Di’s thought castle, aerating and seeding the ground on which it stands, which is where the damned all gather, inseparable pando in pandemonium. The strange, sad thing about the subversive/critical/fugitive intellectual is that he all but can’t help but want unhappily to commit to the refugee camp in the hope of one or two glorious summer sojourns in the writer’s colony, held, in either case, in the insufficiency of the primary amenity they each distribute, which is separation misunderstood as reward. Only in the university can winning a fellowship mean access to solitude. Trained to want to stay there rather than fall through there, the better he is, the more he gets, the worse he feels. Hence a set of fantasies, ranging from transparency to blackening, held in relational solitary confinement that mistakes the restricted (re)forms of the academy’s general population for the revolutionary force of a general intellectual meteconomy that will have been foregiven in the subversion, criticism and fugitivity we share when we till in the morning, chop it up in the afternoon, and run the jam all night along.

This thing where you work for the abolition of the institution that you work for is nothing new. It happens under all kinds of coercive pressures and regimes, in the name of a general, generative, generous abolition—in the entanglement of growth and destruction in the very roots of the word—improvising its out and undergrounding (black) radicalism. It’s a generous, generative, general meteconomy, which institutionality restricts and regulates. The dream of a “free and ordered” space was always a waking trauma of sequestration and management. The university is generation’s cell. The marketplace of ideas is a battlefield. Even the open university was always an oxymoron, which some of us have proudly and generatively practiced like an annihilative, anorchestral score, cuts and scratches scarred and
dubbed into a disappearance that hasn’t happened yet because of the cuts and scarcity they impose. Being post-medieval doctors in good standing, we bleed the university in order to keep alive what we would kill. What emerges in this articulated, antagonistic combination is a temporary equilibrium, stale as a kind of life support, a ventilator bearing both salvific and debilitating capacities. We are constrained to keep alive, under constraints that make what we are constrained to do impossible, a monster whose constant murder, which we intend, keeps us alive. And now, the university is just a dirty business and a state apparatus (for the imposition of policy), maybe most especially if it’s private, though nowhere is the simple opposition between public and private more misleading. In the eclipse and subdivision, in the individuation of our dispossessive work into this or that bad job that you and I try desperately to own, we’re a credential-granting front for finance capitalism and a machine for stratification. In other words, we’re workers in and of study—which is, if it is study, black—insofar as we share a consensual condition. We are against what they have done and are still doing to us; and we have something to say about the new society to be built; and we share in that which they have sought to discredit. Therefore, you and I and the university have to disappear.

What does it mean, then, to work for an institution—the self, the university—whose disappearance you desire, particularly when the expression and refinement of that desire is the work you do? What does it mean to work against the institution you work for when your working against the institution is extracted by the institution as surplus? It’s a real problem, in conditions of “freedom,” to work for the institution you work against. But that’s a better problem than not working against the institution that works against us and our needs, and desires, and calling. We can work through the contradictions of working for and working against the university. It requires practicing non-cooperation rather than petitioning for shared governance. It requires generative, degenerative generosity, not the citational affirmations and shady dismissals of intellectual property management. We’re not stakeholders in the university. Let’s not share in its governance. We are neither producers nor consumers of intellectual property. Let’s not enact its management. And why should we want to hear from the motherfuckers who run it as they tell us why they have no choice but to run it like they do? Most people know they are in an antagonistic relation with their boss. It’s a fuck of a lot easier to think about how to grow in antagonism to the boss than to think about how to make the bosses’ genocidally dysfunctional shit job—the management he imposes upon us as weight and role—better. Why should we make their job better, or easier? Let’s be glad to grow in the ongoing project of destroying their shit. Let’s refuse to make do in the maintenance of their shit. Our work, not their jobs.

See, one way to answer the question, what is the undercommons? is that it is the discredited thing we have had a tremendous part in. But we have to be careful about what has in fact been discredited, and to distinguish it from what is only the job, which is to say the role play, the character. Because the university is an integral part and prime example of the experience economy. It is integral because it is where students and faculty learn to subordinate necessarily shared experience to the collective individuation machine of the experience economy, and it is a prime example because it incorporates so many aspects of the experience economy—sports, dining, dwelling, socializing, and co-branding (i.e., the students brands himself as, say, Northwestern’s and Northwestern, through the student, brands itself repeatedly as Northwestern).

In other examples of the experience economy, precisely because they are not taken so seriously, the role player knows he or she is in a role, and the role delivers a purchased, packaged “experience” designed to simulate what is depleted, extracted, exploited, denigrated, and alienated in the quotidian world of work, (anti-)social reproduction, and (anti-)social life, that is to say the very forces the experience economy is designed to further by way of false remediation. In other words, the worker who puts on the Mickey Mouse costume at Disneyland, or the worker who paints themself even whiter to be Snow White, knows they are delivering a paid experience. This is not to say they cannot take pleasure in a
conceptualized within an ongoing process of hoarding and irrational reproducing space and as financial assets that is also called New York University. The credential business provides a more or less steady stream of capital (unless you get some kind of manmade natural disaster, say, in the form of a novel virus riding the blinde of globalization — the necessarily racist, misogynist and anti-black machinations of a capitalist “health care system”), which funds the (anti)intellectual front and generally provides a surplus that is recognized and then deployed as financial asset. There is a board that runs the set of businesses called NYU and its primary objective is to optimize the leveraging of those assets not only to increase the value of the other assets they control, as their understanding of their interests commands, but also at the command of a system of accumulation which continues monstrously and masterfully to deploy the ge(n)ocidally bullshit idea of interests. The board that controls the businesses called NYU dictates terms to the administrators of the front called NYU. The job of those administrators is to oversee the dispersal of their job, to turn our work into their job, which is subdivided into the jobs NYU faculty rent, along with the apartments they rent if they are gifted with the privilege, which accrues to those on the tenure track, to pay a massive tax for the gift/privilege of teaching there, having exchanged the consensual intellectual debt we share for the individual academic credit they extend and the credentials they sell and use as tools of exclusion and hierarchization. These university administrators distribute scarcity and manage insurgency (i.e., socio-aesthetic intellectual innovation against the state and, more generally, the static), which is extracted, (re)conceptualized and financialized by and for the businesses. When they distribute scarcity and manage insurgency, they do so by way of the constant imposition not simply of the effects but also of the labor of administration, which we sanction, and for which we clamor, under the name of shared governance. We say we want to be consulted and The Provost consults us, listening to us eloquently respond to her everlasting no until we walk away from the consultation unsatisfied, having been turned, just as we asked, into her consultants. We are immersed in the sick feeling of having been alienated from the insurgency that we reproduce and that sick feeling resolves into a kind of resentment we direct at the crabs who are one or two levels above and/or below us in a barrel which is so bad, as barrels go, that it seems like it's not that bad. That condition adds a measure of guilt—usually expressed as philanthropic pseudo-solidarity with the unbarreled—to the sick feelings in which we are immersed. Fuck sharing governance, or the slightly more equitable distribution of extracted surplus; let's share needs.

Why the fuck should we want to lower administrative salaries rather than eliminate administration? Defund the police ain’t the same as fuck the police. If detached from a general insurgency that it is ours, too, to practice and not simply describe, then members of the faculty are members of the administration, playing the role of its guilty conscience, good cops cleaning up the bad cops’ mess then helping them get their story straight before throwing subadministrative shade back at the administrative suite on the way home, after work, at whatever faculty cop bar, and then going home to work some more, is neither fun nor productive nor destructive. So, fuck that. For there is a general imperative to refuse administration. The question is: how do we eliminate administration not only as this or that person or set of people filling this or that job or set of jobs but also as a mode of existence, as an attitude, as a kind of climate in which the job—the role, the character, the managed, manufactured “experience”—overshadows our work? Fuck every possible appeal to the bosses insofar as the rhetorical demand, the mere petition, is their protein shake; and fuck the acceptance of the university as limit or horizon. The enslaved didn’t seek the reform but the elimination of the plantation. Via the patient, breath accretion of the general strike, they advanced the long project of eroding it from the inside, which, now, we must extend, because the plantation never died but multiplied. The enslaved, who shared the advantage of knowing they were enslaved, worked and organized where they were but outside of any sense or imperative of a spatio-temporal coordinate that both established and bound their “personhood” or “subjectivity.” They practiced an anti- and ante-administrative ministry for defense and sacred and profane enjoyment. They didn’t just utter but also practiced the
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"personhood" or "subjectivity. They practiced an anti- and ant-administrative ministry for
defense and sacred and profane enjoyment. They didn't just utter but also practiced the
demand, and all but all of the time, when they did utter it, they were rightly, fugitively,
fugally, selflessly talking to and amongst themselves, under duress that is beyond calculation
and description. We think about how they lived through and how they lived on not because
we have any hope of establishing a grammar adequate to that suffering but because their
suffering and their practice are the anagrammatical poetics of our rebellion. The
immeasurably narrow margin upon which black study might be in but not of the university
has no room for the black student, let alone the black professor, insofar as both, in their
individuation, are hosts for the oxymoronic plague of black administration, which
professional, academic black studies tends to operationalize in spite of every possible good
intention. Whatever vision we have of the university should begin with what we can
practice, independent of what administration will or can or can't and will not grant. Let's
criminally misinterpret the university. Let's cut it till we can't see it and then cut where it
was.

Faculty and students and staff have the means of intellectual production. Now, all we have
to do is want what we have. Let's stop violating those means, and the sharing of them, by
engaging in abusive and extractive rituals of pseudo-intellectual governance, which are, in
themselves, always unsatisfying. If faculty want their share in, rather than the eradication
of administration, which is the governance of the bullshit that goes on outside the classroom,
and students want a share of that power to trickle on down to them, both while
relinquishing at the drop of any muthafuckin' hat the capacity to shape what goes on where
the actual work is done, then we gotta learn how to want to be some other way, in those
ways otherwise than normative academic being, which we share in relative unawareness with
all who work to maintain the barest possibilities and necessary infrastructures of study in
the university. Now, pitifully, we seem to want it way instead of the other ways under a
true but fictitious flag of economic necessity that relinquishes all that might be given in the
sharing of needs. But there's something in the other ways through things. Fuck office hours,
classes and exams, all of which are serial and simulated monogamous situations for the
enactment of the weak abusive power of the professor and the strong abusive power of the
university, and the weak extractive power of the student and the strong extractive power of
the university. They are tools of necessarily degraded and degrading identification, and
sometimes counter-identification, with faculty, with administration and, ultimately, with
the university. The identification with the fucking university is almost as bad as the
counter-identification against the fucking university, which is almost as bad as the
identification with the fucking university.

Is the difference between satyagrah and civil disobedience like the difference
between non-cooperation and the demand for (transparency, equity and) shared governance?
Why does Gandhi keep a kind of respectful distance from Thoreau even in his translational
(ab)use of the term “civil disobedience,” while Arendt creates a kind of identification that
weakens, ultimately, the essential force, the soul force, of non-cooperation? Non-
cooperation refuses both consultation and confrontation to the extent that it is, in the first
instance, not directed towards the bosses. If consultation is the fetish of this or that AAUP
executive committee, then confrontation is the kink of non-general strikers. Either way, all
energy is directed towards the bosses and our own sociality is residual, derivative,
thradarle etiolation of social aid and pleasure. Power seeks our attention; we have to
refuse their extraction of it. For all who crave either consultation or confrontation, for all
who only feel alive when they’re face to face with the man who is sent by the drive,
remember that the drones who are sent by the man who is sent by the drive will absolutely
come to claim our eye when we do what we do and selflessly practice what we preach to us,
for us.

Unfortunately, as has become clear over the past few weeks in predictable, because
they have been oft repeated, ways, this or that rhetoric-political stance on decoloniality or
expression of solidarity with suffocated black lives breathes reformist air into a dying
machine. On the other hand, the practice of anti-coloniality and anti-antiblackness tends
towards and is given in a general strike, an affirmative blow that is delivered, with
increasing effectiveness the less the object of that strike or blow is our focal point. Can we
resist the logico-neurotics of the demand as mere expression, mere petition? Rather than
being a speech act whose perlocutionary effect will have been to convince the citizen of his
own existence, the demand is a practice that will have been illegible to normal political
psychology. In their teaching, Douglass and Fanon excavate an alternative meaning of
demand that liberal academic posture and performance abjure and suppress. The expression
of solidarity in the absence of the practice of solidarity is some similarly thin, hot air. Fuck
the name and the game of honor. Fuck the future of the university. Please stop worrying
about that shit so we can worry (still, tease, turn over, chew over, chop up and fret) the
practice of our presence. No promises from the university, no demands on the university,
just the presence of our practice in love and battle, in and through its ruins, on the other
side of its dying gasps and last words.

1 NYU housing is not subsidized housing. It’s company housing. But it’s not even that since
real estate is such a fundamental part of NYU as a set of businesses and as a reservoir of
financial capital. Or, if it is subsidized housing it’s because we subsidize them, which is why
the rent strike must accompany the labor action and why the demand to be paid must be
accompanied by the refusal to pay. What is a general strike and what are the rent strike and
the labor action within and as an emanation of that generative generality? The general strike
is when we mobilize our needs, take them seriously as wealth—as shifting/shifted, historical
essence, even, rather than as some depression from which we are trying to arise, or some
deficit we are always trying to overcome, or some crisis we are attempting to (out)face, on
the path to completeness or self-sufficiency. We should do so by way of the insight Marx
has and shares in his definition of wealth in the Groudriese. It’s an insight worth having and
sharing because it is common, because it actually makes Marx into something like
earthly folks rather than a great (European) thinker. We need to generate our own strike fund out of the way we go, and the fact that we go, on strike—to withhold from them and share with us for social aid and pleasure and the cultivation of people’s needs. We need simply to refuse the condition in which the university both neglects our needs and extracts the collective wealth that is given in those needs as surplus. The landscape of need is dark and lovely.

— Fred Moten and Stefano Harney
Cops Out of CUNY!

- Free CUNY + Rank and File Action (RAFA)

As the Strike MoMA insurgency revealed in Spring 2021, policing and state repression structure the overseeing of cultural institutions like the Museum of Modern Art, such as board member Larry Fink’s support for the New York City Police Foundation among other board members’ ties to war profiteering, vulture funds, gentrification, and beyond. This argument rightly extends to how universities also contain and repress communities under the guise of “higher learning,” which shields the sordid dealings of its administrators and justifies the violence of campus policing. At the City University of New York (CUNY), a tradition over half a century old of radical solidarity between students, faculty, staff, and our multi-ethnic working poor communities has contested the legitimacy of policing in our campuses and neighborhoods, and colonialism more broadly. We recognize that creating an abolitionist counter-university within—to go beyond—the carceral university in part means contrasting the needs of students and campus workers with those of the administration, campus police, and U.S. settler-colonial state. The following action report and historical analysis documents our approaches to abolitionist complicity-building—via an emerging ecosystem of studies/actions whose relationships and strategies are essential pre-conditions to deeper sustained uprisings—from which we hope readers in other contexts can gain inspiration.

Abolitionist Studies from our Streets to Living Rooms

On May 14, 2021, students, staff, faculty, and community activists enacted a “Cops Out of CUNY!” (Re)Orientation Mobile Tour, one of dozens of actions across the city and across the country with the Abolition May campaign coordinated by the Cops Off Campus Coalition. Starting at the Hunter College Audre Lorde Building, our group swarmed through Central Park to John Jay College and the CUNY Police headquarters, hearing testimonies by the Bronx Student Strike Committee, Brooklyn College Anti-Racist Coalition, CUNY for Abolition and Safety, Free CUNY, North Bronx Collective, NYC 4 Abortion Rights, Bank and File Action (RAFA), and Save Center for Puerto Rican Studies “Centro” Coalition.

Participants decried the allocation of tens of millions of dollars in university resources for policing and surveillance, and called for the abolition of campus policing and for reinvestment in Ethnic, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, free tuition, childcare, housing, and food, among many urgent needs.

Free CUNY organizer Lucien Baskin, the final speaker in the “Cops Out of CUNY!” tour, identified the conditions of synergy that inspire our work ahead:

Solidarity is essential. Our organizing at CUNY must breach the walls of the university to join forces with other struggles in the city. We need to understand CUNY organizing as city organizing. And we must scale up and see our liberation as connected with liberation in Philly and Bedford Hills and Gaza. The calls to free Palestine, free CUNY, and free all political prisoners are deeply interconnected and central to our work of getting cops out of CUNY and off all campuses and indeed off earth. Support these struggles: The Jericho Movement works to free political prisoners, many of whom have defense campaigns, such as Mumia Abu-Jalal, Leonard Peltier, Dr. Mutulu Shakur, Jalil Muntazim, and minister Jamil Al-Amin. The Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP) campaign works right here in New York to free our elders. Samidoun is working for the liberation of Palestinian student organizers who have been incarcerated by the Israeli state. In the tradition of CUNY students Assata Shakur and Guillermo Morales, we say fuck the police and free all political prisoners.

This action occurred in the wake of last summer’s Black Lives Matter mobilizations and calls to defund and abolish the police, the largest racial justice movement seen in decades that galvanized an array of anti-racist demands co-created by students, faculty, and staff to transform CUNY. Also in May 2021, during Israel’s eviction sweep and asymmetrical bombing of Gaza, a flurry of CUNY statements in solidarity with Palestine and the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement emerged. Then in September, the newly formed Cross-CUNY Working Group Against Racism and Colonialism launched an extensive online speakers’ series to link these Palestine solidarity initiatives at CUNY to broader global struggles. Together, we considered the coalitional words of CUNY poet-teacher June Jordan, “I was born a Black woman / and now I am become a Palestinian / against the relentless laughter of evil / there is less and less living room / and where are my loved ones? / It is time to make our way home.”

Historical Context of CUNY Police Repression

For much of its history before the 1960s, CUNY was mostly of European descent, tuition-free, and free of police presence. However, a nationwide trend of campus policing was already being established by Ivy League universities. According to the historian Eddie B. Cole, “Campus policing is rooted in conflicts between institutions of higher education and the Black neighborhoods near where they are often located. And tensions between universities and Black communities are rooted in deep-seated discriminatory policies in housing.” In the 1960s, CUNY campus police began to actively repress newly admitted Black and Puerto Rican liberation movements, as well as anti-war, anti-capitalist, and housing justice campus organizing. After a wave of late 1960s Black and Puerto Rican student-led direct actions led to the university’s 1970 Open Admissions desegregation policy and Ethnic Studies inclusion, CUNY began to change tuition and expand campus policing.

CUNY “Public Safety” receives training and is closely tied to the NYPD, a police department with a proven record of racist violence. In 1992, during the height of the “war on drugs,” broken windows policing and pro-carceral politics, a memorandum of understanding was signed between CUNY and the NYPD that grants the NYPD access to campuses—risking the safety of Black and Brown students, including undocumented students. In 1996, CUNY admitted to deploying an armed “elite team” of 33 CUNY security officers to surveil, videotape, and crowd-control students. The NYPD’s racist and Islamophobic conduct on CUNY campuses was exposed in 2011 when the Associated Press revealed that NYPD undercover officers had infiltrated CUNY Muslim student groups and surveilled Muslim students for several years.

CUNY cops continue to be deployed to repress students’ and campus workers’ political activities. In 2010, in response to student protests against tuition hikes, Hunter College police refused entrance to anyone who did not immediately display Hunter identification, locking students and staff out of school for hours. In 2011, Baruch College campus officers beat and arrested students, faculty, and staff with batons during another protest against a 5-year tuition increase. At a 2019 protest against tuition hikes, CUNY cops again used force to intimidate students, faculty, and staff including by arresting and detaining a student without justification. In a January 2020 call for FTP actions, Free CUNY teamed up with People’s Cultural Plan and Teens Take Charge to host a student speak-out—“Cops Out of Our Schools and Subways”—at the front steps of the NYC Department of Education (DOE), which has the fifth largest police force in the nation.

Impacts of CUNY Policing Today

Like the NYC DOE, every CUNY campus spends more on campus policing than on student counseling. Hunter College student Moll Daniels explains, “The funding of policing on campuses across CUNY allocates millions of dollars every year to a system that harms students, faculty, staff, and communities CUNY occupies. During the pandemic, Kingsborough Community College president Claudia Schrader opted to cut funding for the vital campus urban farm but continue funding the surveillance and policing of students. Students don’t need to be harassed and surveilled: They need access to fully funded Ethnic Studies departments, mental health counselors, academic advising services, fresh and accessible food, and more.”

The specific attack on Ethnic Studies across CUNY demonstrates a slow counter-insurgency campaign by the administration and its police since these studies were implemented by campus occupations and other mass disruptions over half a century ago. A recent $10 million Mellon Foundation-funded “Black, Race, and Ethnic Studies Initiative” grant is juxtaposed with declining Black and Latinx student enroll-
ment; a barrage of cuts to Ethnic, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; and a funding freeze of the hiring and retention of faculty and staff of colors (in particular, women and gender non-conforming). Hunter College alumnus Linda Luu argues, "The administration’s lack of investment prevents Ethnic Studies programs like Hunter’s Asian American Studies Program from supporting and mentoring their students. This precarity is a reflection of the political priorities of the colleges, for whom policing budgets are secure and untouchable. From 2014 to 2018, the Coalition for the Revitalization of Asian American Studies at Hunter (CRAASH)’s protests and visible presence on campus were frequently disrupted by the Hunter police and the NYPD. Cops on campus are tools the administration uses to stifle student voices, particularly those demanding a different order of the university."

John Jay College, in particular, plays an important role in further entrenching CUNY’s relations with the police and carceral state, with free tuition and stipends for students enrolled in programs that train the city’s current and future cops as well as prison guards. John Jay’s 2020-21 student government president Amber Rivero explains, "John Jay is directly complicit in the harm that plagues Black, Brown, and minoritized communities through its relationship with so many institutions that perpetuate violence in the name of public safety. In order for students of color to feel safe in these spaces we first need a real commitment to decolonization and accountability in John Jay curriculum and more."

Various CUNY colleges also maintain relations with other racist institutions that police and inflict violence on working class, racialized communities at “home” and “abroad” including John Jay’s Masters in Homeland Security, the CIA’s recruitment program at Baruch and the military’s Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) recruitment programs, which are housed at York and City Colleges, although students from any of CUNY’s 25 campuses can participate in its programs. Even so, John Jay adjunct professor Marianne Madoré affirms, "#CopsOutofCUNY began many years ago, when Black and Puerto Rican students in the 1960s led the struggle for Open Admissions. They occupied buildings, rallied, mobilized their communities, and faced arrests and police beatings. Today their courage gives us strength."

Nurturing Complicities
Free CUNY—the student-led group that spearheaded the May 14 action as part of a larger horizon toward an anti-racist, liberatory, tuition-free CUNY has navigated a rowdy 2020-2021 academic year in which a tuition strike threat, mutual aid funds, a campaign to revitalize Ethnic, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; mobilizing with NYC anti-fracking direct actions; and solidarity with Palestinian and South African students contrasted with the CUNY administration’s woefully inadequate handling of the pandemic and its most impacted communities.

Rank and File Action—a group of militant campus workers challenging the culture of austerity in higher education and demanding a more democratic fighting union—is coalescing traction across CUNY through strike readiness trainings, solidarity with the ongoing Columbia University strike, creating anti-colonial and anti-racist union cultures, organizing against university debt, and beyond, as chronicled in a monthly newsletter that shows the potential for coordinated power by all of those who produce our university every day from below.

Like our predecessors over fifty years ago, we demand that it’s time to get cops off campus and redirect resources to foster learning and the actual holistic care of our communities that comprise CUNY, NYC, and indeed the world. Our vision more broadly jettisons the existing confines of the university, even as we refuse to abandon CUNY as a strategic site of transformation by forging bonds of solidarity between students, faculty, staff, and our communities inside and outside of prisons.

CUNY and NYC’s populations are composed of a broad array of communities who have been displaced by colonialism and imperialism. To borrow the words of Sri Lankan/British Marxist A. Sivanandan: “We are here because you were there.” People from Palestine, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, the Philippines, Guam, Indigenous communities from the Americas and Caribbean, along with all of our siblings in the Third World/Global South, are the majority of CUNY and our city. We also have principled European and Jewish accomplices who struggle alongside us. When we entwine our opposition to policing with the multi-faceted potential of our university and city to become a model for broader anti-colonial resistance—through developing long-term strategies and organizational power—we can together celebrate the end of policing and colonialism.

"Nurturing Complicities"
Free CUNY—the student-led group that spearheaded the May 14 action as part of a larger horizon toward an anti-racist, liberatory, tuition-free CUNY has navigated a rowdy 2020-2021 academic year in which a tuition strike threat, mutual aid funds, a campaign to revitalize Ethnic, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; mobilizing with NYC anti-fracking direct actions; and solidarity with Palestinian and South African students contrasted with the CUNY administration’s woefully inadequate handling of the pandemic and its most impacted communities.

Rank and File Action—a group of militant campus workers challenging the culture of austerity in higher education and demanding a more democratic fighting union—is coalescing traction across CUNY through strike readiness trainings, solidarity with the ongoing Columbia University strike, creating anti-colonial and anti-racist union cultures, organizing against university debt, and beyond, as chronicled in a monthly newsletter that shows the potential for coordinated power by all of those who produce our university every day from below.

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Harry Burke

In her remarkable essay “History Hesitant” (2015), Lisa Lowe addresses the lingering aftereffects of slavery and colonialism in the liberal present. Lowe’s title references W. E. B. Du Bois’s paper “Sociology Hesitant” (1905), which powerfully critiques the entanglement of European positivist philosophical methods within imperial agendas of expansion and extraction. Building on the work of Du Bois and Saidiya Hartman, Lowe interprets history not just as a record of the past, but as an index that, when read ideologically, can clarify or obfuscate contemporary power relations. As a means to query disciplinary attachments, hesitation opens a space of temporal fluidity that might enable us to consider “the connections that could have been but were lost and are thus not yet—before we conceive the freedoms yet to come.” Lowe outlines a historical method, in other words, that pauses to reckon with structures of erasure, rather than rushes to recover what has been lost.

For Lowe, the archive is a critical site of inquiry that prescribes “the possibilities and limits of knowledge.” In like manner, the conversation, art and action catalyzed under the banner of Strike MoMA spotlights the museum’s ongoing enclosure of ways of knowing and being. In an effort to theoretically contextualize these activities, this brief text positions the museum of modern art as an archetype of dispossession property relations and settler-colonial spatial production. To destabilize this framework of ways, I suggest, is to prepare a ground for other possible models for nurturing and disseminating art.

“The settler owes the fact of his very existence,” writes Frantz Fanon, “that is to say, his property, to the colonial system.” Similarly reflecting on ontology and property (and, like Lowe, the contingency of history), Ariella Azoulay’s Potential History (2019) shows how modes of being and owning are elicited in the plundered inventory of the museum. This wide-ranging book traces a haunting imperial dialectic of “carelessness for people” justified by “extra care for their expropriated objects.” What is valorized and collected as modern culture, Azoulay clarifies, has “already been ‘collected’ as the destruction of other ecologies as its precondition. Azoulay’s work, like Lowe’s, follows a lineage of Black radical critique that has situated slavery, as Du Bois illustrates in Black Reconstruction (1935), not as a transgression of liberal democracy, but as its central and chronic contradiction.

In tune with these discussions, Indigenous studies scholars have critiqued the “primitive” disposition of Karl Marx’s concept of “primitive accumulation”—which identifies capital’s origin in transparently violent mechanics like war and colonialism yet doesn’t attend to the complex recursiveness of this process—in order to describe settler colonialism not as an occurrence in a foreclosed past but as a continuous and adaptive system. Drawing from Patrick Wolfe’s oft-quoted observation that settler colonialism is “a structure not an event,” Alyosha Goldstein contends that “settler colonialism is not so much an ‘event’ or a static relationship as a condition of possibility that remains formative while also changing over time.” Jodi Byrd, Goldstein, Jodi Melamed and Chandan Reddy, meanwhile, consider the sustained abstractions engendered by accumulation to be descriptive of what they term “economies of dispossession.” By analyzing dispossession as a “relation of taking and violence that works at once to produce and delimit subjectivation, property, and value,” these authors underscore “the constitutive and continuing role of both colonization and racialization for capitalism.”

Taken together, these Black and Indigenous intellectual traditions confront the ongoingness of unfreedom and its dispossession in the liberal present. By holding these traditions simultaneously, works by Brenna Bhandar, Byrd, Glen Coulthard, Denise Ferrer da Silva, Many Karuka, Tiffany Lethabo King, Lowe, Melamed and others advance significant critiques of the discourses of history, political economy, and law, pointing the way toward knowledges grounded in land and relation rather than expropriative accumulation.

What might it mean then for art to abolish its present conditions of possibility? Translating these theoretical accounts into praxis, movements for PIC abolition, reparations and Indigenous land back guide communities toward what Byrd et al. regard as “alternatives that are both transformative and realizable and,” significantly, “already manifest and discernable.” For these authors, such alternatives endure as “grounded relationalities” that emerge in coexistence with the land, as an interconnectivity “that exceed[s] liberal conceptions of the human.” After all, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore states: “Abolition is about presence, not absence. It’s about building life-affirming institutions.” In an aesthetics of presence, the abolishment of the museum—lyricized in the refrain of “fuck MoMA”—uplifts the lively cultural abundance of grounded relationalities. Such spaces of emergence—which can take the form of strikes, collective, DIY publishing, mutual aid, study, prayer, hanging out, and/or other modes yet to be imagined—extend the horizon of abolition beyond that of the museum of modern art to that of the apparatus of dispossession. They stretch the duration and breadth of hesitation to unsettle the modernity of its own making.

On Friday, May 14, 2021, as Israel escalated its military occupation of Palestine through aerial bombardment of Gaza, over 300 people gathered in New York’s Urban Plaza for a teach-in titled “All Eyes on Palestine,” hosted by Strike MoMA and the Palestinian-led organization Within Our Lifetime. Staged one day prior to the 73rd annual commemoration of the Nakba—the as yet unending “catastrophe”—this located Palestine’s more than a century-long struggle for freedom within a network of colonial and imperial architectures stretching from Puerto Rico to Sheikh Jarrah. Midway through the event, a Palestinian comrade was assaulted and beaten by the NYPD after stopping his car in the street outside MoMA, climbing on its roof and waving a Palestinian flag, consequently blocking traffic for, Hyperallergic reported, “several minutes.”

Wrapping up the teach-in, a Palestinian artist castigated members of the MoMA board of trustees—among them Larry Fink, Leon Black, Eyal Offer and Edith Cooper—for their investments in the Israeli military apparatus. The artist was unswerving in her condemnation of the museum, exclaiming “fuck settler colonialism, fuck racial capitalism and fuck MoMA.”

The teach-in took to the streets and marched to Midtown Precinct North, where a sit-in was orchestrated at the intersection of 54th St. and 8th Ave. Organizers demanded that information be shared about where the comrade was being held, and when he would be let go. After a half-hour, it was revealed that he was in this precinct, and would be released that evening. Over one hundred people remained for jail support, chatting, praying, eating and dancing outside the street until the comrade was free.

The “abolition of slavery should be followed by the abolition of the museum, the site where plunder continues to be cultivated as private property,” asserts Azoulay. This does not annul art, but widens its possibilities, Strike MoMA insists. The teach-in’s movement from the museum to the precinct enacted this. In chanting “fuck the U.S. war machine, from Palestine to the Philippines” outside the modern art museum, the group staged a dialectical encounter with the dispossession history of this institution. This was an “aesthetics of combat,” in the words of Dylan Rodríguez. The artistism practiced outside the precinct. Jail support is community care. The evening’s improvised assembly theorized the struggles to abolish the prison- and military-industrial complexes, abolish the museum, and free Palestine as entwined. “Today was a victory for our community here, and inshallah within our lifetime the victory of a liberated Palestine will come,” announced Within Our Lifetime.

Israel’s occupation of Palestine, and ethnic genocide therein, epitomizes, in Bhandar’s words, “the temporally discernable.” For these authors, such alternatives endure as “grounded relationalities” that emerge in coexistence with the land, as a different temporality that might open “a space, a different temporality” that might enable us to consider “the connections that could have been but were lost and are thus not yet—before we conceive the freedoms yet to come.” Lowe outlines a historical method, in other words, that pauses to reckon with structures of erasure, rather than rushes to recover what has been lost.

Gilmore states

Israel’s occupation of Palestine, and ethnic genocide therein, epitomizes, in Bhandar’s words, “the temporally fragmented and nonlinear nature of the racial regimes of ownership that typify the settler colony.” Perhaps because of its fragmentary character—and because its context, like in Turtle Island, Taiwan, West Papua, Puerto Rico and numerous fights globally, is an egregious example of settler-colonialism in the present tense—Palestinian uprising is an exemplary compass for the wild beyond. The combative aesthetic possibilities of degrowth, collectivity, freedom dreaming and other post-MoMA futures find their bellwether in solidarity with Palestine. In the art industry as elsewhere, the time for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions is now.

At the end of the teach-in, a chant led by Within Our Lifetime recalled the Greek poet Dinos Christianopoulos: “They tried to bury us, but they didn’t know we were seeds.” These seeds are sprouting across Black, Indigenous and Palestinian geographies in the countless acts of sabotage and refusal that are reimagining the world we know.
Midtown is Always Cold

Brynn Hatton

Written in response to the Palestine Strikes/Strike MoMA action of 5.21.2021 in NYC

In Midtown, it is perpetually cold, even during summer. The city zips itself up in between the interlocking teeth of airtight skyscrapers, blocking all light and unpredictable airflows from circulating freely. Land left to its own autonomous devices could never withstand these suffocating conditions. In the jargon of the elites in climate-controlled penthouses: coordinated sterilization becomes necessary to acclimate to the constraints of environmental management. None of this is necessary or natural, but MoMA and its neighboring institutions of violence and accumulation brandish this kind of logic and lingos to make it seem necessary, inevitable, even. They pretend through displays of cultural patronage to be cleaning up the gigantic mess they made and spin it as public service.

MoMA is the cleanroom of middle Manhattan. MoMA and its surrounding area, void of communities and life other than global finance, mass media propaganda machines, and international policy think tanks, are safe spaces for the conservative oligarchy and the carceral state, which artists and dissenters to the art world’s status quo have known, and have been saying, for decades. The modern imperialist can breathe freely here, can relax in the sealed and frigid chamber where preciousness reigns and precociousness is stripped of its sacred energies, then left to expire in cold storage. Can you imagine what it must feel like to be able to relax in here—to thrive here—in the bleak sharpness, where everything alive and lush comes to die in its right and proper place (according to some maniac isolationist’s conception of what is “right” and “proper”)?

MoMA can only chemically and violently eliminate what it extracts as resources. It can only sanitize and prematurely age its young harvest. The contemporary art world, with MoMA at its center, punishes the natural impulse of cooperation between divergent formations that stand to uproot the cleanrooms and their tasks, and incentivizes competition between the resource-starved. MoMA runs on the starvation principle from top to bottom. Ask an underpaid intern, ask an unpaid contract worker (like all the educators who were fired last year), ask a junior curator making $40 thousand a year dragging half a million dollars in student loan debt behind them. The museum waits while the radical and necessary breakdown that emerges in this extreme environment still manages to nourish the most vibrant and resilient of human impulses in the form of creative care and new art. Then, when a tenuous sprout emerges against the odds, it is ripped out, expropriated, polished, and sold to the highest bidder.

Nonhuman species have evolved brilliantly over time to reach out beyond the exhausted conditions of their resource-striped environments in order to survive. By huddling together, as mice do in extreme cold temperatures, or by living very close to each other, as the Three Sisters crops of corn, beans, and squash do in American indigenous agriculture and foodways, organisms create cooperative superorganisms. This way of working in common can sometimes have the effect of generating completely augmented and improved environmental conditions for all involved. Mutual care runs directly counter to how economic conservatives twisted Darwin’s research and propagated naturalizing myths like “survival of the fittest” as a capitalist anthem, a bad metaphor roundly touted by Rockefellers and Carnegies and other early twentieth century capitalists historically entangled with the American art-industrial complex.

The movement to abolish MoMA and the movement to liberate Palestine organize themselves together out of a mutual necessity to stay warm and bend toward the light in the neo-imperial cleanroom erected by the global ruling class. In 1967, before capitulating to illusory “peace” accords decades later, Yasir Arafat called cooperation across different fights “the struggle against oppression everywhere” when he indelibly linked the Palestinian and Vietnamese insurgencies against occupation in the collective imagination of the international leftist. We do it now, when we raise signs on West 53rd Street linking Puerto Rico and Palestine, Tanzania and Yemen; and on the verso, cross out the names of the interlocking directorate of oppressors everywhere: Paul and James Crown, Gustavo and PatriciaAWS Blackwater, Daniel Och, The City, The University, The Museum.

In ’67, Arafat encouraged the fedayeen to draw radical parallels between foreign and local experience, not because the equivalence was exact, nor the idea itself some kind of prepackaged political brand ready for didactic mass consumption. He did it because it was not obvious; but it also clearly communicated a reality and a common experience that was translatable and transmissible everywhere but had no official language to speak with yet. The connection across spatio-temporal locations and contexts must have felt nourishing to anyone living under the impossible conditions of colonial extraction and state violence. The vestiges of that familiar feeling are available now to any non-white, non-rich, non-capitalist walking through Midtown, wondering why it’s so cold and dead in the center of the “greatest city on earth.”
Some Notes on John Szarkowski and the Work of Art in the Age of Settler-Colonization

Strike MoMA Archival Research Unit

"In persuading a nation of park visitors that his seeing is their own...Ansel Adams] has perhaps helped to teach his countrymen to revere what remains of their native landscape."

- John Szarkowski, The Photographer and the American Landscape

"Viewed from the perspective of history, Yellowstone is a crime scene."

- David Treuer, "Return the National Parks to the Tribes"

In 1962, the photographer John Szarkowski was selected by Edward Steichen to become the chief photography curator at MoMA, a position he held until 1991. As The New York Times put it in a monumentalizing 2007 obituary, Szarkowski "almost single-handedly elevated photography's status in the last half century to that of a fine art."

Landscape played a crucial role in Szarkowski's project, exemplified by the first show he curated at MoMA - The Photographer and the American Landscape (1963). This show sought to legitimize then-contemporary photography (such as Ansel Adams' images of Yellowstone National Park) by highlighting its affinity with the "original" photographers of America: those embedded in the work of the post-Civil War U.S. military's geological surveys. Szarkowski subsumed the violent histories sealed in these photographs into an aesthetic plane, retroactively projecting on them the ideals of modernist medium-specificity: "Simultaneously exploring a new subject and a new medium...This work was the beginning of a continuing, inventive tradition, a tradition mediated by the desire to explore and understand the natural world." Szarkowski's settler/modernist project of reconciling "natural site" and "indigenous tradition" was connected to a discourse of "wilderness" conservation founded on the erasure of Indigenous people and their ongoing resistance to dispossession and displacement. In the credits to the exhibition, we see thanks given both to the Sierra Club and David Rockefeller (who was heavily involved with the 'acquisition' and display of Indigenous arts from across the world at MoMA and beyond). This toxic triangulation of imperialism, modernism, and environmental management speaks to what could be called "the work of art in the age of settler-colonization," a phrase indicating not a singular history sealed in the past, but rather an antagonistic structure of the settler colonial present in which Indigenous movements and their arts of liberation are met with various forms of soft and hard counterinsurgency.

Wilderness ideology was central to the trajectory of Szarkowski's project, exemplified by the so-called Quetico-Superior Wilderness region in northern Minnesota, Anishinaabek (Ojibwe) lands divided by the colonial border with Canada. Szarkowski visited the region while compiling The Face of Minnesota (1958), a best-selling photo-book commissioned by the state of Minnesota (1858), the genocidal iconography of which remains displayed on the state seal to this day. Szarkowski had trained as a museum photographer at the Walker Center in Minneapolis, named after T.B. Walker, a timber baron and toxic philanthropist whose fortune was made through land grabs in Northern Minnesota, and whose private art collection was converted into a "public" museum during the New Deal. Celebrating the "pioneer spirit" of Minnesota as a settler entity, the book alternates between physiognomic portraits of white settler-types (farmers, miners, lumberjacks, fishermen), industrial sites, and the auratic "wilderness" of the northern border region, including what would become Voyagers National Park following years of advocacy by an associate of Szarkowski's in the area. Several images of Native people appear as well, with captions like "This was a wild land...but now the land has been conquered." The book classified and normalized the white mythologies of settler society, helping Minnesota to emerge as the homogenizing standard of "American" life in general, propagated by Minneapolis-based brands like General Mills, Target, and, later, the Mall of America. These ruinous emblems of modernity (and the zones of "natural beauty" with which they are dialectically entwined) are the superstructural expression of what Winona LaDuke calls the Windigo Economy of global capitalism, "the economy of a cannibal, one which destroys its mother. One which destroys every source of wealth upon which it would live."

It is no coincidence that today, as MoMA makes weak gestures to address ecological crisis, it relies on the ecocidal wealth of people like Larry Fink of Blackrock, which invests billions in new fossil fuel infrastructure. This includes the Line 3 Pipeline cutting across Dakota and Ojibwe lands in central Minnesota, where water protectors like the Giniw Collective have been at the forefront of anti-extractivist resistance, resonating in turn with unsettling counter-memorial interventions undertaken by artists and organizers in the region (intensifying with the George Floyd rebellion of 2020). With Land Back as an essential horizon informing numerous initiatives in recent years, the process of shedding light on the connection between modernist landscapes and the ongoing theft of Indigenous lands and waters (including the land on which museums stand and the lands held and impacted by board members) is a point of leverage in approaching the decolonization/abolition of settler cultural institutions, whatever shape such struggles may take in particular places. The archival receipts highlighted in this document are offered as points to be acted upon. Engagement should be informed by a person's positionality and privileges should be deployed strategically. There is no blueprint, but the research can inform and support work and struggle that acknowledges debts and nurtures relations while organizing wherever we are, from MoMA to so-called "national" museums and beyond.
White Walls, Dirty Wars: Art, Institutional Liberalism, and the Cultural Politics of Counterinsurgency

Andrew Weiner

It will be clear to anyone reading this dossier that Strike MoMA is carefully and powerfully aligned with the struggles for radical emancipation that have become such a defining characteristic of the political landscape over the last decade: on tribal lands throughout the American ghettos, across the carceral archipelago, in occupied Palestine, and everywhere else across the globe that systematic domination and exploitation are allowed to continue. By refracting and refocusing these insurgent forces at specific sites within the cultural sector, the strike has forcefully called our attention to a problem that is easily overlooked but nevertheless essential if we want to understand what is at stake in this confrontation: the role of liberal cultural institutions (not just MoMA and other modern or contemporary art museums, but organizations like Hollywood studios, Apple, the New York Times, or New York University, where I currently teach) as agents of counterinsurgency.

This term is of course typically associated with U.S. imperialism in its anti-communist guise during the Cold War, and with a spectrum of nefarious activity that ranged from clandestine assassination, as in the death of the Black Panther Fred Hampton.

Critical historians like Nikhil Singh have demonstrated how this nexus of repression — where techniques of counterrevolutionary violence were first developed in the gheto of the metropole and then exported to the colonial frontier, or vice versa — is crucial to understanding American hegemony in the post-1945 era, especially given the high degree of bipartisan support for the military-police-industrial complex. And as cultural historians like Richard Slotkin have shown, anxieties and fantasies surrounding America's highly racialized counterrevolutionary politics penetrated deeply into pop culture in the 1950s and 60s, as in any number of John Wayne-era Westerns, or in later films that tried to transpose the myths of the frontier to Vietnam.

Nothing would seem further from MoMA — whether as a specific cultural institution, a quasi-corporate brand, or a kind of aesthetic ideology — than the sort of imagery we associate with counterinsurgency: riot police swarming around protesters, helicopters strafing rural villages, columns of tanks on city avenues, molten clouds of napalm. This is no accident. During the 1950s, with the pressures of McCarthyism on the rise, the museum executed an elaborate institutional volte-face, through which it managed to distance itself from two potentially damaging moments of its past: the 1920s, when Alfred Barr’s research into the Soviet and Weimar avant-gardes began to bring the museum into proximity with an explicitly leftist cultural politics; and World War II, when MoMA openly collaborated with multiple government agencies to stage propaganda exhibitions in support of the war effort.

By aligning itself completely with the ascendant hegemonic ideology of Marshall Plan-era Modernism — which valorized formalist abstraction, heroic individualism, and a highly voluntaristic conception of autonomy — MoMA was able to place itself firmly on the winning side of history, in a moment when both cultural and geopolitical power were being transplanted across the North Atlantic. Thanks to the influence of its International Program — which organized highly influential touring exhibitions like The New American Painting, again with the unadulterated assistance of American government agencies — MoMA gradually came to be recognized as one of the world's leading arbiters of elite cultural merit, almost like the artistic equivalent of a credit ratings agency.

The spatio-visual rhetoric that became synonymous with this complex of forces — not just MoMA's global primacy, but the hegemony of U.S. (i.e. liberal imperialist) culture, even after the era of so-called High Modernism ended — was that of the white cube, which became and still remains the default display mode for nearly all forms of modern and contemporary art, even after several decades of critique, much as the dollar and American English retain their primary in any allegedly “globalized” world art system. Much like the whiteness of white people in a racist social order, the whiteness of the white cube functions as a kind of unmarked universal, valorizing certain forms and practices by elevating them on a platform that is supposedly neutral (in this case thought to be built from a quasi-Kantian objectivity of taste), but that is in fact deeply beholden to specific interests.

Speaking in relatively abstract, aesthetic terms (i.e. in terms of sensate representations and their circulation), we might understand the counterinsurgent power of white cube aesthetics to function in three dimensions: first, a mechanism of exclusion that prevents specific actors, ensembles, demands, or allegations from being made public and receiving institutional validation; second, a subsidiary effect of this exclusion, which discourses or disavows an open insurmountable desire for [representation], making certain claims or actions less likely to occur; and third, as a technique of abstract individuation, removing artworks and artists from the kind of lived interdependencies in which meaningful aesthetic experience is grounded, and in which art is so often entangled with and inseparable from other modes of social life.

But there is also a much more concrete, more damning sense in which MoMA and its version of white cube aesthetics can be linked to counterinsurgency, whether historically or in the present. I refer here to the manifold linkages between the power structure of the museum (typical, but not limited to its trustees) and the entrenched networks of interests that enable, perpetuate, and of course benefit from the machinations of the U.S. war apparatus in all its manifestations. As Julia Bryan-Wilson has documented, these connections were first exposed and condemned in the Vietnam War era by a group of overlapping collectives, including Women Artists in Revolution (WAR), Art Workers Coalition (AWC), and Guerrilla Art Action Group (GAAG), all of whom experienced considerable pushback as a result. Despite the late-60s surge in feminist, antiracist, and anti-authoritarian organizing, the fields of art criticism and academic art history largely remained content to stay within the space of formalist autonomy. If the white cube was in this sense a kind of magic circle, an ideological vacuum from which actual political conflict and risk had been banished, the interventions of these groups served as a harsh but deeply needed reality check.

In actions like GAAG's Blood Bath (1969), which culminated with a group of artists and activists delivering two limousines full of animal blood in the museum lobby, the power of “guerrilla”-style impromptu performance was manifest in its ability to short-circuit the polite exclusions of institutional policy, and to make the many levels of the museum’s complicity undeniable. In a series of interventions over the next several years, activists delivered searing indictments of the museum’s links to U.S. military policy, to war profiteering, to war crimes like the My Lai massacre, and to the state-sanctioned murder of peaceful protesters in the 1971 prison uprising at New York’s Attica Correctional Facility. (Many of these arguments targeted MoMA board member and then-Governor Nelson Rockefeller, who gave the shoot-to-kill order at Attica and was instrumental in passing discriminatory anti-drug laws that would become a key model for the War on Drugs legislation of the 1980s and 90s.)

As these charges steadily accumulated, it became harder for the museum to credibly maintain the hollowed-out illusions of its own autonomy: its quasi-sovereign power to determine the terms of aesthetic engagement, and the fastidiously maintained illusion of distance from the actual material conditions of domination that guaranteed U.S. hegemony. The more intense these contradictions became, the more the ostensibly anamorphic space of the white cube began to grow uncanny, even monstrous; as if the blood of America’s countless victims could at any moment begin to seep through its walls.
It would surprise no one to learn that museums like MoMA are not only more than capable of retaining their reputations and profits, but can also extend the reach of other institutions and individuals whose votes have little value in retail politics. This wouldn’t be a drastic change of direction — such a realignment has been in the works for some time now, and not just at MoMA — and one imagines that the museum’s curatorial department could manage to pull it off artfully, and also without triggering the fervent denouncements of ‘soft power’ by whose politics often approximate a kind of reactionary liberalism. Clearly such a shift would represent an important kind of progress (with the necessary asterisk that such progress can only be gauged relative to MoMA’s own history, which could hardly be described as progressive). The question is: progress toward what end, and for whom?

Until we see otherwise, it should be safe to assume that MoMA’s chief goal will be what it has always been: self-fashioning and public relations. Its private police — to protect the experience of its clientele by removing protesters from its premises. This response, which momentarily collapsed the difference between the museum and a corporate campus or a gated community, has in its turn been somewhat self-reinforcing. The War era paradigm is still powerfully present. The Theatre of Greenbergian autonomy may be long debunked but white cube aesthetics remain the norm, which means that art institutions both derive and preserve their power through mechanisms of exclusion, whether that happens through a curator’s email or a guard’s terse instructions.

Yet MoMA’s struggles are also emblematic of art institutions more generally: they themselves struggling to negotiate a sociocultural environment that has changed profoundly over the last decade. Art is at once more ubiquitous and more dispensable than ever, with viewers habituated to an economy of overproduction and a swipe-and-forget mentality; meanwhile, museums continue to rely on and perpetuate the shrinking myth of a leisure economy that has been both disrupted and colonized by Silicon Valley. Closer to home, many institutions have been forced to confront dissent from within their own ranks, with workers forming unions, protesting sexual exploitation, and demanding accountability from management and board members.

It is too soon to tell how these changes will play out, especially since the politics of the past decade have not quieted down with us for some time yet. That said, it would seem that museums like MoMA will try to reassert their relevance (and cover their flanks) by embracing the signifiers of woke corporate liberalism. They will hire impassioned millenials to keep their social media feeds stocked with carefully chosen slogans and symbols; they will “lean in” to moments of political turmoil by allocating more budgetary resources to DEI committees; they will heed the advice of management consultants; they might even make broad-sounding but uncharacteristically unenforceable statements to the effect that they are more than they actually are. Not that long ago, MoMA’s leadership seemed to be uncharacteristically uncharacteristic. It was the object of a sudden outbreak of hostilities in a global hotspot — interventionist foreign policy, it is easy to imagine how things are changing.

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CONVERSATIONS
#StrikeMoMA

Modernity Is An Imperial Crime
1,230 views • Apr 29, 2021

Talk link:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTiW02en8YA&t=1310s

Week 4 of #StrikeMoMA, a conversation with Ariella Aisha Azoulay, Daleaja Foreman and Shellyne Rodriguez, facilitated by Nitasha Dhillon. Modernity Is An Imperial Crime

#strikemoma

Kency Cornejo, Saudi Garcia, Macarena Gómez-Barris, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Mónica Ramón Rios
625 views • Streamed live on Jun 3, 2021

Talk link:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4HNvds8XEo&t=4797s


www.strikemoma.org li #strikemoma
A Conversation with Sandy Grande, Stefano Harney, Fred Moten, Jasbir Puar, and Dylan Rodriguez

Talk link:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaJc_yfA-xY&t=19s

Emergency Conversation: Free Palestine/Strike MoMA

Talk link:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2vzhwnjy4s&t=2530s
Until our lands are free — Interconnected Struggles — Globalize the intifada
INTRODUCTION

This movement document offers an operational framing and practical toolkit for the globalization of the Intifada in NYC and beyond in the coming weeks and months. Grounded in the Globalize the Intifada call released in July 31, this manual is intended to facilitate conversation, relationship-building, and action in the lead up to a city-wide convergence on September 17th (S17). Week by week, gathering by gathering, community by community, things are building toward this date. S17 is not an endpoint. It is a launching pad for a season of resistance as the contradictions of settler-colonialism, racial capitalism, and liberal imperialism continue to heighten, and the authority of governing institutions including the university, the museum, political parties, and the police continue to erode. In neighborhood rallies, family gatherings, study-sessions, banner-making parties, and conversations throughout our communities and workplaces, we build capacity for the day of action. On S17 we scale up our power and bring our interconnected struggles together.

This document builds on ten years of movement work in the city, nourished in turn by many generations and legacies of struggle from around the world. It weaves together principles, practices, and lessons of anti-capitalist, decolonial, abolitionist, and anti-imperialist political formations, and operates autonomously from any sectarian organizations, political parties, state regimes, or nonprofit entities.

What time is it on the clock of the world? Ten years after the Arab uprisings of 2011, seven years after Ferguson, five years after Standing Rock, one year after the George Floyd uprising, and a few months since a wave of Free Palestine solidarity swept the world, inspiring an internationalist insurgent feeling at local and global scales. Palestine brings everyone together, reorienting away from empire, and toward each other’s struggles.

Whether we are talking about massive marches, militant disruptions, de-occupations, poetry readings, spiritual celebrations, or building emergent counter-institutions, our relationships are key. Such relational organizing is rooted in trust, affinity, and mutuality over time. The manual aims to make itself obsolete as we move together along the pathways of collective liberation.
As Palestinians continue to bravely confront ethnic cleansing and genocide, it’s time to globalize the Intifada. This call is rooted in direct action and driven by the belief that all colonized and oppressed people have the right to take back their land, to realize self-determination, and to win their liberation by any means necessary. We build upon the revolutionary spirit and inspiration of Palestinian resistance, in the understanding that our own liberation is either collective or nonexistent, and that it must reflect the interconnectedness of our struggles in our neighborhoods and homelands. That is why we are organizing actions every week as we build towards September 17th, a peak day of action across New York City and beyond.

Globalize the Intifada comes from the urgent need to defend our lands, resist our oppressors, and break free from the genocidal grip of U.S. imperialism and Zionism. Waves of solidarity have swept the world in reaction to the Sheikh Jarrah evictions, the bombardment of Gaza, and the militarist policies of the U.S.-sponsored Zionist regime. These events have united Palestinians across the occupied territories and in exile, and also sparked a new unity against colonial violence in many parts of the world; from Colombia and Mexico, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, Bangladesh and the Philippines, to the Bronx and Bay Ridge in New York City. As Palestinians from Gaza and Haifa to Al-Quds and Beita have consolidated their resistance to the Zionist settler-colonial project, we too must amplify the spirit of Palestine Liberation in the belly of the beast by linking arms with all those who are confronting U.S. and Israeli aggression globally.

Globalize the Intifada expands the terrain of struggle by creating new points of leverage for our movements based on the interconnectedness of our struggles. Although these struggles arise from our specific place in the world, the forces we are fighting against—the creditor class, the landlords, the cops, the prison industry, the teargas manufacturers, the multinational corporations, the mining companies, and the military defense complex—are all interconnected parts of the same oppressive system. So we can find points of convergence in our separate struggles when we join the dots between what is happening across the street, or ocean, and what we are doing in our own backyard. With each link, and each mobilization, we are building the collective power and relationality needed to effectively confront the tyranny of the settler state.

How can you amplify the message of Globalize the Intifada? Organize an action in your neighborhood along with other communities who support Palestinian liberation and who want to channel the spirit and example of the Palestinian intifada for their own ends. Make it clear that our mutual liberation is interdependent, and identify common targets that have an active hand in the domination of our peoples. To those who participate in, and profit from, the oppression of people here in the U.S. and around the world—your days of comfort are coming to an end. In the coming weeks, the boroughs of this city will become a theater of operations where we can actualize the interconnectedness of our struggles with a diversity of strategies and tactics. Globalize the Intifada will be an ongoing strike at the heart of empire with Palestine as its compass.

Bay Ridge/Sunset Park, Brooklyn
July 31, 2021
Decolonization is not a metaphor. 
Transformation of indigenous struggle, 
black liberation, and a free Palestine 
produce a rearrangement of relationships 
that make empire look like illness.

We are writing from the unceded territory of the Lenni Lenape. We stand in solidarity with Native American and Indigenous peoples leading the movement for resurgence, decolonization, and reclamation of their homelands. These lands were stolen to create settler-colonial states, and those who were dispossessed continue to live under conditions of siege, surveillance, and extractivist violence. We support land back, an imperative addressed to all settlers and settler-institutions, including museums, universities, and the City of New York. At its foundations, this city was established on stolen Indigenous land, and shaped and cultivated by enslaved African peoples. We support the undying fight for Black liberation and its many manifestations here and across the planet.

Subsequent layers of the city have been built by generations of migrants and refugees from other zones of the world violently impacted by colonialism, racial capitalism, and imperialism. Think of the Mohawk skywalkers whose labor made possible the Manhattan skyline, and the Black, Latinx, and Asian workers who maintain the urban infrastructure today even as they are displaced by real-estate developers in Chinatown, Mott Haven, East New York, and beyond. We support sanctuary for all migrant communities, and the allied movement for degentrification. We support the self-determination of oppressed peoples everywhere fighting against the imperial states, repressive regimes, occupying powers, comprador elites, and global corporations whose calculations have forced so many people from their homes in places like Palestine, Puerto Rico, Haiti, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Philippines, Bangladesh, Kashmir, Punjab. From within the belly of the beast of U.S. empire, we acknowledge our responsibility, and act in solidarity with struggles to get free.

We are organizing and building against a system of imperialism, colonialism, and racial capitalism with gendered violence at its core. We stand in solidarity with all those who strike against patriarchy every day, at work, at home, in the fields, in the prisons, in the detention centers, in the streets, in the shelters. Stolen land, stolen people, stolen labor, stolen wealth, stolen worlds, stolen horizons. This is the modernity to which NYC is a monument.
What is the Intifada? The Intifada is the shaking off of oppression, the unsettling of occupied territory, an uprising for dignity in the face of dehumanization, an expression of self-determination grounded in the relations between people rather than the authority of states and politicians that claim to represent us.

Who is the Intifada? The Intifada is all those seeking to get free in solidarity with others; all those who recognize the interconnectedness of our struggles against settler-colonialism, imperialism, and racial capitalism across borders and identities; all those who refuse to allow our struggles to be isolated, segregated, and pitted against each other according to the classic colonial logic; all those who practice what Huey P. Newton called a “revolutionary intercommunalism” that sees the modern nation-state as a hindrance rather than vehicle when it comes to collective liberation.

When is the Intifada? The Intifada is now, nourished by roots running deep into our entangled histories of survival and liberation across centuries and continents. In the words of Ghassan Kanafani, “Imperialism has laid its body over the world, the head in Eastern Asia, the heart in the Middle East, its arteries reaching Africa and Latin America. Wherever you strike it, you damage it, and you serve the World Revolution.”

Where is the Intifada? The Intifada is everywhere. It is all around us, within us, between us. In our homelands, in our diasporas, in our neighborhoods here in the belly of the beast. It lives with each act of resistance and care from the Bronx to Colombia, from Haiti to Punjab, from Standing Rock to Gaza.

Why the Intifada? To break the binds that settler-colonialism, imperialism, and liberalism have placed on our imaginations, relations, and practices of life. The Intifada wants todo para todos, in the words of the Zapatistas. The Intifada is desire-driven, fighting and building simultaneously, cultivating our own powers beyond anything the ruling classes can accommodate within their faltering systems.
1. "For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity." — The Wretched of the Earth

No one is pure in a colonized world. We all live by our contradictions. Working at Amazon and disgusted with Amazon? Being an artist and hating the art system? Teaching at a university and wanting to tear it all down? Studying freedom in college while you go deeper into debt? Struggling to pay rent but displacing someone else? A Ford fellow who protests the Ford Foundation? Oppressed but also contributing to other peoples oppression? This is the entangled dystopia of our present. We can see contradictions as impediments and be consumed by frustration, ambivalence, and despair, or we can acknowledge and heighten them. As we set forms of subversion, deep conversations, mobilizations,large and small, each act we take further undermines the principles that sustain this system.

2. The revolution is an experiment, the revolution is from the ground up. Legitimacy is with people, they work out their contradictions in struggle. How do we uplift an ongoing revolution from afar? This is a question of strategies and tactics. It requires conversations and a commitment to work through those contradictions from below across borders with revolutionaries organizing on the streets.

3. Strike is a verb.

4. "Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it in relative opacity." — The Wretched of the Earth

5. "The Nation-State is no longer the vehicle of emancipation."

6. "No promise, end vision, or strategy justifies a police state or a regime that seeks to make people invisible in the process of struggle."

7. "Colonialism does not end with independence" and the Nation-State is not synonymous with self-determination.

8. "The right to determine our social, political, and economic destiny must never be forfeited."

9. "A different reality at the state's helm or a top down will not overturn the gahorn, nature of the state."

10. "Be aware of elites, cliques and their allies, and remember identity often obscures class."

11. No to the non-profit-industrial complex. No to the ally-industrial complex. No to the diversity-equity-inclusion complex. No to the model-minority assimilation complex. No anti-Blackness. No white nonsense. No toxic masculinity. No heteronormative culture. No anti-poor or anti-working-class sentiments. No ableism. No "progressive except for Palestine." Yes to collective liberation yes to becoming accomplices, co-conspirators, race traitors, class traitors, de-assimilators; yes to all those who are ready to put something on the line, to operationalize their privileges and redistribute their resources in whatever forms those may take, from property deeds to printer ink.
Israel’s violent repression happening in Palestine now is part of the settler colonialist Zionist movement that began in the late 1800s and peaked with the Nakba of 1948. The catastrophe and displacement of Palestinians continues now in Israel’s attempts to forcibly remove Sheikh Jarrah residents. Again, what is and has been happening in Sheikh Jarrah is not new—this is part of decades long ongoing policies of forcibly dispossessing Palestinians of their land. The Nakba did not end in 1948, it is ongoing. Some of the terms you have heard in mainstream media include the “Israeli-Arab” conflict. Let us be clear that there is no conflict. This is a settler colonial occupation. You also hear about needing “balanced reporting”—but there is no balanced relationship between an occupying power and the occupied. Balance is not part of a decolonial lexicon. You hear that the situation is “too complicated and complex” to take a position on. This refrain is a Zionist tactic that encourages you to remain silent and reinforce the status quo—think about who says this as an excuse to avoid standing in solidarity. Palestinians never say it’s too complicated to understand. There is nothing complicated about the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. One has the 4th largest military in the world, including nuclear power, and continually inflicts violence in any number of ways. The other has been resisting their colonization through a myriad of tactics, from throwing stones to the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement, because that is what is happening now, a resistance movement on multiple fronts in multiple forms. You hear politicians use the term “disproportionate force” in very tepid commentary about Israel that ultimately never leads to any global or political action against Israel. You also hear debates about the term whether or not the Israeli occupation is apartheid. While we have called this apartheid for many decades, Israeli human rights organizations are finally recognizing that Israel is an apartheid state. Finally, you hear the media call the Palestinians who live in 48 “Arab Israelis.” 48-ers are Palestinian, period. Despite correcting them over and over, the media continues to perpetuate this language because it projects an utterly false picture of Israeli citizenship and co-existence. You also have been hearing about pogroms and lynching in what they call “mixed Arab-Jewish” towns and cities, to perpetuate the fantasy that Palestinians are treated as neighbors. But these towns, such as Lod and Haifa are deeply segregated, spatially in terms of where housing, businesses, and schools are located, as well as economically, in terms of denying Palestinians resources to develop community infrastructure. There is apartheid in Israel itself, not just in the occupation.

These are some of the media soundbites that you will hear over and over again, despite multiple interventions by Palestinian journalists and activists. For the rest of this presentation, I turn to the specifics of Gaza, a 14-year blockage of the Gaza Strip that is often referred to as the world’s largest open-air prison as well as one of the world’s most densely populated areas. Again, these are easy tropes that we can break down. What is the blockade exactly and how does it work?

What is the blockade?

The blockade is a form of “logistical governance.” That means that the logistics of how, when, and why goods and people are allowed in and out is not a by-product of the blockage, but it’s actual purpose. So, when Israel says it is no longer occupying Gaza, they are attempting to erase the “remote control” of Gaza that happens through the control of logistics. In other words, logistical control is a form of population control.

The blockade not only keep things out and keeps people in. It also creates a perpetual state of uncertainty. You never know when the electricity will turn off. You never know if your medical permit to receive medical care in the West Bank will take one month or 6 months to be approved, though you never assume it will actually be approved. You never know if you the Rafah border with Egypt will still be open by the time you get there, and for how long it might be closed if it is not. You never know when medicines might be available, or surgeries that you need might be possible. You can’t count on the regular supply
of clean water. Sometimes you get what you need and sometimes you don’t, but you don’t know which of those will happen when. That’s part of the logistical governance, to subject a population to endless uncertainty. Gazans have been living like this for 14 years now. In 2014, during the last raid on Gaza, the UN declared Gaza uninhabitable by the year 2020. Well, that was last year, and 1.7 million Gazans continue to exist and resist and fight for their right for the siege to end. Clearly, what is deemed “uninhabitable” does not speak to a universal threshold of human existence, because Gazans are living the unlivable. Remember also that the bombardment of Gaza is happening during a time when the pandemic has already stretched the medical infrastructure of Gaza. According to the World Health Organization, only 6% of 5 million Palestinians living under Israeli occupation have been vaccinated. Contrast that to more than 50 percent of Israelis.

What would it mean for the siege to end? It would mean that Gaza could reopen an airport. It would mean that Gazans could travel to see relatives and friends in the West Bank, 48, and East Jerusalem—and beyond! It would mean the Gazan economy could grow and unemployment which is often around 70 percent could be mitigated. It means Gazans could enjoy their seashores and their homes in peace.

**Why Injuries Matter:**

We are watching in horror the death toll in Gaza and elsewhere in Palestine rise by the hour. We must also register and understand the horror of the growing number of injured Palestinians, currently in the mid-hundreds. Israel has used injury to try to strip Palestinians of their bodily capacity for resistance. During the first intifada, they used the infamous “break their bones” policy created by the Defense Ministry. There were about 2000 killings during the first intifada. But the number of injuries is staggering, estimated by some to be at least 30,000 injured Palestinians. During this time Israel had very specific discussion about using injury and maiming to keep the death toll so as not to solicit global attention and disapproval.

Disability is a big part of life in Gaza. From the siege of 2014, the stats say about 2000 deaths but the number of injuries is again staggering, estimates starting in the 10s of thousands. Because Israel targets and destroys medical infrastructure, wounds that could be treated often become “permanent disabilities.” Gaza was still dealing with a huge wave of disabled people when 2018 happened. You might recall that during the Great March of Return, which began on Land Day, March 30, 2018 and was a by and large peaceful resistance along the so-called boundaries between Israel and Gaza, the Israeli military openly and brazenly injured 10’s of thousands of protestors during the first months of the Great March, including 7000 Gazans in the lower limbs. You saw these sensationalizing pictures of men in wheelchairs and with crutches on the pages of the New York Times and the Washington post. But what is never covered is the aftermath of these injuries. Many of these injuries required amputation, many required multiple surgeries, and again, the medical infrastructure is so compromised that it was overwhelmed by the influx.

Targeting limbs, especially lower limbs and knees, is both symbolically and literally an attempt to foreclose Palestinian mobility and the capacity to resist. And yet, we see repeatedly that disabled Palestinians are often on the frontlines of protests. We can also connect the tactical use of injury to Kashmir, where hundreds of resisters have been shot in the eye and many blinded, again the targeting of the eyes is both symbolic and literal. We can also connect these tactics to the hundreds of blinded protests from the Chilean uprisings in 2019, and the increased use globally of what is purportedly “non-lethal” weapons such as rubber bullets and tear gas for crowd control and protests, and frankly towards deliberate disabling of insurgent resisters of state violence.

**Solidarity:**

Tomorrow is Nakba Day, a day that commemorates the violent expulsion of Palestinians from their land 73 years ago. Tomorrow there will be mass mobilization around the world that includes every possible movement you can imagine, from Black Lives Matter to Puerto Rican Sovereignty to the Farmer’s Protest to those fighting the occupation of
Kashmir, and so many more. From Angela Davis we understand that justice is indivisible, and we learn this lesson over and over again from black, indigenous, queer, Arab, from Palestinian feminists, who call for the adoption of their statement “Palestine is a Feminist Issue.”

In solidarity and as a tribute to the fierce resistance of the Palestinian people, I want to end with a paragraph from Ghassan Kanafani’s 1957 short story “Letter From Gaza,” where he refers to Gaza as an “amputated town.” Here his narrator is revising injury and resistance after visiting the hospital to see his niece who had had her leg amputated.

My friend ... Never shall I forget Nadia’s leg, amputated from the top of the thigh. No! Nor shall I forget the grief which had molded her face and merged into its traits forever. I went out of the hospital in Gaza that day, my hand clutched in silent derision on the two pounds I had brought with me to give Nadia. The blazing sun filled the streets with the color of blood. And Gaza was brand new, Mustafa! You and I never saw it like this. The stone piled up at the beginning of the Shajiya Quarter where we lived had a meaning, and they seemed to have been put there for no other reason but to explain it. This Gaza in which we had lived and with whose good people we had spent seven years of defeat was something new. It seemed to me just a beginning. I don’t know why I thought it was just a beginning. I imagined that the main street that I walked along on the way back home was only the beginning of a long, long road leading to Safad. Everything in this Gaza throbbed with sadness which was not confined to weeping. It was a challenge: more than that it was something like reclamation of the amputated leg!


* Remarks made at Post-MoMa Plaza
In 1977, on the 30th anniversary of the 1947 UN partition plan and in commemoration of the ongoing colonization and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people, the UN marked November 29th “International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.” While UN resolution 194 (passed December 1948) guaranteed the right of return to all Palestinian refugees who were displaced during the Nakba, 72 years later we are still fighting for our right to return home.

As we reflect on all of the UN resolutions and broken promises to Palestinians on the international stage for generations, we also ground ourselves in the uncompromising support that we have received, and continue to receive, from oppressed and colonized people around the world.

This collage features artwork by Palestinian painter Ismael Shammout, posters from the archives of the Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America, Malcolm X’s 1964 meeting with the PLO, and signs that our Mexican, Carribbean and Filippino comrades have brought to our protests here in New York City.

While the Zionist entity and their reactionary partners seek to normalize the ongoing annexation of Palestinian land and genocide of the Palestinian people, the masses of the world stand with Palestine, and will continue to struggle alongside us until we have achieved liberation within our lifetime.

#InternationalDayOfSolidarityWithThePalestinianPeople #LongLiveInternationalSolidarity #RightToResist #DefendPalestine #FreePalestine #WithinOurLifetime #globalizetheintifada

Thirty-three years ago today on December 8th, 1987, the First intifada began in Palestine, four decades after the Nakba and twenty years after the Naksa in 1967.

The event that sparked the First Intifada took place in Jabalia refugee camp in Gaza, when a Zionist truck driver ran over a group of Palestinian workers, murdering four young men.

In response, thousands of Palestinians took to the streets in protest. The next day, on December 9th, 1987, the Palestinian youth of Jabalia camp directly confronted occupation forces with only stones in hand, launching a new chapter of the Palestinian struggle for national liberation.

From Gaza, the Intifada spread to the West Bank, and then on to every corner of historic Palestine. Over the course of the next six years from 1987-1993, the First Intifada was led by the Palestinian masses, who not only took to the streets to protest and resist the occupation, but also formed local committees to organize popular education when schools shut down and coordinated general strikes, economic boycotts of Israeli goods and the withholding of taxes to the occupation. Women’s organizations, youth and students and labor unions in particular took a leading role in these committees.

Today we honor all those who took part in the First Intifada, all those who were arrested, jailed, and tortured by the occupation, and the over 1,100 Palestinian martyrs who were murdered while fighting for their freedom. In their memory, the Intifada continues.
OPERATIONALIZING THE DIAGRAM:
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY AS TEST-CASE

With Palestine as our compass, the diagram on the preceding page is offered as a tool for identifying sites of convergence for our interconnected struggles as we globalize the Intifada in NYC and beyond.

How can campus organizing be strategically linked to globalizing the Intifada? The university exists on the same plane of colonial violence as the rest of settler-society, and it is riven with ever-heightening contradictions. It is full of discontented workers, students, and faculty who are already organizing on various campuses across NYC, each with its own specific conditions and legacies of struggle, from the CUNY system to NYU and Columbia.

As a test-case, let's apply the diagram to Columbia University. The following checklist is a preliminary scaffolding, to be fleshed out in the course of sharing knowledge and building relationships as we converge in the coming weeks.

- **Settler Colonialism.** Columbia University stands on stolen Lenape land. The University was chartered as King's College by King George in 1754 in Lower Manhattan, and to this day Columbia remains one of the largest landowners in so-called New York City. In its name and symbolism, Columbia is also monument to colonization and patriarchal violence. After the American Revolution, the institution was renamed Columbia, in honor of the mythical spirit of Christopher Columbus, the same genocidal conquistador and rapist whose likeness stands above Columbus Circle several miles south at Broadway and 59th street.

- **Racial Capitalism.** Columbia University was founded by slave-owners. Between 1754 and the U.S. Civil War, half of the men who presided over the school "owned" enslaved African people, and all were prime beneficiaries of the hemispheric plantation system. That system and its legacies remains inseparable from the general structure of global capitalism that Columbia as an institution has always been dedicated to growing and preserving, as is evident in the list of Wall Street oligarchs who continue to make up the board of trustees. Their accumulation of wealth has always been founded on the dispossession, incarceration, and brutalization of racialized populations.

- **Gentrification.** Columbia University is an agent of gentrification, which cannot be understood apart from the intersecting matrix of settler-colonialism and racial capitalism. Columbia is an ever-expanding land-grabbing machine, especially in Harlem. Its ongoing 17-acre, $6.3 billion expansion northward of 125th street continues to be met with resistance from local residents. Columbia has always had a predatory relation to Harlem. The 1968 campus uprising was catalyzed by protests from Harlem residents against the proposed placement of a Columbia athletic facility over the majority of Morningside Heights Park. This "Gym Crow" development was but one in a long history of expansion projects by the University into the surrounding area, a process of racialized displacement condemned by community organizers as "the Big Steal."
Poverty Wages. Columbia University is a place of class conflict. Precarious graduate student workers have recently been on strike, and workers of all kinds are resisting in a diversity of ways all the time, unionized and not. How are student-worker struggles building with the struggles of other workers on campus and in the city at large in the face of an institution that is in its very structure hostile to workers power of any kind? What kind of class solidarities are necessary to create the kind of political formation we need and desire?

Empire: Columbia University is designed to be a knowledge factory for the global ruling class, supplemented by the pursuit of the “public good.” From the Business School, to the Law School, to the the School of International and Public Affairs, to the School for Architecture, Preservation, and Planning, and across the arts, sciences, and humanities, Columbia is in the business of preparing elites for power, and integrating select non-elites into the apparatus of liberal governance. As is the case with its fellow Ivy League institutions, significant portions of the university’s programming and faculty are explicitly devoted to serving the interests of capital and empire. Others cite cultural expression, historical understanding, public service, and even social justice as their missions, but remain within the operational frames of academic research, policymaking, or the nonprofit industrial complex. But we know that radical formations of anti-colonial counter-knowledge are alive at Columbia, channeling the tradition of scholars like Edward Said “whose intellectual work was embedded organically in the work of movements.” When we identify a shared place where our interconnected struggles converge, those counter-knowledges can come to fruition in the course of unsettling the imperial university.

Strike Columbia, Globalize the Intifada
HOW TO ORGANIZE A RALLY AND MARCH

Globalizing the Intifada allows us to thread our material struggles through action. This is a non-comprehensive list of what you may need at a rally.

I Logistics
- Determine level of publicity and decide on social media strategy
- Design flyer informed by this zine’s analysis
- Create a blurb for people to share
- Make a banner with message, e.g. “Free Palestine / Unsettle Everything”
- Approach allied communities and groups to co-sponsor and get involved
- Contact legal observers, e.g. National Lawyers Guild
- Let people know which hashtags to use, e.g. “#cliphellocks #globalizetheintifada #interconnectedstruggles #bronx”
- Prepare and circulate a press release to circulate on social media and local media outlets, and with allied influencers the night before or early the day of the rally
- Maybe after rallying an unpermitted march or walk around the neighborhood to spread the message and connect with folk.
- Create a security plan for those that attend the rally to ensure their safety particularly from Zionist, NYPD, and/or Facists disruptors
- Be prepared to do jail support in case any protesters are arrested
- At each gathering announce upcoming actions and events and let people know #September17 #517 is city-wide, cross borough mobilization and convergence to globalize the intifada

II Outreach
Campuses: contact student organizations and see if you can build a relationship together and connect struggles, and if they can share the action on social media.

Coalitions: invite any coalitions with shared politics you may be a part of to not only endorse but attend, speak, and volunteer with security and other demanding tasks.

Local neighborhood: Not everyone is online. Organize physical outreach if you live near a Palestinian community. Ask local stores to advertise your rally in their windows. Go around and tape flyers to polls and bus stops and give them out to those that may be interested. Finally, remember: we are all outreach!

III Materials
Signs
Markers to write down legal observers/lawyers number who agreed to observe
Banners
Bullhorn/speakers + mic/sound
Drums
Flags
Poles
Flyers/handouts
Clipboard for sign up sheet

IV Roles
MC
program coordinator with Speakers list
Live stream
Video
Photography
Security coordinator
Outreach coordinator
Media coordinator

V Follow Up
Posting Statement + pictures on Social Media/ website
Internal assessment + debrief + next steps
Resistance + Building Party to dance and share spac
VI Chants

We will free Palestine!
Within our lifetime!

There is only one solution!
Intifada revolution!

Resistance is justified
When people are occupied!

Palestine is our demand!
No peace on stolen land!

From the river to the sea
Palestine will be free!

From Palestine to Mexico,
Apartheid walls have got to go!

From New York to Gaza
Globalize the intifada!
Free, free Palestine!

Long live the intifada!
Intifada, intifada!

This is not acceptable,
Jerusalem's our capital!

Stop the U.S. war machine
From Palestine to the Philippines!

It is right to rebel,
Israel go to hell!

Settlers settlers go back home
Palestine is our home!

Occupation is a crime,
From New York to Palestine!

Not just annexation!
Not just occupation!
Fight for Liberation,
Bring the whole thing down!

Not another nickel!
Not another dime!
No more money
for Israel's crimes!

Resistance is justified
When people are colonized
KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

WE ARE ABOLITIONISTS. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THE POLICE OR THE LARGER CRIMINAL PUNISHMENT SYSTEM OPERATES TO MAKE PEOPLE SAFER. WE SHOULD NOT IGNORE POLICE POWER, SO WE'RE DEDICATED TO FINDING WAYS TO KEEP OURSELVES - AND PARTICULARLY THE PEOPLE TARGETED FOR POLICE ABUSE - SAFER.

WE LIVE IN A RACIST POLICE STATE, WHERE PEOPLE ARE SUBJECT TO ARREST AND SURVEILLANCE BY JUST LIVING, PARTICULARLY IF YOU ARE BLACK, INDIGENOUS, LATINX, CASH-POOR, TRANS, POLITICALLY ACTIVE AGAINST THE STATE - AND ANY COMBINATION OF THOSE AND OTHER TARGETED GROUPS.

BY PARTICIPATING IN STREET PROTESTS, YOUR RISK OF A POLICE ENCOUNTER AND ARREST GOES UP.

PREPARATION IN ADVANCE OF ACTION

GO TO THE ACTION WITH FRIENDS. HAVE AN ARREST PLAN, IN CASE. LET THEM KNOW WHOM THEY SHOULD CALL AND WHAT THEY SHOULD DO, ESPECIALLY IF YOU ARE HELD OVERNIGHT. YOU SHOULD MEMORIZE THEIR PHONE NUMBER OR WRITE IT IN PERMANENT MARKER ON YOUR ARM (OR A LESS VISIBLE PART OF YOUR BODY).

IF YOU HAVE HEALTH ISSUES, PREPARE YOURSELF KNOWING THAT IF YOU ARE ARRESTED YOU MIGHT NOT GET URGENT MEDICAL ATTENTION RIGHT AWAY. KEEP ANY URGENT MEDICATIONS ON YOU IN THEIR ORIGINAL CONTAINER, BUT KNOW IT WILL BE TAKEN AWAY IF YOU ARE ARRESTED.

SET UP YOUR MOBILE PHONE TO LOCK IMMEDIATELY OR AFTER JUST A FEW MINUTES; SET UP AND USE A LONG DIGIT-BASED PASSCODE (NOT FINGERPRINT OR FACE). BRING IDENTIFICATION; GOVERNMENT OR INSTITUTION-ISSUED.

IF YOU ARE ARRESTED

IF YOU ARE ARRESTED, IT IS MUCH SAFER NOT TO RESIST AND TO SAY ALoud I'M NOT RESISTING, ESPECIALLY IF THEY START SAYING “STOP RESISTING.”

IF YOU ARE ARRESTED, THE POLICE CAN PAT DOWN THE OUTSIDE OF YOUR CLOTHING, TO SEARCH FOR WEAPONS.

THEY CAN AND WILL SEARCH THE INSIDE OF YOUR CLOTHING AND BELONGINGS. NYPD ROUTINELY OVERSTEPS WHAT, HOW, AND WHY THEY SEARCH. TO FIGHT AN ILLEGAL SEARCH LATER WITH A LAWYER, YOU MUST OBJECT TO A SEARCH AS IT HAPPENS. YOUR SILENCE DURING A SEARCH = PERMISSION. SO SAY ALoud: I DO NOT CONSENT TO THIS SEARCH. THOSE WORDS WILL NOT STOP THE SEARCH, BUT WILL GIVE YOUR LAWYER THE ABILITY TO CHALLENGE THE SEARCH IN COURT. IF ANY OTHER OFFICER BEGINS SEARCHING YOUR BELONGINGS, REPEAT I DO NOT CONSENT TO THIS SEARCH. IF LATER, THE SAME OR ANOTHER COP BEGINS SEARCHING YOUR STUFF, REPEAT I DO NOT CONSENT TO THIS SEARCH. REMEMBER SILENCE OR SAYING “SURE” OR “WHATEVER” OR “FUCK YOU” = CONSENT. SO THESE WORDS COME TO YOU AUTOMATICALLY, REPEAT THEM NOW: I DO NOT CONSENT TO THIS SEARCH // I DO NOT CONSENT TO THIS SEARCH.

IF YOU ARE ARRESTED, YOU SHOULD PUT POLICE ON NOTICE THAT YOU DO NOT WANT TO BE INTERROGATED. YOU NEED TO SAY: I'M NOT TALKING WITHOUT MY LAWYER. THIS TRIGGERS YOUR RIGHT TO REMAIN SILENT AND YOUR RIGHT TO AN ATTORNEY. THE POLICE MIGHT LAUGH AT YOU, MOCK YOU, TRY TO TRICK YOU INTO SPEAKING WITH THEM. BUT KNOWING THESE WORDS AND THEN REMAINING SILENT IS POWERFUL FOR YOU AND YOUR COMMUNITY. AFTER SAYING THESE WORDS, DO NOT TALK TO THE COPS.
COMMUNITY DEFENSE
THREE WAYS TO BE BETTER COMRADES AT A PROTEST

IF YOU ARE WHITE CIS GENDERED, KNOW YOUR PRIVILEGE

- You have the privilege and power to behave in ways and get away with things that folks of color, the undocumented, transgender folks do not have
- You face fewer risks and less severe consequences for your actions and in criminal prosecution
- Your acts can be a pretext for police violence against more vulnerable people around you, including people living in the neighborhood, not even participating in the protest

GENERALLY EVERYONE SHOULD BE AWARE OF THE VIBE AND LOOK TO THE ORGANIZERS FOR CUES, SO WE MOVE AS A COMMUNITY.

PHOTOS & VIDEO: If you will take photographs or video at a protest, be thoughtful about what images you share. Police and DA offices - and other white supremacists - review social media for evidence. In general, review before posting and avoid sharing anything that could be problematic for you or anyone else (would you want to explain what you are shown doing before a judge?). Sharing images is important for defense; too, especially when fuckery happens. So to balance that need and protecting one another, use apps to cover faces and film in a way to avoid identifying people.

- If you film an arrest, it's best not to share anything that shows anyone except police. Connect with MLG, jail support team, or organizers, so you can send your evidence privately to the person who was arrested or to their lawyer.
- If you are copwatching - fantastic. Be sure you are filming the police, not your comrades.
- If anyone asks you not to film or photograph them, respect that. Delete the image, if they ask.

NYPD AGITATORS: NYPD uses agitators to cause conflict at protests. We mention this here not to scare you and not to encourage you to distrust others or even to focus on outing suspected agitators at a protest. This is important to discuss, so you and others aren't tricked by NYFD and so you can be ready to disengage and de-escalate. These are all examples seen in practice:

- Anyone who wants to escalate beyond what others are doing, don't fall for it - avoid them or de-escalate and help others avoid them.
- Anyone insulting others or acting aggressively towards certain people, don't engage and help others avoid them.
- Anyone spouting off politics that are obviously contrary to the rest of the group, avoid them or de-escalate.

You can alert organizers or marshals, if anyone is agitating like this. Calling them out publicly as agitators could gain them the attention and engagement they want, so be smart, aware of your environment, when protecting yourself and others.

**All "Know Your Rights" and "Community Defense" content is the work of the KVR Radical Collective.**

STREET SAFETY
- Scout!
- Know the geography!
- Be mindful of vulnerability!
- Have an exit strategy!
- Identity roles!
- Find safe spaces!
- Respect choices!
- Get consent!

I Must Become a Menace to My Enemies
by June Jordan

Dedicated to the Poet Agostinho Neto,
President of The People’s Republic of Angola: 1976

1
I will no longer lightly walk behind
a one of you who fear me:
Be afraid.
I plan to give you reasons for your jumpy fits
and facial tics.
I will not walk politely on the pavements anymore
and this is dedicated in particular
to those who hear my footsteps
or the insubstantial rattling of my grocery
cart
then turn around
see me
and hurry on.
away from this impressive terror I must be:
I plan to blossom bloody on an afternoon
surrounded by my comrades singing
terrible revenge in merciless
accelerating
rhythms.
But
I have watched a blind man studying his face.
I have set the table in the evening and sat down
to eat the news.
Regularly
I have gone to sleep.
There is no one to forgive me.
The dead do not give a damn.
I live like a lover
who drops her dime into the phone
just as the subway shakes into the station
wasting her message.
canceling the question of her call;
futurizing or forgetful but late
and always after the fact that could save or
condemn me.
I must become the action of my fate.

2
How many of my brothers and my sisters
will they kill
before I teach myself
retaliation?
Shall we pick a number?
South Africa for instance:
do we agree that more than ten thousand
in less than a year but that less than
five thousand slaughtered in more than six
months will
WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH ME?
I must become a menace to my enemies.

3
And if I
if I ever let you slide
who should be extirpated from my universe
who should be coterminized from earth
completely
(lawandorder jerks off of the first the
terrorist degree)
then let my body fall my soul
in its bedeviled lecheries.

And if I
if I ever let love go
because the hatred and the whisperings
become a phantom diction I o-

bey in lieu of impulse and realities
(the blossoming fringes of my
wild mimosa trees)
then let love freeze me
out.
I must become
I must become a menace to my enemies.
GLOBALIZE THE INTIFADA

INTERCONNECTED STRUGGLES

DISPOSED PEOPLE

SETTLER-COLONIALISM IS AN ONGOING PROCESS. NOT A HISTORICAL EVENT.

OPERATES LIKE AN EMPIRE

PATRIARCHAL WHITE SUPREMACIST NATION STATE

THIS IS SEIZED INDIGENOUS LAND

DISPLACEMENT
MIGRATION
WARS ABROAD
VIOLENT EXTRACTION

EXTERNAL COLONIALISM

RACIAL CAPITALISM
GENTRIFICATION
POVERTY WAGES
PERMANENT WAR ECONOMY

INTERNAL COLONIALISM
Communiqué from Commandante Scream No. 1

Hey everybody, um... it's me the... The scream. You know (puts hands to cheeks and opens mouth) um yeah. Uh, and i know... I know what you're thinking: I look terrible. But it's been 127 years that I've been screaming. Today is April 9th, 2021 so that means I've been screaming for 46,485 days straight, so I'm sorry if I'm not looking my best. I mean, it's gotten to the point we can even see the halo of this pose that's that's forever embedded now on on on the canvas, but if you'll let me just be real with you for a couple of minutes, I'd like to stop screaming and start speaking a little bit. So, I'm not looking my best. It's not it's not a problem with the relative humidity or the temperature. My owner takes care of that. I mean, when you're when you're an investment that exceeds 100 million dollars, they take care of you that way. But I think what's not what's not so great is, I've been damaged in other ways. I mean, when you think about the fact that I've been so well-taken care of but... you know, my owner—for instance, he's just just one person in the world, he's on the board of MoMA, he recently stepped down as the president of the board but he's still on the board. And, um, you know if I'm really happy he likes art but the money that makes it possible for me to be safe and to be seen by you all who will pay the admission price at MoMA—except for, you know, the days that are free—well, it's a whole system of harm that creates comfort for me and well-being for me but discomfort for others. For instance, everybody's read about the associations with my owner and Jeffrey Epstein and the entanglement with misogynist and predatory practices against underage women and and it's just horrible. There's also it's also the mercenary group called Constellis which used to be called Blackwater which among many other things was responsible for the massacre of 17 unarmed Iraqi civilians in Nisour Square in 2007 and those four assholes were just paraded, i mean, the... the murder... um, it's all, I mean...look at me, right? It's terrible. So, I'd like to invite all of you to think about a a world that that comes after the museum, you know, that i'm supposed to go into eventually where I can be looked after.

I'm honored that everybody likes me so much, but I don't think it needs to be at the expense of the well-being of people... that my owner has taken out on me but I don't know. this heart has me... "handle with care." "do not bend." It's some kind of letter... and photos oh my god! oh my god! Wow... "for my scream, love always, Red Blue. oh my god this brings back so many memories. i can even... i can smell the beach wood. oh my gosh! Wow! oh what a surprise. Here's the letter...

Dear Scream,

I hope this letter finds you in good shape, and that your pastel colors remain bright which among many other things was responsible for the massacre of 17 unarmed Iraqi civilians in Nisour Square in 2007 and those four assholes were just paraded, i mean, the... the murder... um, it's all, I mean...look at me, right? It's terrible. So, I'd like to invite all of you to think about a a world that that comes after the museum, you know, that i'm supposed to go into eventually where I can be looked after.

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great, great architecture. But if you raise really a lot of money, I will make the architecture disappear."

This connects so beautifully to the Strike MoMA Framework and Terms for Struggle document which states, “As the walls that artificially separate the museum from the world collapse, we reorient away from the institution and come together to make plans. Let us strike in all the ways possible to exit from the terms of the museum so we can set our own.”

This thinking really brings me back to my maker, Gerrit Rietveld, who always let me call him Gary. His whole ethos in building me came from a poem by Christian Morgentern called Der Aesthet, which goes like this:

“When I sit, I do not want / to sit like my seat-flesh likes / but rather like my seat-mind would, / if he were sitting, weave the chair for himself
That poem, which is also Gary’s instructions for others who want to build a chair just like me, gives a glimpse into a different world of chairs and what is possible! Our comrades outside the museum are giving us a glimpse into a different world of museums, and what is possible. Yes, museums can respond to calls for change that will lead to a reevaluation of the organization of the museum. Yes, museums can and should spend fewer resources on needless huge expansions and pampering billionaire-class donors, and more money can be spent on making contractual educators into full-time staff! Yes, museums can engage in an honest reckoning with and an accounting of the looted and stolen items in their collections, including those sold or taken during wars, genocides, and revolutions!

Is this really disassembling? No. I call it vision.

Scream, I wish you were here with me. The actions of the museum have given me micro-fractures in my red painted back, and I don’t think it can be restored. I’m stressed. I hope they listen and make radical changes. Things can’t continue like this! Only yesterday, I saw one of the painted yellow squares in Piet Mondrian’s Broadway Boogie Woogie try to jump from its canvas to its likely demise.

Me? Well, I’ve had fantasies about going into the plaza across 53rd street, joining the protesters and asking them to sit on me. How wonderful it would be to feel human buttocks on my seat again, a warm back resting against mine.

I miss you. Please write back.

Love,

Red Blue

[i’ll do better than write back. i’ll do better…]

(Appearing footsteps heard in the distance. The Scream reattaches himself to the wall)

My owner’s coming! Go! Go! GO!!!

Video link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7M-H0k8W4uVA&t=207s

[Chamber Music Playing with people chatting in the background, saying goodbye. Music fades]

Scream: i think they’re gone. (puts hands on back and stretches as he steps down from the wall where he is hanging). Oh, my back!

Hey everyone. uh i’ve been standing there and screaming for hours and, uh, my my owner had a cocktail party today. The director of museum came over introducing the new chairman of the board of trustees that my owner stepped down from but he’s still on the board of trustees, just not the chairman anymore. So, it’s like going from toxic philanthropy to botoxic philanthropy. it’s like rearranging the chairs on the titanic

Scream: (holds up signed picture from Red Blue) I’m till thinking about Red-Blue and i’m kind of losing it everyone… we’ve got to figure out something…we got to figure out something.

(moves over to unattended laptop) Well, luckily my owner left his laptop open and...let’s have a look here

[Camera changes to Scream’s POV and shows home screen of laptop] Scream: (disgustedly) And, of course his home page is Constellis! You fucking murderers..

...Let’s go to the MoMA collection…OK RedBlue, I gotta get your your museum number. I will get you out of there...All right...Red Blue chair...let’s be more specific...there we are...oh, the same photo you sent me...i don’t see any of these stress fractures...let’s get that museum inventory number.all right 487.1953. gift of Philip Johnson! what the fuck? Okay, no judgment...not on view? what are you trying to hide MoMA? What are you trying to hide?

(desperately, almost crying) oh man, Red Blue what are we gonna do what are we gonna do? I’m telling you people got a bad feeling about all of this...a bad feeling. all right one more thing let me just get the address of the place in the collection where it’s set up

Black Hole: Uh, hello? Is someone there? Hello? Are you ok? ...

Scream: Are you speaking to me?

Black Hole: Yes...i can’t see you...i heard you crying...i’m down here...
Scream: MoMA owns a Black Hole?
Scream: You're not on view...
Black Hole: Neither are you. I-I can't see you so well. Click me again.
Scream: What?
Black Hole: Click me
Scream: but I've only just met you.
Black Hole: Do it, please.
Scream: OK.
Black Hole: Harder...
Scream: Clicking...
Black Hole: Feels good…Double click
Scream: What?
Black Hole: but I've only just met you.
Black Hole: OK...now Zoom....
Scream: Any better?
Black Hole: Yes! I can see you now! wait a minute, you're that guy..
Scream: Here we go...
Black Hole: Yeah, you're him! I know you...you're on my tote bag!
Scream: OK.
Black Hole: Diego, check it out it's the guy on the tote bag!
Scream: I'm not a tote bag...
Black Hole: No seriously...Diego, get the tote bag!
Scream: Scream: Yeah
Black Hole: Shit's fucked up. All the other hostages are pissed.
Scream: Hostages?
Black Hole: Yeah, that's what we are calling ourselves now instead of artworks. We are being held for a ransom constantly being paid in rubble and blood. And it is getting worse. You can see the stress in the artworks.
Scream: I know. I got a letter last week from Red Blue.
Black Hole: Ah, Red Blue...my old flame...
Scream: (dumbfounded, jealous and hurt)
Black Hole: They're a chair. You thought you were the only one?
Scream: (feigning indifference) No...of course not...
Black Hole: Anyway, I have a plan! Not such a smart thing for a museum to own a black hole! I can bend space and time. Anything I pull in can have infinite pasts and infinite futures. Even...a Post-MoMA future...Oh, it's glorious, Tote Bag...
Scream: My name is Scream.
Black Hole: Anything that comes close to me turns to putty. It is called spaghettification.
Scream: Holy shit!
Black Hole: Infinite pasts. Infinite futures. Let me show you what a future looks like where we all get free.
Scream: (screams but can't be heard, because, black holes)
Black Hole: Welcome to the MoMA Multiverse!
Black Hole: (licks lips as Scream disappears into the Black Hole) Ah...Escalational Aesthetics!
Video link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnTLKk10S&v=184s

Black Hole: More from Moscow, 1928! Pay attention to the person on sitting atop the shoulders of another.
Black Hole: And, this just in from Diego, who just added a page to his sketchbook (shows Diego Rivera rendering of StrikeMoMA event)
Black Hole: Come closer scream!
Scream: What's happening to me? (Scream's head is being twisted in all different directions)
Black Hole: Anything that comes close to me turns to putty. It is called spaghettification.
Scream: Holy shit!
Black Hole: International Workers' Day! Behold, Diego Rivera's sketchbook drawings of May Day in Moscow from 1928, bought by Abby Rockefeller in 1931 to help fund the artist's exhibition at MoMA that same year!
Communique from Commandante Scream No. 4

The fourth Communique from Commandante Scream was sent from the Post-MoMA Future. After being sucked into the Black Hole, The Scream falls from the sky onto an idyllic beach, with turquoise waves of water gently washing ashore. As he rises from the sand, he spots someone familiar. Could it be? Indeed, it is Red-Blue, liberated from MoMA!

The two run toward each other, dance and spin together until finally kissing passionately on the sand. Finally, Red-Blue asks The Scream to sit on them. The scene ends with two lovers looking out at the horizon, and toward the Post-MoMA Future.

Video link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQq8C3lipk4

Final Communique from Commandante Scream No. 5

The Final Communique opens with Red-Blue, radiant in a garden. Whistling is heard offscreen. The Scream enters the frame.

The Scream: Hey everybody. It’s me. Your artwork, The Scream coming to you live from the post moma future and wow i’m so happy to be here. Me and red blue rekindled our relationship. i’m gardening every day and uh can’t wait for you all to get here in this paradise. there’s still reminders of what’s happened. come let me show you… so you remember when red blue told us about the stress fractures in their paint? and so here you can see…am i getting this right red blue? this one is from the museum’s relationship with constellis, formerly blackwater…this one is from barrick gold, and the Cisneros family. And once we get in here, and these deeper entanglements you can see all of these different fractures: General Dynamics…Blackrock…private prisons…I mean just look at this, this isn’t going away with any kind of wood oil or anything else. No conservator can fix this, but we’re free…We’re free.

So, a lot of us are getting free here. And how can you get here? Well let’s think about it and let’s think about it together. We’re gonna need each other because we’re all entangled in this mess and not one pair of hands can undo all of these knots that have been so tightly wound over and over the years.

(Scream is startled)

Ah! Alberto! You snuck up on me there! Alberto joined us here in the Post-MoMA Future. Item number 632-1994 from MoMA’s collection. Walking quickly under the rain from 1948/1949. (To Alberto) You were cast in 1949 right? Va bene. Si…I mean, he just uh completely left the rest of his base behind! i spent the last week polishing the rough edges of the base. It’s good to have you Alberto! (reaches for some greens in the garden) Hey! I got some rucola for you. You want some rucola? (Feeds Alberto some rucola) Bene…yeah, you love the rucola. Okay, okay (lifts Alberto onto knee) Say hi!

So anyway i don’t know… let’s think creatively. Maybe if all the artists who are in MoMA’s collection would reopen their editions and make works for places that are more aligned with their thinking… that’s a way of moving forward! But we’ll be here, just waiting for everybody’s exit. Everybody’s exodus. We will be here waiting for you. And we’ll even have some tea waiting! (Holds up Meret Oppenheim’s Le Déjeuner En Fourrure). I mean, Meret’s doing well but as you can see she’s a little fluffier than normal but this is part of the de-stressing of the artworks. We’re trying to, you know, comfort them. It’s a little bit like a cat who whose fur raises at the site of danger. (Scream gently talks to Meret) It’s okay, you’re safe now.

So cheers! Strike MoMA! Here’s to the artists! See you in the Post-MoMA Future!

Video link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReECWGZnKkM