

Decolonizing: The Curriculum, the Museum, and the Mind



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Series Introduction

**Lolita Jablonskienė and
Ieva Pleikienė**

10 Almost ten years ago, in 2011, Vilnius Academy of Arts began its practice-based doctoral studies programme in visual arts and design. From the very beginning the Department of Doctoral Studies raised questions around what it means for artists and designers to do research alongside their creative practice. And, when we say 'alongside', we're asking what it means for research to be *in addition to* or *in dialogue with* creative practice, but also and more importantly what it means for that creative practice to *emerge from and be shaped by* research?) What's the point of doing it? And, what might this kind of research look like, be, and do? We are still asking these questions genuinely and openly.

This book series comes out of the Academy's ongoing commitment to debating research from different perspectives. The titles of the four books in the Series are (1) *Research: Practitioner | Curator | Educator* (2) *Decolonising: the Museum, the Curriculum, and the Mind* (3) *Do The Right Thing*, and (4) *What If? The Future of History in Post-Truth Times*.

The Series as a project is born of a desire to listen to, learn from, and extend the horizons of 'local' academic knowledges via a course entitled 'Research as Praxis' for PhD students led by prof. Marquard Smith who in turn invited Vilnius-based curators, practitioners, critics, academics, and educators to be in public dialogue with international guests from the arts and humanities.

The National Gallery of Art (NGA) in Vilnius, which has many long-term associations with the Academy, was invited to join the initiative with a view to opening up a debate on our shared interests in urgent topics concerning research and praxis to a wider public beyond academia including artists, designers, researchers, curators, and museumgoers.

NGA served as a site to host the majority of these discussions, and contributed to the discourse by necessarily transforming more exclusively academic concerns through the perspectives of curatorial and educational research and practice. Arguments proposed and debated during the events confirmed the critical potential of 'learning in public' as prof. Marquard Smith aptly called this joint endeavour between the Academy and the Museum. This series of books consolidates and shares the diverse knowledges generated through such a collaboration.

Introduction

Decolonizing: The Curriculum, the Museum, and the Mind

Marquard Smith

moment. Such challenges and possibilities flow from the Americas of the South, the post-Soviet, ends of the British Empire, and elsewhere, amplifying the voices of the oppressed, and enabling us to see and think, educate, write, curate, and know otherwise.

To decolonize, then, is to democratise.

So what are the benefits of this decolonizing impulse, its rhetoric, activism, its protest? What does it really mean – conceptually and practically even – for the museum and its collection, the art school and the university's curriculum, the mind, and knowledge itself to decolonize? And what might a decolonizing aesthetics, politics, and ethics be and do?

These words were included in the public programmes announcement for an event on 'decolonizing' at Lithuania's Nacionalinė dailės galerija, the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius, an event co-organised with Vilnius Academy of Arts. It was the second of five related events organised by the Academy in the academic year 2018-19; three of the five events, including the one on decolonizing, were collaborations with the Gallery. That event forms the basis of this publication.

The events, in chronological order, were:

- 'Research: Practitioner | Curator | Educator', also at the National Gallery;
- 'Decolonizing: The Museum, the Curriculum, and the Mind';
- 'Do The Right Thing', a project composed of an exhibition of work by 21 PhD students in the 5,000-square foot Titanikas Gallery at Vilnius

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The Decolonizing debate is raging passionately!

It's raging in our public institutions, in our universities and art schools, and on the streets. Artists, designers, academics, critics, curators, educators, and activists internationally are demanding a decolonizing of the museum, a decolonizing of the curriculum, a decolonizing of knowledge, and a decolonizing of the mind.

Why? Because as 'inventions' of the West's global blueprint, museums, institutions of higher education, and the worlds of art and design are always already aligned with the logic of coloniality.

We can be glad, then, about the emergence of decolonizing perspectives and practices from different continents, territories, and geographies; all the more urgent in our fraught political

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Academy of Arts, accompanied by a catalogue, a pirate radio broadcast, debates and workshops, a club night, and a poetry slam, all led by the students themselves;

- 'Writing: Academic, Critical, Performative', a 'conversation' at the Vilnius Book Fair; and
- 'What If? The Future of "History" in Post-Truth Times', another event also at the Gallery.¹

14 These events were the public-facing components of a course I began teaching in 2018-19 entitled 'Research as Praxis' with PhD students in the Department of Doctoral Studies at Vilnius Academy of Arts, Lithuania's premier (and in fact only) art and design school. The course is structured as four two-day thematic Intensives, each including lectures, seminars, workshops and the events themselves. Each Intensive is an occasion for students to work closely together, and with visiting practitioners, academics, curators, and educators (who also contribute to the events) on a particular theme common, germane, and pressing for their studies.

Each Intensive takes as its starting point a 'key text' around which activities congregate, and for the theme of 'decolonizing' that text was 'Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive' by Achille Mbembe, the Cameroonian philosopher, political theorist, and public intellectual.

The course encourages students to think explicitly about situating or orienting themselves, and their PhD projects in relations with:

- practices (art and design practices above all, but also histories and theories of art and design, art

1 Apart from the event on 'Writing', all of the others appear in book form in this Series.

- and design education, and practices of pedagogy);
- institutionally (in relation to the art school, the classroom, the studio, the gallery, the public/civic domain, the art world and design industries, etc.); and
- planetarily (in relation to ecologies or networks of practitioners and practices, curators and curating, critics and criticism, institutions and audiences, the market/economy, publics and their own communities of practice).²

This second Intensive circled around decolonizing the curriculum and the art school, the museum, and the mind – matters of considerable urgency in institutions of higher education, in cultural institutions, and for social activism in the UK, the Americas, Canada, South Africa, and elsewhere.

15 The event on decolonizing that took place at the National Gallery in December 2018 couldn't then have come at a better (or worse) time: with the seemingly unstoppable resurgence of national populism, xenophobia, distrust, fear, and outright hatred that accompanies (and leads to) elections results we've seen recently in Austria, Brazil, Hungary, Italy, and Sweden, along with ongoing far-right-ism in Poland, post-Brexit Britain, and in Trump's Divided States of America; and the nasty behaviour that comes with it; that is sanctioned by it.

It turned out, though, that in post-Soviet and post-Socialist Lithuania, with its near 50-year history of military *occupation* by the USSR, it was in fact *us*, the event's 'international guests' with our talk of decolonizing, who were the new colonizers!

We *do* live in interesting times!

2 I borrow the word 'planetarily' from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

Curricula

So yes, the decolonizing debate is raging passionately.

We feel it in our institutions of higher education, when we ask:

Who's teaching? What are we teaching? How's it being taught? Under what conditions, and via what under-acknowledged epistemological, organisational, and behavioural assumptions is it being taught? How and why is structural or systemic racism (as well as classism, sexism, and ableism), woven as it is into the very fabric of a building or curriculum or the protocols of a discipline such as Fine Art, Product Design, Fashion, and so on?³ Who are these lessons being taught to? Who's in the room? (And, by extension, who isn't?) And, who's it working for?⁴

18 (As an aside, it's worth mentioning early on that racism isn't always only prejudice and discrimination against *visible* difference such as skin colour. In a country like Lithuania, a cohort of students in an institution of higher education, and the staff therein also, are going to carry with them ideologically and affectively the legacies of terrestrial changes and human migration. A country with citizens of such mixed heritage can manifest its racism by way of, for instance, the relative *invisibility* of whiteness, and the white privilege that's then granted unevenly in the hierarchy of white supremacy. Lithuanian students and staff will rub shoulders with Lithuanian Jews, Poles, Russians,

3 See for instance Tristan Schultz et al, 'What Is at Stake with Decolonizing Design? A Roundtable, *Design and Culture*, Volume 10, Issue 1, 2018 pp. 81-101.

4 This final question is one asked by artist Onyeka Igwe (<https://www.onyekaigwe.com>) during the 5th Nida Doctoral School at the Venice Biennial entitled 'Fight The Power 2019/1989: We, the Ungovernable' in August 2019 (<http://www.nidacolony.lt/en/nida-doctoral-school/fight-the-power-2019-1989-we-the-ungovernable>).

Belarussians, Ukrainians, and so on, where issues of race, national identity, and racialisation may well be less visible, but this doesn't mean these issues aren't shaping the curriculum, the discipline, studio culture, and institutional policies and protocols, as well as mentalities and behaviours that are discriminatory because of it.)

When it comes to the curriculum, then, but also more widely throughout the art school or university, what might decolonizing or decolonization involve, and what form might it take? It might be:

- that individuals at every level push for the institution to be transparent and accountable vis-à-vis its policies and protocols; and that the institution demonstrate daily its commitment to drive race (as well as gender, sexuality, class, and disability) equality and tackle discrimination; and for such a commitment to permeate the institution from admissions and recruitment to salaries and salary anomalies, working conditions and training, collegiality, curriculum, and so forth;
- an emphatic, reflexive foregrounding of the historical (but also the contemporary) as contexts in which scholarly and artistic knowledges are produced, distributed, and consumed;
- a critical appraisal of *what* knowledges come to the fore, and by what means, and which don't and why;
- an attention to the 'value' attributed to certain knowledges, and ways of knowing and coming to know, at the expense of and to the detriment of alternative (and often Indigenous) knowledge systems, practices, and modes of being;
- an understanding of the consequences of privileging Western knowledges, epistemologies, and aesthetics; both a de-Western-izing of canons and references and reading lists, *and* an

internationalizing and cosmopolitan-izing of sources and resources (with the availability of open source materials there's no excuse not to do this);

- a turn away from an ongoing, widespread, and injurious adherence to Enlightenment epistemologies, especially universalism, and a turn towards being 'open to epistemic diversity', a point made by Achille Mbembe in his article 'Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive', as I shall go on to discuss;
- an incitement to shift and transform radically the dynamics that shape the classroom or lecture theatre or studio as places of teaching to environments for non-hierarchical power-knowledge pedagogies of learning, listening, and practicing (in which a student's experience [as knowledge, whether formal or tacit] would be solicited, heard, and validated as legit);
- and, that such decolonizing or decolonization might call on an art school (and art and design *practice*) to put pressure on, to question and challenge 'academic writing' as that which is necessarily proper to (i.e. the right way of discoursing on) practice and turn instead to a mode of writing that's for instance more properly critical, creative, performative, or speculative.

Such practices might be instances of decolonization as epistemic disobedience, a term I take from the Argentinian scholar of the global geopolitics of knowledge Walter D. Mignolo.⁵

5 Walter D. Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26: 7-8, 2009, pp. 159-181 and Walter D. Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto', *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1: 2, 2011 (Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/62j3w283>)



Figure 3. Rhodes Must Fall protests at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, September 2015.



Figure 4. Decolonize Education protest at Oriel College, University of Oxford, 2016.

(For me, such epistemic disobedience ought to be operating at PhD level where the student by way of their project should be *making their own curriculum* – researching and developing their practice in ways that assemble actively an historical/theoretical/conceptual context, a group of allies with whom the sensibility of their practice aligns, an image archive, a form and format, a bibliography, and so on, all of which are *shaped by their practice* and for their project.)

Why does a decolonization of the curriculum matter? An obvious question perhaps, but one that deserves asking again, and deserves a clear answer:

Because we should want to, and because if we don't want to we should be compelled to question our epistemic worldview fundamentally, our assumptions and perspectives regarding values and qualities and judgements, and our institution's structural biases that preserve asymmetrical power relations and thus an inequitable status quo.

A perhaps simpler and more instrumentalised outcome, but one that's no less true because of it, is that a decolonization of the curriculum will offer students a wider range of types of art and design and fashion and architecture (and ways of thinking about and discoursing on them) that will create an expanded field which will feed into, enrich, and transform their practice, and thus the industries in which they will go on to ply their trade.

The less instrumentalised and more idealistic version of this is that we're hoping to work towards a more cosmopolitan cultural imaginary of planetary proportions that might enable our students to flourish (thereby transforming the creative sector), and for our educational and cultural institutions to be torn down

and re-built on deeply-rooted foundations of equitability, transparency, accountability, and social justice, creating cultures that are brimming with care, criticality, curiosity, and invention.

Cultural Institutions

In our cultural institutions, we also feel the passion of the raging decolonizing debate, when we ask:

- much like in art schools and universities, how is a cultural institution, and all the individuals therein, pushing for transparency and accountability with regards to equitability and tackling discrimination, and evidencing that commitment by way of its recruitment and staffing policies and practices, but also its collections strategy, exhibitions and display, interpretation, public programming, commissioning, engagement with audiences, etc?
- 24 • if my local publicly funded museum – a ‘universal’ or ‘encyclopaedic’ museum born of the imperial moment, as most ‘national’ museums are – has in its permanent collection a Benin Bronze, an Ethiopian Tabot, artefacts from the Old Summer Palace in Beijing, are they asking who owns them, and whether they should be deaccessioned, restituted, repatriated?
- what story do these cultural institutions want to tell (by way of their signage, labels, exhibitions, public programming, wayfinding, media & comms, etc.), knowing full well, as they should, that (writing, narrativising, exhibiting, and discoursing) History (including their own institutional history) is always already, and always only ever relational, provisional, ideological, fictional?⁶

6 Recent exhibitions on/as decolonization abound, from Copenhagen to Mexico City, see for instance: <https://museumsandmigration.wordpress.com/2018/09/11/decolonizing-appearance-at-camp->



Figure 5. Uncredited image, used by *The Economist* in an article dated June 2018 (<https://www.economist.com/prospero/2018/06/01/the-campaign-to-decolonise-culture-in-britain>)



Figure 6. 'Maasai leaders visit British museums in attempt to decolonise collections', title of article by Afroze Fatima Zaidi, published in *The Canary*, January 2020 (<https://www.thecanary.co/uk/news/2020/01/31/maasai-leaders-visit-british-museums-in-attempt-to-decolonise-collections/>

- when I visit or collaborate with a cultural institution, *does it matter* (to me) that it owes its existence to the legacy of chattel slavery in British colonies in the Caribbean and mainland Americas (Tate), to forced labour in the Congo (the Leverhulme Trust), to a paradigm of curiosity born of the entrepreneurial-capitalist-colonial-Victorian-mindset (Wellcome Collection), and *how* should it matter?⁷
- when I wander in a cultural institution's exterior environment, or the pseudo-public (i.e. privatized) spaces of a city, as I look at (or fail to see) monuments commemorating colonization (or occupation), colonizers and slave owners, does my protest at these white supremacist (or totalitarian) reminders of the colonial era (or era of occupation) provoke me to tear them down or to sit with them, considering critically how the past resonates, persists; and to use them as 'teachable moments', as sites for congregating uncomfortably and conversing critically?⁸

copenhagen/ and <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/170511/upcoming-exhibitions/>.

- 7 See for instance Sumaya Kassim, 'The Museum is the Master's House: An Open Letter to Tristram Hunt', 26th July 2019 (<https://medium.com/@sumayakassim/the-museum-is-the-masters-house-an-open-letter-to-tristram-hunt-e72d75a891c8>), and Tristram Hunt, 'Should museums return their colonial artefacts?' 29th June 2019: https://amp.theguardian.com/culture/2019/jun/29/should-museums-return-their-colonial-artefacts?__twitter_impression=true
- 8 See for instance Tyler Stiem, 'Statue Wars', *The Guardian*, Wednesday 26th September, 2018:

(The fervour around whether or not to tear down an existing monument or speak with/against it – by way of for instance the ‘statue wars’ in the USA, the Rhodes Must Fall campaign in South Africa and the UK, and decommunization in ‘the Former East’ – is equally intense incidentally for a situation where there is *no* monument, as is evident from the ongoing heated discussions around the redesign of Lukiškių Square in Vilnius.)⁹

- how meaningful (in principle and in practice) is an institution’s access, diversity, and inclusion (AD&I) policy and strategy (in relation to audiences [and the exhibitions and public programming they attend], but also collections, resources, staff, board members, etc.) when it comes to equitability, civic rights, and social rights?

28 And, bear in mind that this question is all the more challenging when AD&I is thought in terms of institutions and systems, structures and infrastructures, and mentalities and behaviours, given that *such policies and strategies aren’t in and of themselves synonyms for justice*; as political activist Angela Davis has said recently:

I have a hard time accepting diversity as a synonym for justice. Diversity is a corporate strategy. It’s a strategy designed to ensure that the institution

9 See Skaidra Trilupaitytė, ‘Monuments, Memory, and Mutating Public Space: Some Initiatives in Vilnius’, *Lithianus: Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences*, 60: 2, Summer 2014 (Monuments, Memory, and Mutating Public Space: Some Initiatives in Vilnius’ (http://www.lituanus.org/2014/14_2_02Trilupaityte.html), the exhibition ‘*Non-Existent Monuments: A Walking Tour of Vilnius*’ at the National Art Gallery in 2011 (curated by Eglė Mikalajūnaitė, Rasa Antanavičiūtė, and Živilė Etevičiūtė) and ‘Not a Proposal. Letter on the modified (1974) postcard’ (2010-2017) by Konstantinas J. Bogdanas.

functions in the same way that it functioned before, except now that you have some black faces and brown faces. It’s a difference that doesn’t make a difference.¹⁰

Diversification ≠ decolonization, then, as artist susan pui san lok writes in the recent issue of the journal *Art History*’s Questionnaire on Decolonizing Art History with regards to the uneven distribution of unacknowledged labour related to ‘diversity work’.¹¹ Likewise inclusion (and the discourse of inclusion in the neoliberal order) is not decolonization, as scholar Erich W. Steinman has put it.¹²

Ultimately, what is to be done, then, by cultural institutions vis-à-vis decolonizing or decolonization, by way of them, and also *to* them?

Minds (and Bodies)

29 In our minds and bodies – and our hearts and spirits and souls, if we’re so inclined – we think and feel (in ways that are more embodied, visceral, and affective) the passion of the raging decolonizing debate, when we ask:

How does being subjected to or enabled by the curriculum, the institution, power and authority, mentalities and behaviours make us think and feel?

10 <http://dailytrojan.com/2015/02/23/civil-rights-leader-angela-davis-speaks-at-bovard/>

11 See susan pui san lok, in Catherine Grant and Dorothy Price, ‘Decolonizing Art History’, *Art History*, February, 2020, pp. 8-66; pp. 34-38, p. 37.

12 See Erich W. Steinman, ‘Decolonization Not Inclusion: Indigenous Resistance to American Settler Colonialism’, *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 2: 2, 2016, 219–236. See also Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, ‘Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor’, *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1: 1, 2012, 1–40.

What do we think about what we feel, and how do we think and feel it? How do we wear that feeling? How do we wear it about our person – is it a burden or an incitement? Are we victimised or scandalized by it? How do we feel, *how are we made to feel* our race and class and gender and sexuality and embodied-ness, or are we oblivious to (and thus licensed by) such despotisms or apparatuses of inequity? And what are you doing about it?

To ask this differently, and to ask it in a way that's (at least for a moment) wilfully and ungracefully exploiting the racialization of minds and bodies: how do black and brown folks, and white folks, wear such inequity differently, and what are we doing about it, if anything? Do black and brown bodies ever 'see themselves' in the images and objects and environments that constitute learning about the contexts for art and design practice in the art school, and if so how do they figure? Do they ever 'read themselves' in histories of art and design (or 'theory') that are taught to them, that appear on bibliographies, that are available as resources in the library, that they stumble across (either by accident or design) and that they hold close to their hearts, or that circulate informally, functioning as unofficial (perhaps even clandestine) guides? Did it ever bother them that they weren't there, that they weren't present and visible, and what did they think about it, and what did they feel about it? Was it true and fair and just, and, if not, what did they do about it? Conversely, did it ever even occur to white folks to notice that they *were* present, that they *were* visible, that they always over-populate the histories and theories of art and design practice, and its discourses, and the creative and cultural industries, and what did *they* do about it, and why did they do nothing?

Over thirty years ago, American anti-racist activist Peggy McIntosh characterised white privilege as 'an invisible weightless knapsack':

[white privilege is] an invisible package of unearned assets that [we] can count on cashing in each day, but about which I [am] 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks. Describing white privilege', she concluded, 'makes one newly accountable'.¹³

Might white folks now notice their presence and visibility and over-population of histories and theories and industries? If they didn't do anything about it before, might they now?

Because there is ignorance, there is willful ignorance; and then there is what Rosalba Icaza and Rolando Vázquez, professors of global politics in the Netherlands, have recently characterised as 'arrogant ignorance'.¹⁴

I don't want to play the blame game, I just want to point to the fact that, from all sides, colonization of the mind is ideology or interpellation or subjectification or, in the context of this publication, a way of drawing attention

13 See Peggy McIntosh, 'White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack' (<https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf>). A version of the text first appeared in *Peace and Freedom Magazine*, July/August, 1989, pp. 10-12.

14 See Rosalba Icaza and Rolando Vázquez, 'Diversity or Decolonisation? Researching Diversity at the University of Amsterdam', in *Decolonizing the University*, edited by Gurminder K. Bhambra, Kerem Nişancioğlu, and Dalia Gabriel, London: Pluto Press, pp.108-128, 2018. For more on agnotology (the study of ignorance) in general, see for instance Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger, eds., *Agnotology: The Making & Unmaking of Ignorance*: Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.

**IF YOU DON'T THINK
WHITE PRIVILEGE EXISTS**

**CONGRATULATIONS, YOU
ARE ENJOYING THE
BENEFITS OF IT.**

Figure 7. White Privilege (<https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-privilege.html>)

to the process of beginning to decolonize the mind, a phrase I take undeniably from Kenyan thinker, author, and activist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's book *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, published back in 1986[1981].¹⁵

In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ writes of the use/imposition of the English language in Africa as a 'cultural bomb'. For Ngũgĩ, this bomb 'annihilate[s] a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environments, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves'. Such 'colonial alienation', as Ngũgĩ calls it, is ultimately an alienation from one's self, identity, and heritage, vis-a-vis linguistic oppression' (p. 28).¹⁶

(Living in a language other than one's own still alienates hundred of millions of the world's population. An estrangement by way of linguistic oppression, albeit a far less violent one, is familiar too to those in Europe and elsewhere for whom English has become the *lingua franca* of globalized higher education, the museum sector, and the art world with regards to the injunction to *have to* teach or publish or present or converse or to barter and exchange in English.)

(And before Lithuanians remind me that they were never colonized but only ever occupied, I'd suggest that the idea of decolonizing the mind is as relevant to those occupied as it is to those colonized, and I'd also propose that while a legacy of colonialism per se might not be so 'visible' in the Baltic States, what certainly is visible is the legacy of the Soviet regime and Socialism, woven as it is into the fabric of Lithuanian industrialization, immigration, housing estates, the

15 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, London: James Currey, 1986.

16 It is worth noting that for Ngũgĩ language is both a tool for imperialism and a weapon of resistance.

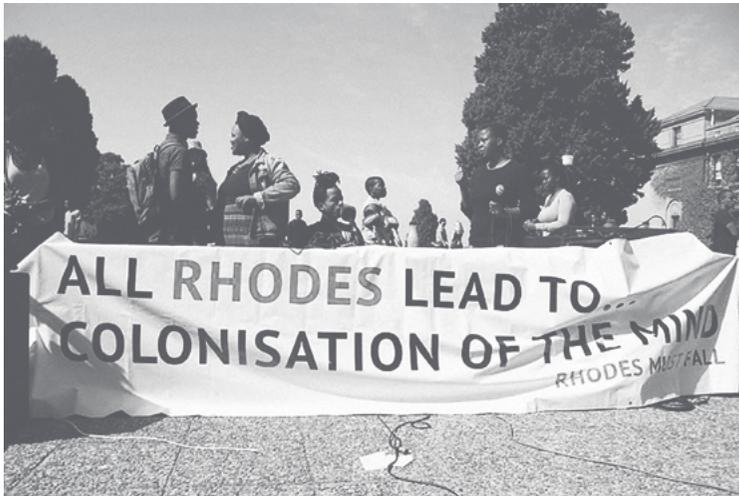


Figure 8. 'All Rhodes lead to... colonisation of the mind', uncredited image, sourced from event at UCL, June 2016, on campus protest in South Africa and the US, then and now: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/institute-of-advanced-studies/events/2016/jun/four-campus-four-protests-south-africa-and-united-states-then-and-now>

education system, public sculptures, senses of history and temporality itself, and yes, ways of thinking and feeling and doing that we might call subjectification.¹⁷ That in Lithuania more than 70% of over-40s speak Russian, and more than 80% of under-30s are English-speakers attests to this, I think.)

My point? Coloniality affects all of us; so shouldn't we all be sharing collectively in the labour of provoking and sustaining this process of decolonization?

If we're feeling such colonial alienation in higher education and in cultural institutions, that means there's work to be done! (If we're *not* feeling it, then there's even more work to do! Because that'd be evidence of our ignorance or willful ignorance or arrogant ignorance, right?) But who's doing the work, and what is to be done? Who is already doing the work, the labour, the emotional labour? Who is being asked to serve as an institution's racial conscience, and who is being *expected* to carry the bulk of the burden of labouring for decolonization?¹⁸

Why should students and academics and curators of colour be doing all the work, not least because The Race Question is really The Problem of Whiteness: I'm the fucking problem, me and people like me that are racialized as white, and thus a share of the solution too. What about our complicity, *my* complicity in instituting and endorsing alienating curricula, research cultures, funding regimes, forms of collegiality, hiring

17 See Madina Tlostanova, *What Does It Mean to Be Post-Soviet? Decolonial Art from the Ruins of the Soviet Empire*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2018; and Skaidra Trilupaitytė, *ibid.*

18 This is not a new question of course, and Sara Ahmed was writing astutely on the relative 'value' of 'diversity and equality work' in higher education, and who's expected to do it, almost a decade ago in their book *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, Durham: Duke University press, 2012.

practices, institutional policies, exhibition programming, and so on?

Here's a decent start, why don't I step up, take some responsibility, and give a better account of myself! I should recognise my white privilege, locate my own cultural whiteness, and subject it to auto-critique. I do, and I laugh at my own white fragility! I wipe away my white crocodile tears! Now, what's to be done? Now, how can I put that privilege to work?¹⁹

On exactly this point, in the most recent issue of the journal *Art History*, feminist art historian and cultural theorist Griselda Pollock writes:

I have been working on this [ending patriarchal, racist, and heteronormative assumptions] for fifty years and have been challenged over those five decades for my own indifference, blindness and stupidity. The key thing is to respond with real work when our own racism, sexism, class privilege and colonial mind-set is called out. Decolonizing must also include continuous engagement with the fabric of human life composed of the threads of race, gender, sexuality, sexual difference, geopolitical inequality and the brutality that is globalizing capitalism.

I'm with Pollock. We're talking positionality here, white folks, and, for me today, the process of decolonization, but also pedagogy and collaboration and activism more generally, begins with positionality. In the interests of being open and transparent and accountable, I feel that it's necessary to foreground my own position as an academic and a curator; as a privileged white,

straight, middle-aged man; as a London-born German-Polish-Jew (White Other, but still white) with a British passport, and the benefits that come with that (even now that Britain has left the EU); as someone who has the power and authority (by way of higher education, cultural institutions, exhibitions, public programming, and collaborative publication projects) to create conditions where that power and authority can be shared, re-distributed, relinquished. I'm trying to be a better ally, or, rather, a better accomplice – because at this time it seems imperative not simply to cooperate with others per se but pointedly to commit crimes against power and authority!

Am I doing enough? No. Are you?

Why aren't I working every day to question, call out, and dismantle systemic structural racism (and classism, sexism, ableism, etc.) in the curriculum, in higher education, and in cultural institutions?

Doing this work is in all our interests, right? I think it is. I guess some think it's more in their interests than others (or more in the interests of others than in their own), that some have more to gain and some have more to lose, but it isn't about winners and losers, is it? If you think it is, get over it! It's about equitability, it's about social justice, it's about doing the right thing!

Which is why, whenever there is individual or institutional disapproval of or pushback on a decolonization initiative, we have to ask: who is such an initiative threatening, why does it threaten them, and what does it threaten?

This work *should* come at a cost.

19 A useful 'guide' to white allyship, especially for white folks in the museum sector, is Mike Murawski, 'Interrupting White Dominant Culture in Museums' (<https://medium.com/@murawski27/interrupting-white-dominant-culture-in-museums-f5b58d29e10>, 2019 ongoing)

For Epistemic Diversity

For me decolonization concerns the inequity that's already and always integral to structures and infrastructures, the all too human beliefs and behaviours that perpetuate them, and how we might work towards eliminating such inequalities and behaviours.

One such foundational inequity is, as I've noted, that ongoing, widespread, and injurious adherence to Enlightenment epistemologies, especially universalism, a point made by Achille Mbembe in 'Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive'. In that article, Mbembe speaks about the adherence to such epistemologies, these systems of knowledge, these dominant traditions and tropes of post-Enlightenment, Euro-centric thought. Simultaneously, he issues a call for knowledge production that's 'open to epistemic diversity'.

To that end, Mbembe is keen to demystify history and demystify whiteness. He's interested in the decolonization of the university, the museum, and the mind – for the context of this publication I might adapt this into the art school, cultural institutions in general, and the intimacies of our thinking, being, and becoming. For Mbembe, such a decolonization starts with a de-privatization and re-habilitation of the public space, a re-definition of what is public, of what pertains to the realm of *the common*, and the consequent *democratization of access* to it. 'Because it does not belong to anyone in particular', Mbembe says, 'it must be equally shared between equals', since, he goes on, everyone has 'a right to belong', and this 'rightful sense of ownership' entitled all of us to say: "I belong here".

Here Mbembe draws on Frantz Fanon, the psychiatrist and political philosopher of anti-colonialism born in the

French colony of Martinique, for whom, Mbembe says, 'struggles for decolonization are first and foremost about self-ownership. They are struggles to repossess, to take back, if necessary by force that which is ours unconditionally and, as such, belong to us.' In Fanon's eyes, Mbembe says, 'self-ownership is a precondition, a necessary step towards *the creation of new forms of life* that could genuinely be characterized as fully human'. Decolonization is, he continues, 'about reshaping, turning human beings once again into craftsmen and craftswomen who, in reshaping matters and forms, need[] not to look at the pre-existing models and need[] not use them as paradigms.'

Such rights to belong, along with Fanon's call to 'provincialize' Europe (which is to say, to turn our backs on Europe, to not take it as a model) necessitates and valorizes, says Mbembe when speaking of environments for learning, different forms of knowledge and intelligence, and a change in student-teacher relations: to 'reinvent *a classroom without walls* in which we are all *co-learners*; a university [and he might be speaking of cultural institutions here also] that is capable of convening *various publics in new forms of assemblies that become points of convergence of and platforms for the redistribution of different kinds of knowledges*.'

Towards the end of his article, Mbembe speaks about a radical cosmopolitan 'pluriverse'. Not the universal, but the pluriversal, and by extension not the university, but the pluriversity. As he says, '*knowledge can only be thought of as universal if it is by definition pluriversal*'. I am convinced by this, but I will leave it to Mbembe's article to convince you (if you need convincing) of knowledge production that's open to epistemic diversity, the creation of new forms of life, and of the radical cosmopolitan pluriverse! Suffice

to say, for me this is crucial for our PhD students in thinking about their research projects, in fact for all our students, and all of us academics and administrators and curators and educators and critics in the art school, the university, cultural institutions, and the cultural and creative industries.

Decolonization as a Process

A word of caution: today 'decolonizing' has become a fashionable buzzword, and we must be wary of this. Every institution of higher education, every cultural institution, every arts organisation seems to be developing policy, organising workshops, agitating and activism-ing, buying into the debate in order to contribute to shaping it. There is a danger, in other words, that it becomes co-opted, if it hasn't already, by well-meaning liberals doing the right thing (wanting to be seen to be doing the right thing or not wanting to be seen to not be doing the right thing), and a neo-liberal version of the internationalisation or diversity agenda. Which is why we must be careful, to echo the words of Angela Davis on diversity quoted above, that 'decolonizing' itself doesn't become just another tick box exercise, a righteous but ultimately empty rhetorical rallying cry, a corporate strategy even, a difference that doesn't make a difference.

This is why in my Introduction, I'm agitating not for decolonizing per se but rather for *decolonization as a process*. This is to acknowledge and struggle with the fact that:

- decolonization is a process because, as Walter D. Mignolo put it, 'l[ic]oloniality is never over, it's all over';²⁰

20 Ignacio López-Calvo, 'Coloniality is not over, it's all over', interview

- institutions of higher education, disciplines and their protocols, curricula, pedagogies, and cultural institutions are almost all always already mired in – and actually products of – the national-imperial-colonial-capitalist nexus. As such because they are a locus of colonialism and colonial legacies, *they can never actually be decolonized*, but they can and must undertake an engaging, challenging, and relentless *process of decolonization* (not least because they can handle it).
- yes, these institutions are products of and shaped by this nexus, but they also continue to be shaped by it. This is to recognise that *post-colonialism* isn't simply the temporal period *after which* colonialism came to an end but rather a marker to designate what it mean *to live in the wake*, as Christina Sharpe puts it with such heart-breaking power, in 'the state of wakefulness', in 'the wake of the unfinished project of emancipation', which is also to live both with the dead of colonialism, and the never-ending legacies and after-lives of colonialism.²¹ (If the 'post' of post-colonialism does offer even a sliver of optimism, hope, and possibility for a time *after* colonialism, the incessant *process of decolonization* confirms the never-ending process of dismantling it, and makes it incontrovertible that this work is unremitting.)
- since it is tied to concomitant processes relating to class, gender, sexuality, and able-ism, to call for *decolonization as a process* is also to locate a nexus of inter-sectional inequities, and engineer its overthrow;
- to foreground such inequity is also to acknowledge Indigenous dispossession, and support struggles

with Dr. Walter Mignolo, *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 6:2, Part II, 2014, Spring 2016, pp. 175-84.

21 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

for Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, and listen for and learn from genealogies of Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous genealogies of knowledge;

- since *decolonization as a process* is so contingent on epistemology (and institutions and structures and infrastructures and behaviours as knowledge), it necessitates that post-Enlightenment, Euro-centric thought butt up against situated knowledge, tacit knowledge, experiential knowledge, and Indigenous genealogies of knowledge. They must come to the fore in order not only to be 'legitimised' as knowledges and knowledge systems and ways of knowing and speaking – along with the voices that will be 'legitimized' because of this – but also because they will *put such unbearable pressure* on established institutions, structures, infrastructures, and behaviours that they can no longer carry nor comfort themselves;
- 42 • in their place is knowledge production that is, following Mbembe, 'open to epistemic diversity'; and that embraces universal knowledge for humanity 'via a *horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic traditions*' leading to radical cosmopolitan pluriversalism!

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Decolonizing: The Curriculum, the Museum, and the Mind tries to identify where we're at and where we might be going vis-à-vis the idea of decolonizing – better, *the process of decolonization* – in higher education, museums and galleries, and the ongoing legacies of colonization that shape structures and infrastructures, policies and protocols, mentalities and behaviours, and minds and bodies.²²

22 While decolonizing may for some be a theory, an interpretive strategy, or a methodology, and a useful one too, calls for

For this book, contributors to the original event at Lithuania's National Gallery of Art, all here, were asked to 'set the scene' with regards to their 'take' on 'decolonizing', to raise fundamental questions and concerns, and to begin to map a few directions for further consideration, and offer thoughts, however provisional, on future potentialities for decolonizing itself. That event, along with the extended discussion contributed to so actively by the audience, was captured and has been transcribed, edited carefully, and forms the bulk of this publication.

It is frontloaded by Achille Mbembe's article 'Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive'. His article is, as I've noted, the key compulsory reading for the second Intensive on the 'Research as Praxis' course in the Department of Doctoral Studies at Vilnius Academy of Arts, and was a provocation and springboard for those contributing to the event at the Gallery. I thank Achille warmly here, along with the other contributors, and the active participation of audience members at the National Gallery of Art. I also thank administrator-curandera Teresa Cisneros and artist Andrea Francke who were kind enough to write an Afterword to this publication, offering an additional perspective from the borderlands of the Americas, to join contributors working on the Arab region and its diaspora, England and its Imperial legacies, the post-Soviet condition, Lithuania under occupation, and South Africa.²³

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decolonizing often miss the fundamental truth laid bare by the process of decolonization which is, as I've noted above, that institutions and disciplines and protocols and behaviours devised by the national-imperial-colonial-capitalist nexus can never actually be decolonized.

23 Thanks also need to be extended to the invisible hands that are so often instrumental in turning ideas into realities whether through labour, guidance, or rubber stamping, so thanks to Marius Iršėnas, Lolita Jablonskienė, Audrius Klimas, Joanne Morra, Julija Navarskaitė, Alfreda Pilitauskaitė, Gailė Pranckūnaitė, Ieva Pleikienė, Ieva Skauronė, Julijonas Urbonas, and Marek Volda.

Decolonizing: The Curriculum, the Museum, and the Mind is hopefully useful for PhD students in art schools internationally, and those working across the Arts and Humanities in institutions of higher education, cultural institutions, and social activism, as well as additional publics engaged critically with the arts and culture. I hope it offers food for thought on pressing issues around 'decolonizing'; and also that it offers an instance, a model even, of how a collaboration between an art school and a museum/gallery might create a public-facing context exploring matters of concern that are priorities for diverse if often overlapping and inter-animating communities of practice.

We have tried, and we are trying to go beyond the institute of higher education figured as an 'ivory tower' or as an arts factory, and to model the possibilities of further reciprocal relations between an art school, a national gallery, between students, academics, practitioners, and publics, in ways that spill out beyond higher education's architectures of pedagogy, and that enable, demand even, that the world spill into academic discourse, transforming it anew.

Decolonizing: The Curriculum, the Museum, and the Mind is evidence of the activities of the students and staff in the Department of Doctoral Studies at Vilnius Academy of Arts, and the National Gallery of Art, of working closely with students, their interests and concerns, and how one develops a curriculum for them, from them, which leads (it's practice-led after all!) to conversations, public-facing events, and publications such as this. The book is a contribution to what a PhD community is and does; in fact I think of it as a PhD seminar in book form, and I think it can be used as such. Hopefully it will circulate widely (as printed matter

but also and especially electronically) to other art and design schools internationally.

Hopefully it will be shared amongst PhD students who are themselves today being challenged by, and in turn challenging engagingly and unremittingly their own institutions' complicity in perpetuating post-Enlightenment Euro-centric thought and, instead, imagining and instituting for tomorrow knowledge production that is open to epistemic diversity in the interests of equitability, social justice, and progressive democratization.

Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive

Achille Mbembe

46 *(This document was deliberately written as a spoken text. It forms the basis of a series of public lectures given at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER), University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg), at conversations with the Rhodes Must Fall Movement at the University of Cape Town and the Indexing the Human Project, Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Stellenbosch. The nature of the events unfolding in South Africa, the type of audience that attended the lectures, the nature of the political and intellectual questions at stake required an entirely different mode of address – one that could speak both to reason and to affect.)*

Twenty one years after freedom, we have now fully entered what looks like a *negative moment*. This is a moment most African postcolonial societies have

experienced. Like theirs in the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, ours is gray and almost murky. It lacks clarity.

Today many want to finally bring white supremacy to its knees. But the same seem to go missing when it comes to publically condemning the extra-judicial executions of fellow Africans on the streets of our cities and in our townships. As Fanon intimated, they see no contradiction between wanting to topple white supremacy and being anti-racist while succumbing to the sirens of isolationism and national-chauvinism.

Many still consider whites as 'settlers' who, once in a while, will attempt to masquerade as 'natives'. And yet, with the advent of democracy and the new constitutional State, there are no longer settlers or natives. There are only citizens. If we repudiate democracy, what will we replace it with?

Our white compatriots might be fencing off their privileges. They might be 'enclaving' them and 'off-shoring' them but they are certainly going nowhere.

And yet they cannot keep living in our midst with whiteness' old clothes. Fencing off one's privileges, off-shoring them, living in enclaves does not in itself secure full recognition and survival.

Meanwhile, 'blackness' is fracturing. 'Black consciousness' today is more and more thought of in fractions.

A negative moment is a moment when new antagonisms emerge while old ones remain unresolved.

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It is a moment when contradictory forces – inchoate, fractured, fragmented – are at work but what might come out of their interaction is anything but certain.

It is also a moment when multiple old and recent unresolved crises seem to be on the path towards a collision.

Such a collision might happen – or maybe not. It might take the form of outbursts that end up petering out. Whether the collision actually happens or not, the age of innocence and complacency is over.

When it comes to questions concerning the decolonization of the university – and of knowledge – in South Africa now, there are a number of clear-cut political and moral issues – which are also issues of fairness and decency – many of us can easily agree upon.

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Demythologizing whiteness

One such issue has just been dealt with – and successfully – at the University of Cape Town.

To those who are still in denial, it might be worth reiterating that Cecil Rhodes belonged to the race of men who were convinced that to be black is a liability.

During his time and life in Southern Africa, he used his considerable power – political and financial – to make black people all over Southern Africa pay a bloody price for his beliefs.

His statue – and those of countless others who shared the same conviction – has nothing to do on a public university campus 20 years after freedom.

The debate therefore should have never been about whether or not it should be brought down. All along, the debate should have been about why did it take so long to do so.

To bring Rhodes' statue down is far from erasing history, and nobody should be asking us to be eternally indebted to Rhodes for having 'donated' his money and for having bequeathed 'his' land to the University. If anything, we should be asking how did he acquire the land in the first instance.

Arguably other options were available and could have been considered, including that which was put forward late in the process by retired Judge Albie Sachs whose contribution to the symbolic remaking of what is today Constitution Hill is well recognized.

But bringing Rhodes' statue down is one of the many legitimate ways in which we can, today in South Africa, *demythologize that history and put it to rest* – which is precisely the work memory properly understood is supposed to accomplish.

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For memory to fulfill this function long after the Truth and Reconciliation paradigm has run out of steam, the demythologizing of certain versions of history must go hand in hand with *the demythologizing of whiteness*.

This is not because whiteness is the same as history. Human history, by definition, is history beyond whiteness.

Human history is about the future. Whiteness is about entrapment.

Whiteness is at its best when it turns into a myth. It is the most corrosive and the most lethal when it

makes us believe that it is everywhere; that everything originates from it and it has no outside.

We are therefore calling for the demythologization of whiteness because democracy in South Africa will either be built on the ruins of those versions of whiteness that produced Rhodes or it will fail.

In other words, those versions of whiteness that produced men like Rhodes must be *recalled and de-commissioned* if we have to put history to rest, free ourselves from our own entrapment in white mythologies and open a future for all here and now.

It might then be that the statue of Rhodes and the statues of countless men of his ilk that are littering the South African landscape properly belong to a museum – an institution that, with few exceptions, has hardly been subjected to the kind of thorough critique required by these times of ours in South Africa.

Yet, a museum properly understood is not a dumping place. It is not a place where we recycle history's waste. It is first and foremost an epistemic space.

A stronger option would therefore be the creation of a new kind of institution, partly a park and partly a graveyard, where statues of people who spent most of their lives defacing everything the name 'black' stood for would be put to rest. Putting them to rest in those new places would in turn allow us to move on and recreate the kind of new public spaces required by our new democratic project.

Architecture, Public Spaces and the Common

Now, you may ask: 'what does bringing down the statue of a late 19th century privateer has to do with decolonizing a 21st century university?' Or, as many have in fact been asking: 'Why are we so addicted to the past'?

Are we simply, as Ferial Haffajee, the editor of the weekly *City Press* argues, fighting over the past because of our inability to build a future which, in her eyes, is mostly about each of us turning into an entrepreneur, making lots of money and becoming a good consumer?

Is this the only future left to aspire to – one in which every human being becomes a market actor; every field of activity is seen as a market; every entity (whether public or private, whether person, business, state or corporation) is governed as a firm; people themselves are cast as human capital and are subjected to market metrics (ratings, rankings) and their value is determined speculatively in a futures market?

Decolonizing the university starts with the de-privatization and rehabilitation of the public space – the rearrangement of spatial relations Fanon spoke so eloquently about in the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*.

It starts with a redefinition of what is public, *i.e.*, what pertains to the realm of *the common* and as such, does not belong to anyone in particular because it must be equally shared between equals.

The *decolonization of buildings and of public spaces* is therefore not a frivolous issue, especially in a country that, for many centuries, has defined itself as not of Africa, but as an outpost of European imperialism in the Dark Continent; and in which 70% of the land is still firmly in the hands of 13% of the population.

The decolonization of buildings and of public spaces is inseparable from the *democratization of access*.

When we say access, we are naturally thinking about a wide opening of the doors of higher learning to all South Africans. For this to happen, SA must invest in its universities. For the time being, it spends 0.6% of its GDP on higher education. The percentage of the national wealth invested in higher education must be increased.

But when we say access, we are also talking about the creation of those conditions that will allow black staff and students to say of the university: 'This is my home. I am not an outsider here. I do not have to beg or to apologize to be here. I belong here'.

Such a right to belong, such a rightful sense of ownership has nothing to do with charity or hospitality.

It has nothing to do with the liberal notion of 'tolerance'.

It has nothing to do with me having to assimilate into a culture that is not mine as a precondition of my participating in the public life of the institution.

It has all to do with ownership of a space that is a public, common good.

It has to do with an expansive sense of citizenship itself indispensable for the project of democracy, which itself

means nothing without a deep commitment to some idea of public-ness.

Furthermore – especially for black staff and students – it has to do with creating a set of mental dispositions. We need to reconcile *a logic of indictment and a logic of self-affirmation, interruption and occupation*.

This requires the conscious constitution of a substantial amount of mental capital and the development of a set of pedagogies we should call *pedagogies of presence*.

Black students and staff have to invent a set of creative practices that ultimately make it impossible for official structures to ignore them and not recognize them, to pretend that they are not there; to pretend that they do not see them; or to pretend that their voice does not count.

The decolonization of buildings and public spaces includes a change of those colonial names, iconography, *ie.*, the economy of symbols whose function, all along, has been to induce and normalize particular states of humiliation based on white supremacist presuppositions.

Such names, images and symbols have nothing to do on the walls of a public university campus more than 20 years after Apartheid.

Classrooms Without Walls and Different Forms of Intelligence

Another site of decolonization is *the university classroom*. We cannot keep teaching the way we have always taught.

A number of our institutions are teaching obsolete forms of knowledge with obsolete pedagogies. Just as we decommission statues, we should decommission a lot of what passes for knowledge in our teaching.

In an age that more than ever valorizes different forms of intelligence, the student-teacher relationship has to change.

In order to set our institutions firmly on the path of future knowledges, we need to reinvent *a classroom without walls* in which we are all *co-learners*; a university that is capable of convening *various publics in new forms of assemblies that become points of convergence of and platforms for the redistribution of different kinds of knowledges*.

The Quantified Subject

Universities have always been organizational structures with certified and required programs of study, grading system, methods for the legitimate accumulation of credits and acceptable and non acceptable standards of achievement.

Since the start of the 20th century, they have been undergoing internal changes in their organizational structure.

Today, they are *large systems of authoritative control*, standardization, gradation, accountancy, classification, credits and penalties.

We need to decolonize the systems of management insofar as they have turned higher education into a marketable product bought and sold by standard units.

We might never entirely get rid of measurement, counting, and rating. We nevertheless have to ask whether each form of measurement, counting and rating must necessarily lead to the reduction of everything to staple equivalence.

We have to ask whether there might be other ways of measuring, counting and rating which escape the trap of everything having to become a numerical standard or unit.

We have to create alternative systems of management because the current ones, dominated by statistical reason and the mania for assessment, are deterring students and teachers from a free pursuit of knowledge. They are substituting this goal of a free pursuit of knowledge for another, the pursuit of credits.

The system of business principles and statistical accountancy has resulted in an obsessive concern with the periodic and quantitative assessment of every facet of university functioning.

An enormous amount of faculty time and energy are expended in the fulfillment of administrative demands for ongoing assessment and reviews of programs and in the compilation of extensive files demonstrating, preferably in statistical terms, their productivity – the number of publications, the number of conference

papers presented, the number of committees served on, the number of courses taught, the number of students processed in those courses, quantitative measures of teaching excellence.

Excellence itself has been reduced to statistical accountancy.

We have to change this if we want to break *the cycle that tends to turn students into customers and consumers*.

We have to change this – and many other sites – if the aim of higher education is to be, once again, to redistribute as equally as possible a capacity of a special type – the capacity to make disciplined inquiries into those things we need to know, but do not know yet; the capacity to make systematic forays beyond our current knowledge horizons.

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The Philosophical Challenge

Let me now move to the most important part of this lecture. While preparing it, it became clear to me that the questions we face are of a profoundly intellectual nature.

They are also colossal. And if we do not foreground them intellectually in the first instance; if we do not develop a complex understanding of the nature of what we are actually facing, we will end up with the same old techno-bureaucratic fixes that have led us, in the first place, to the current *cul-de-sac*.

To be perfectly frank, I have to add that our task is rendered all the more complex because there is hardly any agreement as to the meaning, and even less so the

future, of what goes by the name 'the university' in our world today.

The harder I tried to make sense of the idea of 'decolonization' that has become the rallying cry for those trying to undo the racist legacies of the past, the more I kept asking myself to what extent we might be fighting a complexly mutating entity with concepts inherited from an entirely different age and epoch. Is today's university the same as yesterday's or are we confronting an entirely different *apparatus*, an entirely different rationality – both of which require us to produce radically new concepts?

We all agree that there is something anachronistic, something fundamentally wrong with a number of institutions of higher learning in South Africa.

There is something fundamentally cynical when institutions whose character is profoundly ethno-provincial keep masquerading as replicas of Oxford and Cambridge without demonstrating the same productivity as the original places they are mimicking.

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There is something profoundly wrong when, for instance, syllabi designed to meet the needs of colonialism and Apartheid continue well into the post-Apartheid era.

We also agree that part of what is wrong with our institutions of higher learning is that they are 'Westernized'.

But what does it mean 'they are westernized'?

They are indeed 'Westernized' if all that they aspire to is to become local instantiations of a dominant academic model based on a Eurocentric epistemic canon.

But what is a Eurocentric canon?

A Eurocentric canon is a canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production.

It is a canon that disregards other epistemic traditions.

It is a canon that tries to portray colonialism as a normal form of social relations between human beings rather than a system of exploitation and oppression.

Furthermore, Western epistemic traditions are traditions that claim detachment of the known from the knower.

They rest on a division between mind and world, or between reason and nature as an ontological a priori.

They are traditions in which the knowing subject is enclosed in itself and peeks out at a world of objects and produces supposedly objective knowledge of those objects. The knowing subject is thus able, we are told, to know the world without being part of that world and he or she is by all accounts able to produce knowledge that is supposed to be universal and independent of context.

The problem – because there is a problem indeed – with this tradition is that it has become hegemonic.

This hegemonic notion of knowledge production has generated discursive scientific practices and has set up interpretive frames that make it difficult to think outside of these frames. But this is not all.

This hegemonic tradition has not only become hegemonic. It also actively represses anything that

actually is articulated, thought and envisioned from outside of these frames.

For these reasons, the emerging consensus is that our institutions must undergo a process of *decolonization* both of knowledge and of the university as an institution.

The task before us is to give content to this call – which requires that we be clear about what we are talking about.

Is ‘Decolonization’ the Same Thing as ‘Africanization’?

Calls to ‘decolonize’ are not new. Nor have they gone uncontested whenever they have been made. We all have in mind African postcolonial experiments in the 1960s and 1970s. Then, ‘to decolonize’ was the same thing as ‘to Africanize’. To decolonize was part of a nation-building project.

Frantz Fanon was extremely critical of the project of ‘Africanization’. His critique of ‘Africanization’ (*The Wretched of the Earth*, chapter 3) was entirely political.

First, he did not believe that ‘nation-building’ could be achieved by those he called ‘the national middle class’ or the ‘national bourgeoisie’.

Fanon did not trust the African postcolonial middle class at all.

He thought the African postcolonial middle class was lazy, unscrupulous, parasitic and above all lacking spiritual depth precisely because it had ‘totally assimilated colonialist thought in its most corrupt form’.

Not engaged in production, nor in invention, nor building, nor labour, its innermost vocation, he thought, was not to transform the nation. It was merely to 'keep in the running and be part of the racket'. For instance it constantly demanded the 'nationalization of the economy' and of the trading sectors. But nationalization quite simply meant 'the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which were a legacy of the colonial past'.

He also thought that in the aftermath of colonialism, the middle class manipulated the overall claim to self-determination as a way of preventing the formation of an authentic national consciousness.

In order to preserve its own interests, the middle class turned the national project into an 'an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what might have been'. In this context, the discourse of 'Africanization' mostly performed an ideological work. 'Africanization' was the ideology masking what fundamentally was a 'racketeering' or predatory project – what we call today 'looting'.

More ominously, Fanon took a certain discourse of 'Africanization' to be akin to something he called 'retrogression' – retrogression when 'the nation is passed over for the race, and the tribe is preferred to the state'.

'Retrogression' too when, behind a so-called nationalist rhetoric, lurks the hideous face of chauvinism – the 'heart breaking return of chauvinism in its most bitter and detestable form', he writes.

In the aftermath of independence, Fanon witnessed events similar to what we in South Africa call

'xenophobic' or 'Afrophobic' attacks against fellow Africans. He witnessed similar events in the Ivory Coast, in Senegal, in the Congo where those we call, in the South African lexicon 'foreigners' controlled the greater part of the petty trade.

These Africans of other nations were rounded up and commanded to leave. Their shops were burned and their street stalls were wrecked.

Fanon was ill at ease with calls for 'Africanization' because calls for 'Africanization' are, in most instances, always haunted by the dark desire to *get rid of the foreigner* – a dark desire which, Fanon confesses, made him 'furious and sick at heart'.

It made him furious and sick at heart because the foreigner to be gotten rid of was almost always a fellow African from another nation.

And because the objective target of 'Africanization' was a fellow African from another nation, he saw in 'Africanization' the name of an inverted racism – *self-racism* if you like.

As far as I know, Fanon is the most trenchant critique of the 'decolonization-as-Africanization' paradigm.

He is its most trenchant critique because of his conviction that very often, especially when the 'wrong' social class is in charge, there is a shortcut from nationalism 'to chauvinism, and finally to racism'.

In other words, we topple Cecil Rhodes statue only to replace it with the statue of Hitler.

Difference and Repetition

Now, if Africanization and decolonization are not the same thing, what then is the true meaning of decolonization?

For Fanon, struggles for decolonization are first and foremost about self-ownership. They are struggles to repossess, to take back, if necessary by force that which is ours unconditionally and, as such, belongs to us.

As a theory of self-ownership, decolonization is therefore relational, always a bundle of innate rights, capabilities and claims made against others, taken back from others and to be protected against others – once again, by force if necessary.

In his eyes, self-ownership is a precondition, a necessary step towards the *creation of new forms of life* that could genuinely be characterized as fully human.

Becoming human does not only happen 'in' time, but through, by means of, almost by virtue of time. And time, properly speaking, is creation and self-creation – the creation of new forms of life. And if there is something we could call a Fanonian theory of decolonization, that is where it is, in the dialectic of time, life and creation – which for him is the same as self-appropriation.

Decolonization is not about design, tinkering with the margins. It was about reshaping, turning human beings once again into craftsmen and craftswomen who, in reshaping matters and forms, needed not to look at the pre-existing models and needed not use them as paradigms.

Thus his rejection of 'imitation' and 'mimicry'. Thus his call to 'provincialize' Europe; to turn our backs on Europe; to not take Europe as a model – and this for all sorts of reasons:

- [1] The first was that 'the European game has finally ended; we must find something different'; that 'We today can do everything, so long as we do not imitate Europe ...' (WoE, 312); or 'today we are present at the stasis of Europe' (314);
- [2] The second was that 'It is a question of the Third World starting a new history of Man' (315); we must 'try to set afoot a new man' (316).

The time of decolonization had a double character. It was the time of closure as well as the time of possibility. As such it required a politics of difference as opposed to a politics of imitation and repetition.

It is not very difficult to understand why for Fanon, decolonization came to be so closely associated with these fundamental facts about being, time and self-creation, and ultimately difference as opposed to repetition.

The reason is that colonization itself was a fundamental *negation of time*.

- [1] Negation of time in the sense that, from the colonial point of view, natives were not simply people without history. They were people radically located *outside of time*; or whose time was radically out of joint.
- [2] Negation of time also in the sense that that essential category of time we call 'the future' – that essential human quality we call the disposition

towards the future and the capacity for futurity – all of these were the monopoly of Europe and had to be brought to the natives from outside, as a magnanimous gift of civilization – a gift that turned colonial violence and plunder into a benevolent act supposed to absolve those such as Rhodes who engaged in it.

- [3] Thirdly, negation of time in the sense that, in the colonial mind, the native was ontologically incapable of change and therefore of creation. The native would always and forever be a native. It was the belief that if she or he were to change, the ways in which this change would occur and the forms that this change would take or would bring about – all of this would always end in a catastrophe.

In other words, the 'native principle' was about repetition – *repetition without difference*. Native time was sheer repetition – not of events as such, but the instantiation of the very law of repetition.

Fanon understands decolonization as precisely a subversion of the law of repetition. In order for this to happen, decolonization had to be:

- [1] An event that could radically redefine native being and open it up to the possibility of becoming a human form rather than a thing;
- [2] An historical event in the sense that it could radically redefine native time as the permanent possibility of the emergence of the not yet.
- [3] To the colonial framework of pre-determination, decolonization opposes the framework of possibility – possibility of a different type of

being, a different type of time, a different type of creation, different forms of life, a different humanity – the possibility to reconstitute the human after humanism's complicity with colonial racism.

'Decolonization, he says, is always a violent phenomenon' whose goal is 'the replacing of a certain "species" of men by another "species" of men' (35).

The Latin term 'species' derives from a root signifying 'to look', 'to see'. It means 'appearance', or 'vision'. It can also mean 'aspect'. The same root is found in the term '*speculum*', which means 'mirror'; or '*spectrum*', which means 'image'; in '*specimen*' which means 'sign', and '*spectaculum*' which refers to 'spectacle'.

When Fanon uses the term 'a new species of men', what does he have in mind?

A new species of men is a new category of 'men' who are no longer limited or predetermined by their appearance, and whose essence coincides with their image – their image not as something separate from them; not as something that does not belong to them; but insofar as there is no gap between this image and the recognition of oneself, the property of oneself.

A new species of men is also a category of men who can create new forms of life, free from the shock realization that the image through which they have emerged into visibility (race) is not their essence.

Decolonization is *the elimination of this gap between image and essence*. It is about the 'restitution' of the essence to the image so that that which exists can exist in itself and not in something other than itself, something distorted, clumsy, debased and unworthy.

Seeing Oneself Clearly

Now, let's invoke another tradition represented by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (*Decolonizing the Mind*, 1981) for whom to 'Africanize' has a slightly different meaning.

For Ngugi, to 'Africanize' is part of a larger politics – not the politics of racketeering and looting, but *the politics of language* – or as he himself puts it, of 'the mother tongue'.

It is also part of a larger search – the search for what he calls 'a liberating perspective'.

What does he mean by this expression? He mainly means a perspective which can allow us 'to see ourselves clearly in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe' (87). It is worth noting that Ngugi uses the term 'decolonizing' – by which he means not an event that happens once and for all at a given time and place, but an ongoing process of 'seeing ourselves clearly'; emerging out of a state of either blindness or dizziness.

We should note, too, the length to which Ngugi goes in tying up the process of 'seeing ourselves clearly' (which in his mind is probably the same as 'seeing for ourselves') to the question of relationality (a trope so present in various other traditions of Black thought, in particular Glissant).

We are called upon to see ourselves clearly, not as an act of secession from the rest of the humanity, but in relation to ourselves and to other selves with whom we share the universe.

And the term 'other selves' is open ended enough to include, in this Age of the *Anthropocene*, all sorts of living species and objects, including the biosphere itself.

Let me add that Ngugi is, more than Fanon, directly interested in questions of writing and teaching – writing oneself, teaching oneself.

He believes that decolonization is not an end point. It is the beginning of an entirely new struggle. It is a struggle over what is to be taught; it is about the terms under which we should be teaching what – not to some generic figure of the student, but to the African 'child', a figure that is very much central to his politics and to his creative work.

Let me briefly recall the core questions Ngugi is grappling with, and it is pretty obvious that they are also ours:

What should we do with the inherited colonial education system and the consciousness it necessarily inculcated in the African mind? What directions should an education system take in an Africa wishing to break with neo-colonialism? How does it want the 'New Africans' to view themselves and their universe and from what base, Afrocentric or Eurocentric? What then are the materials they should be exposed to, and in what order and perspective? Who should be interpreting that material to them, an African or non-African? If African, what kind of African? One who has internalized the colonial world outlook or one attempting to break free from the inherited slave consciousness?

If 'we are to do anything about our individual and collective being today', Ngugi argues, 'then we have to coldly and consciously look at what imperialism has been doing to us and to our view of ourselves in the universe' (88).

In Ngugi's terms, 'decolonization' is a *project of 're-centering'*. It is about rejecting the assumption that the modern West is the central root of Africa's consciousness and cultural heritage. It is about rejecting the notion that Africa is merely an extension of the West.

Indeed it is not. The West as such is but a recent moment of our long history. Long before our encounter with the West in the 15th century under the sign of capital, we were relational, wordly beings.

68 Our geographical imagination extended far beyond the territorial limits of this colossal Continent. It encompassed the trans-Saharan vast expanses and the Indian Ocean shores. It reached the Arabian Peninsula and China Seas.

Decolonizing (*à la* Ngugi) is not about closing the door to European or other traditions. It is about defining clearly *what the centre is*.

And for Ngugi, Africa has to be placed at the centre.

'Education is a means of knowledge about ourselves... After we have examined ourselves, we radiate outwards and discover peoples and worlds around us. With Africa at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literatures, things must be seen from the African perspective'. 'All other things are to be considered in their relevance to our situation and their contribution

towards understanding ourselves. In suggesting this we are not rejecting other streams, especially the western stream. We are only clearly mapping out the directions and perspectives the study of culture and literature will inevitably take in an African university'.

I have spent this amount of time on Ngugi because he is arguably the African writer who has the most popularized the concept of 'decolonizing' we are today relying upon to foster the project of a future university in South Africa. Ngugi drew practical implications from his considerations and we might be wise to look into some of these as we grapple with what it might possibly mean to decolonize our own institutions. Most of these implications had to do with the content and extent of what was to be taught (curriculum reform).

Crucial in this regard was the need to teach African languages. *A decolonized university in Africa should put African languages at the center of its teaching and learning project.* 69

Colonialism rimes with mono-lingualism.

The African university of tomorrow will be multilingual.

It will teach (in) Swahili, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Shona, Yoruba, Hausa, Lingala, Gikuyu and it will teach all those other African languages.

French, Portuguese or Arabic have become while making a space for Chinese, Hindu etc. It will turn these languages into a creative repository of concepts originating from the four corners of the Earth.

A second implication of Ngugi's position is that Africa expands well beyond the geographical limits of the Continent. He wanted 'to pursue the African

connection to the four corners of the Earth' – to the West Indies, to Afro-America.

The lesson is clear. Decolonizing an African university requires a *geographical imagination that extends well beyond the confines of the nation-state*.

A lot could be said here in view of the segregationist and isolationist histories of South Africa.

Recent scholarship on the many versions of black internationalism and its intersections with various other forms of internationalisms could help in rethinking the spatial politics of decolonization in so far as true decolonization, as Dubois intimated in 1919, necessarily centers on 'the destiny of humankind' and not of one race, color or *ethnos*.

70 Decolonizing in the Future Tense

Today, the decolonizing project is back on the agenda worldwide.

It has two sides. The first is a critique of the dominant Eurocentric academic model – the fight against what Latin Americans in particular call 'epistemic coloniality', that is, the endless production of theories that are based on European traditions; are produced nearly always by Europeans or Euro-American men who are the only ones accepted as capable of reaching universality; a particular anthropological knowledge, which is a process of knowing about Others – but a process that never fully acknowledges these Others as thinking and knowledge-producing subjects.

The second is an attempt at imagining what the alternative to this model could look like.

This is where a lot remains to be done. Whatever the case, there is a recognition of the exhaustion of the present academic model with its origins in the universalism of the Enlightenment. Boaventura de Sousa or Enrique Dussel for instance make it clear that *knowledge can only be thought of as universal if it is by definition pluriversal*.

They have also made it clear that at the end of the decolonizing process, we will no longer have a university. We will have a pluriversity.

What is a pluriversity?

A pluriversity is not merely the extension throughout the world of a Eurocentric model presumed to be universal and now being reproduced almost everywhere thanks to commercial internationalism.

By pluriversity, many understand a process of knowledge production that is open to epistemic diversity.

It is a process that does not necessarily abandon the notion of universal knowledge for humanity, but which embraces it via *a horizontal strategy of openness to dialogue among different epistemic traditions*.

To decolonize the university is therefore to reform it with the aim of creating a less provincial and more open critical cosmopolitan pluriversalism – a task that involves the radical *re-founding* of our ways of thinking and a transcendence of our disciplinary divisions.

The problem of course is whether the university is reformable or whether it is too *late*.

The Age of Global Apartheid

We need not to be blind to the limits of the various approaches I have just sketched.

As I said at the start of this talk, my fear is that we might be fighting battles of the present and the future with outdated tools.

A more profound understanding of the situation we find ourselves in today if we are to better rethink the university of tomorrow.

There are a number of things we can do. For instance, turning our universities into safe spaces for black students and staff has an economic cost.

We can keep toppling the statues of those who were firmly convinced that to be black is a liability and to a certain extent we must.

We can change the names of infamous buildings, remake the iconography of their interiors, reform the curriculum, desegregate the dormitories.

Transformation will not happen without a recapitalization of our institutions of higher learning.

To better design the higher education landscape of tomorrow, we also need to pay close attention to deeper, systemic global dynamics.

We cannot lose sight of the political economy of knowledge production in the contemporary world of higher education and pretend to decolonize either the university or knowledge itself for that matter.

The flows and linkages in the production, distribution and consumption of knowledge are global. They are not global in the same way everywhere, but they are definitely global and the world of higher education itself is made up of different forms of geo-political stratifications.

The university as we knew it is dead.

Unaware of this fact, many countries might elect to keep living in the midst of its ruins for a long time to come.

Spearheaded by global markets, notably speculation-driven finance and a push for hyper-profits, the global restructuring of higher education initiated at the beginning of the 20th century in American has now reached its final stage.

Late orthodoxy has it that universities are too expensive, too fragmented and too nation-state-centric at a time when economic integration at a planetary level must become the new norm.

The urgency, we are told, is to move towards a post-national or partially denationalized higher education space that would increase the availability of a skilled labor force and foster the transferability and compatibility of skills across boundaries while helping to set up intensive research collaborations between universities and transnational corporations.

Within this paradigm, the new mission assigned to universities is to produce innovations that are necessary for the interests of transnationally mobile capital.

To this effect, a small number of elite universities must train tomorrow's creative classes.

These are people whose economic interests will be globally linked; whose bonds as citizens of a particular nation-state will be weakened while those resting on being the member of a transnational class will be strengthened. They are destined to share similar lifestyles and consumption habits.

The rescaling of the university is meant to achieve one single goal – to turn it into a springboard for global markets in an economy that is increasingly knowledge and innovation-based and therefore requires specialized knowledge in advanced mathematics, complex systems and technologies and intricate organizational formats.

74 A consequence of the denationalization and transnationalisation has been the de-funding of major public institutions in the West and the intensification of the competition among universities throughout the world.

The brutality of this competition is such that it has opened a new era of global Apartheid in higher education. In this new era, winners will graduate to the status of 'world class' universities and losers will be relegated and confined to the category of global bush colleges.

Global bush colleges will keep churning out masses of semi-qualified students saddled with massive debts and destined to join the growing ranks of the low-income workers, of the unemployed and of the growing number of people expelled from the core social and economic orders of our times.

This is what is called zoning or warehousing.

Zoning is fuelled by the tremendous expansion of higher education on a global scale.

The latter has opened the way to an unprecedented era of student mobility and educational migration.

China alone had a staggering 419,000 students pursuing higher education outside the country's borders in 2008. Today, Africans constitute 7% of the international student body in Chinese universities.

They are present in virtually every province. According to the World Trade Organization, outward student mobility is increasing faster from Africa than from any other continent.

Why is China comparatively well positioned to attract African students?

Well, partly because of its moderate tuition fees, low living costs, welcoming visa policies as compared to most Western destinations and, more and more, South Africa. At Wits, non-national African students pay more than 700% what South African students pay annually. The other factor is the extent to which African students in China are able to combine studies with business activities, especially to engage in trade.

In SA, contrary to the United States, a non-national staff member with tenure is not guaranteed a permanent work permit. His or her work permit must not only be subjected to renewal periodically. Whenever he moves from one institution to another, he must reapply for an entirely new work permit.

Furthermore, there is no correlation between permanent job tenure and access to permanent residence.

The paradigm of the 'world class university' has become attractive to many countries, especially in Asia where national governments are copying the Anglo-American based model in order to restructure their higher education sector.

The world's largest and most populous nations outside the Western world such as China, India, Brazil, Indonesia and Pakistan are educating large skilled workforces. Malaysia, the Gulf States, Singapore are increasingly supporting the development of regional institutions while establishing themselves as major hubs for new waves of globalized higher education.

The developments sketched above partly explain why universities have become large systems of authoritative control and standardization.

Indeed higher education has been turned into a marketable product. The free pursuit of knowledge has been replaced by the free pursuit of credits. Worldwide not much differentiates students from customers and consumers.

Can we and should we fight against this trend? Are there aspects of this process of denationalization that can be maximized for our own objectives?

If the university has been effectively turned into a springboard for global markets, what do terms such as 'decolonizing knowledge' possibly mean?

Can we compete with China in attracting African students to our shores?

Yes, if we fully embrace our own location in the African continent and stop thinking in South-Africa-centric terms.

Yes, if we entirely redesign our curricula and our tuition systems, revamp our immigration policy and open new paths to citizenship for those who are willing to tie their fate with ours.

Of all African nations, we are in the best position to set up diasporic knowledge networks which would enable scholars of African descent in the rest of the world to transfer their skills and expertise to our students without necessarily settling here permanently.

This is what China has done through its 111 program whose aim is to recruit overseas Chinese intellectuals to mainland universities on a periodic basis.

We are also in the best position to set up study in Africa programs for our students and to foster new intra-continental academic networks through various connectivity schemes. This is how we will maximize the benefits of brain circulation.

The speed, scale and volume of the phenomenon of transnational talent mobility will only increase and with it, the emergence of the new reality of *knowledge diasporas*. The constitution of these knowledge diasporas is encouraged, supported and necessitated by globalization.

We need to take this phenomenon seriously and stop thinking about it in terms of theories of migration. The complexity of the current motion defies the labels of brain drain and brain gain. We live in an age in which most relations between academics are increasingly de-territorialized.

Let's do like other countries. Take, for instance, China. In 2010, Chinese scholars in the USA represented 25.6% of all the international scholars. In China itself, they are regarded not only as knowledge carriers and producers but also as cultural mediators capable of interrogating the global through the local, precisely because they inhabit in-between spaces not bound by nation-states.

We will foster a process of decolonization of our universities if we invest in these diasporic intellectual networks and if we take seriously these spaces of transnational engagement, with the goal of harnessing for South Africa and Africa the floating resources freed by the process of globalised talent mobility. In order to achieve such a goal, we cannot afford to think exclusively in South-African-centric terms.

78 There will be no decolonization of our universities without a better understanding of the complex dynamics of global movement to which we must respond through Africa-centered, pro-active projects.

The aim of higher education in emerging democracies is to redistribute as equally as possible the capacity to make disciplined inquiries into those things we need to know, but do not know yet.

Our capacity to make systematic forays beyond our current knowledge horizons will be severely hampered if we rely exclusively on those aspects of the Western archive that disregard other epistemic traditions.

Yet the Western archive is singularly complex. It contains within itself the resources of its own refutation. It is neither monolithic, nor the exclusive property of the West. Africa and its diaspora decisively

contributed to its making and should legitimately make foundational claims on it.

Decolonizing knowledge is therefore not simply about de-Westernization.

As writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o reminds us, it mostly means developing a perspective which can allow us to see ourselves clearly, but always in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe, non-humans included.

Deep Time

Finally we can no longer think about 'the human' in the same terms we were used to until quite recently.

At the start of this new century, three processes force us to think the human in entirely new ways.

The first is the recognition of the fact that an epoch-scale boundary has been crossed within the last two centuries of human life on Earth and that we have, as a consequence, entered an entirely new deep, geological time, that of the *Anthropocene*.

The concept of the Anthropocene itself denotes a new geological epoch characterized by human-induced massive and accelerated changes to the Earth's climate, land, oceans and biosphere.

The scale, magnitude and significance of this environmental change – in other words the future evolution of the biosphere and of Earth's environmental life support systems particularly in the context of the Earth's geological history – this is arguably the most

important question facing the humanity since at stake is the very possibility of *its extinction*.

We therefore have *to rethink the human not from the perspective of its mastery of the Creation as we used to, but from the perspective of its finitude and its possible extinction*.

This kind of rethinking, to be sure, has been under way for some time now. The problem is that we seem to have entirely avoided it in Africa in spite of the existence of a rich archive in this regard.

This rethinking of the human has unfolded along several lines and has yielded a number of preliminary conclusions I would like to summarize.

The first is that humans are part of *a very long, deep history that is not simply theirs*; that history is vastly older than the very existence of the human race which, in fact, is very recent. And they share this deep history with various forms of other living entities and species.

Our history is therefore one of entanglement with multiple other species. And this being the case, *the dualistic partitions of minds from bodies, meaning and matter or nature from culture can no longer hold*.

The second – and this is crucial for the renewed dialogue the humanities must have with life and natural sciences – is that matter has morphogenetic capacities of its own and does not need to be commanded into generating form.

It is not an inert receptacle for forms that come from the outside imposed by an exterior agency.

This being the case, the concept of agency and power must be extended to non-human nature and conventional understandings of life must be called into question.

The third is that to be a subject is no longer to act autonomously in front of an objective background, but *to share agency* with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy.

We therefore have to shift away from the dreams of mastery.

In other words, a new understanding of ontology, epistemology, ethics and politics has to be achieved. It can only be achieved by *overcoming anthropocentrism and humanism*, the split between nature and culture.

The human no longer constitutes a special category that is other than that of the objects. Objects are not a pole opposed to humans.

At the heart of the efforts at reframing the human is the growing realization of our precariousness as a species in the face of ecological threats and the outright possibility of human extinction opened up by climate change.

We are witnessing an opening up to the multiple affinities between humans and other creatures or species. We can no longer assume that there are incommensurable differences between us, tool makers, sign makers, language speakers and other animals or between social history and natural history.

Our world is populated by a variety of nonhuman actors. They are unleashed in the world as autonomous

actors in their own right, irreducible to representations and freed from any constant reference to the human.

Conclusion

Race has once again re-entered the domain of biological truth, viewed now through a molecular gaze. A new molecular deployment of race has emerged out of genomic thinking.

Worldwide, we witness a renewed interest in terms of the identification of biological differences.

Fundamental to ongoing re-articulations of race and recoding of racism are developments in the life sciences, and in particular in genomics, in our understanding of the cell, in neuroscience and in synthetic biology.

82 This process has been rendered even more powerful by its convergence with two parallel developments.

The first is the digital technologies of the information age and the second is the financialization of the economy.

This has led to two sets of consequences. On the one hand is a renewed preoccupation with the future of life itself. The corporeal is no longer construed as the mystery it has been for a very long time. It is now read as a molecular mechanism. This being the case, organisms – including human organisms – seem ‘amenable to optimization by reverse engineering and reconfiguration’. In other words, life defined as a molecular process is understood as amenable to intervention.

This in turn has revitalized fantasies of omnipotence – the Second Creation (vs Apocalypse).

A second set of consequences has to do with the new work capital is doing under contemporary conditions.

Thanks to the work of capital, we are no longer fundamentally different from things. We turn them into persons. We fall in love with them. We are no longer only persons or we have never been only persons.

Furthermore we now realize that there is probably more to race than we ever imagined.

New configurations of racism are emerging worldwide. Because race-thinking increasingly entails profound questions about the nature of species in general, the need to rethink the politics of racialisation and the terms under which the struggle for racial justice unfolds here and elsewhere in the world today has become ever more urgent.

Racism here and elsewhere is still acting as a constitutive supplement to nationalism and chauvinism. How do we create a world beyond national- chauvinism?

Behind the veil of neutrality and impartiality, racial power still structurally depends on various legal regimes for its reproduction. How do we radically transform the law?

Even more ominously, race politics is taking a genomic turn.

At stake in the contemporary reconfigurations and mutations of race and racism is the splitting of

humanity itself into separate species and sub-species as a result of market libertarianism and genetic technology.

At stake are also, once again, the old questions of who is whom, who can make what kinds of claims on whom and on what grounds, and who is to own whom and what. In a contemporary neoliberal order that claims to have gone beyond the racial, the struggle for racial justice must take new forms.

In order to invigorate anti-racist thought and praxis and to reanimate the project of a non-racial university, we particularly need to explore the emerging nexus between biology, genes, technologies and their articulations with new forms of human destitution.

But simply looking into past and present local and global re-articulations of race will not suffice.

To tease out alternative possibilities for thinking life and human futures in this age of neoliberal individualism, we need to connect in entirely new ways the project of non-racialism to that of human mutuality.

In the last instance, a non-racial university is truly about radical sharing and universal inclusion.

It is about humankind ruling in common for a common which includes the non-humans, which is the proper name for democracy.

To reopen the future of our planet to all who inhabit it, we will have to learn how to share it again amongst the humans, but also between the humans and the non-humans.

Imagining Otherwise

Danah Abdulla

86 This concept of 'otherwise' is a space where, as postcolonial scholar Cristina Rojas has written 'different narratives [are brought] into contact with each other, allow[ing] the marginalized to reveal their own interpretation, and opens space for accommodation, contradiction, and resistance.'¹

Here today, I do not offer a solution; there are more questions than answers.

To speak of decolonizing design, we must understand the term decoloniality. But there are different definitions of what decoloniality means.²

1 C. Rojas, 'International Political Economy/Development Otherwise', *Globalizations*, 4: 4, 2007, pp.573–587, p. 585.

2 See T. Schultz, D. Abdulla, A. Ansari, E. Canlı, M. Keshavarz, M. Kiem, O de Prado. L. Martins, and P. Vieira de Oliveira, 2018. What is at stake with decolonizing design? A Roundtable, *Design and Culture*, 10(1), pp.81–101.

Decoloniality is based on context. What is defined as decolonizing in a place like the Arab region is different than speaking of decolonizing the institution here in Lithuania, or decolonizing in South Asia for example.

Historical Grounding of Decoloniality

Decolonial theory emerged from the work of Anibal Quijano, María Lugones (who developed a concept of the coloniality of gender), Walter D. Mignolo, and Gloria Anzaldúa (who discusses the borderlands, about the hybrid spaces she inhabits as neither fully Mexican nor fully American) to name but a few. The ideas emerged first in Latin America in the 1920s, and by way of dependency theory and philosophy of liberation that spread all over Latin America in the 1970s.

Decoloniality has its historical grounding in the Bandung Conference of 1955, in which 29 countries from Asia and Africa gathered. The main goal of the conference:

was to find a common ground and vision for the future that was neither capitalism nor communism. That way was 'decolonization'. It was not 'a third way' à la Giddens, but a delinking from the two major Western macro-narratives (socialism and capitalism). The conference of the Non-Aligned countries followed suit in 1961 [... where] several Latin American countries joined forces with Asian and African countries (Mignolo, 2011, p.273).³

The legacy of the Conference is that participants chose to *delink* – this means not accepting the options

3 W.D. Mignolo, 'Geopolitics of sensing and knowing: on (de) coloniality, border thinking and epistemic disobedience', *Postcolonial Studies*, 14: 3, 2011, pp.273–283.

available to them. They said neither capitalism nor communism. The option was decolonization. The conference showed that another way is possible, however, such delinking remained within the domain of the political and the economic.

The term decoloniality should be understood as a subversion and transformation of Eurocentric thinking and knowledge; a knowledge produced *with* and *from* rather than *about*. Decoloniality shatters the familiar; it makes people question; and calls for creating something new rather than an additive inclusion into a certain field.

Decolonial theory however does not aim to be another hegemonic project, therefore, it is meant to be an option amongst a plurality of options.

I see decoloniality here as coupled with intersectionality – where ‘race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate... as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities.’ As Patricia Collins writes, Intersectionality’s purpose is to:

analyze social inequality, power, and politics. Because not only understanding but challenging social inequality have also been central to the mission of intersectionality, the interrelationships among social inequality, power, and politics have assumed distinctive forms within this knowledge project.⁴

It is therefore important to acknowledge, to quote my decolonizing design colleague Luiza Prado, that:

4 P. Collins, ‘Social Inequality, Power, and Politics: Intersectionality and American Pragmatism in Dialogue’, *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 26: 2, 2012, pp.442–457, p. 449.

It is not enough to shift our focus from a Northern- and Western-centric perspective to one that is Southern-centric. We must also address the masculinist structures of power that govern knowledge production in design. The work of decolonization requires a profound consideration of how gender hierarchies established by coloniality affect our perception of what counts as valid knowledge, and who generates that knowledge.⁵

To think decolonially and to be an ally in decoloniality is also to acknowledge and understand that Israel is a settler colonial state through its ongoing land theft and repression of the Palestinian people. As Bhandar and Ziadah argue, The Zionist project ‘is rooted in dispossession, and maintained through a sophisticated matrix of apartheid policies against Palestinians everywhere, not just in the territories occupied in 1967’.⁶ This is an important statement as often what happens with discussions on decoloniality is what the Diaspora Palestinian writer and political commentator Nada Elia calls ‘progressive except for Palestine.’⁷

Objective Knowledge

René Descartes’ famous phrase ‘I think therefore I am’ (je pense, donc je suis) means the ‘I’ is non-situated as it distinguishes between mind and body. It claims to produce objective knowledge, and to do this, you

5 T. Schultz, D. Abdulla, A. Ansari, E. Canli, M. Keshavarz, M. Kiem, O de Prado, L. Martins, and P. Vieira de Oliveira, ‘What is at stake with decolonizing design? A Roundtable’. *Design and Culture*, 10: 1, 2018, pp.81–101, p. 79.

6 Bhandar, B. and Ziadah, R., 2016. *Acts and Omissions: Framing Settler Colonialism in Palestine Studies*. Jadaliyya. Available at: <<https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/32857/Acts-and-Omissions-Framing-Settler-Colonialism-in-Palestine-Studies>> [Accessed 20 Jul. 2018].

7 N. Elia, ‘Justice is indivisible: Palestine as a feminist issue’, Justice is indivisible: Palestine as a feminist issue, *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 6(1), 2018, pp.45–63.

are not situated – you are beyond a location, beyond a body, beyond power relations and you claim neutrality in knowledge. In his view, reality is composed of discrete ‘thinking things’ and ‘extended things’. Humans – but not all of them – were thinking things, and nature was full of extended things. The ruling classes saw women, people of colour, and Indigenous people as extended and not thinking beings. This begins the invention of our contemporary ideas of nature and of society. And nature is something to be controlled. This outlook shaped modern logics of power and thought.

This is a mythological narrative of Western sciences that pretends to be beyond any particularity. To claim that research is neutral or objective is to claim that knowledge is ‘unconditioned by its body or space location.’⁸ Knowledge becomes hidden, because you’re not supposed to come to a space thinking as a gay person, a female, a black person, you are not supposed to situate yourself, because if you do, you are biased. Therefore, as Puerto Rican sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel argues, unlike other traditions of knowledge, the western is a point of view that does not assume itself as a point of view. In this way, it hides its epistemic location, paving the ground for its claims about universality, neutrality and objectivity. This is what Donna Haraway calls ‘the god-trick’ that is the conquering gaze from nowhere.

Colonial Matrix of Power

For decolonial theorists, using the term decolonial emphasises that we are not past (post) colonial, and that only the active agency of the colonized will complete the process of eradicating the most harmful legacies of

8 R. Grosfoguel, ‘The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century’, *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 11:1, 2013, pp.73–90, p. 76.

the colonial and neo-colonial eras. By the coloniality of power and colonial power matrix, decolonial theorists have come to mean the structures and institutions of power, control and hegemony that emerged with the modern world of colonialism starting in 1492 and are still at large. The colonial matrix of power contains four interrelated domains: control of subjectivity and knowledge, authority, gender and sexuality, and economy. It affects all dimensions of social existence such as sexuality, authority, subjectivity and labor.⁹

The term modernity/coloniality is used by decolonial theorists as it is argued that the modernity that Europe takes as the context for its own being is, in fact, so deeply imbricated in the structures of European colonial domination over the rest of the world that it is impossible to separate the two: hence, modernity/coloniality. So we could say that globalisation is merely a continuation of coloniality. Colonisation did not end in the 20th century.

As Jason W. Moore and Raj Patel have written recently in their considerations of the Capitalocene, their way of characterising our new geological era that is not an ecological emergency resulting from humans doing what humans do (i.e. the Anthropocene) but rather a direct and active consequence of contemporary capitalism:

The rise of capitalism gave us the idea not only that society was relatively independent of the web of life but also that most women, Indigenous peoples, slaves, and colonized peoples everywhere were not fully human and thus not fully members of society. These were people who were not – or were only

9 See for instance Mignolo, W.D., ‘INTRODUCTION’, *Cultural Studies*, 21(2), 2007, pp.155–167; A. Quijano, ‘Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America’, *International Sociology*, 15(2), 2000, pp.215–232.

barely – human. They were part of Nature, treated as social outcasts – they were cheapened.¹⁰

Thinking of History and Who Contributes to History

Edward Said's *Orientalism* opened up the question of the production of knowledge by interrogating the Orient/Occident divide.¹¹ Said unsettled the terrain of any argument concerned with the 'universal' by demonstrating how the idea of the universal was based both on an analytic division of the world and an omission of that division. This double displacement removed the 'other' from the production of an effective history of modernity. History became the product of the West in its actions upon others. At the same time, it displaced those actions in the idea that modernity grew and originated in the West and therefore removed the very question of the 'other' in History.

Decolonization is the subversion and transformation of that which exists. It is not about erasing every trace of colonial culture: people often inhabit the language of those that colonized them. So it is not to be thought of as *dewesternisation*.

Janet Abu-Lughod's book *Before European Hegemony* calls into question the Eurocentric view of the Dark Ages.¹² Her work reinterprets the beginnings of the global economic revolution. The roots of the modern trade system were not set in the 16th century but in the 13th century.

10 Patel, R. and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*. London: Verso, 2018, p. 24.

11 E. Said, *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books, 2003[1979].

12 J. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

For Abu-Lughod, the world already in the medieval period constituted a global system, but no one area was dominating, every country had equal footing. The system collapsed at the time of the Black Death in 1350, allowing Europe to become the key player 100 years later and pushing others into the periphery. This period marked the rise of the Spanish and Portuguese empires and their construction of massive New World production systems, worked by coerced Indigenous and African labour. These transformations were key elements of a planetary shift in the global centre of power and production from Asia to the North Atlantic.¹³

If we turn to the Edward Said quote – 'Modern Western Culture is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees' – it does a good job of demonstrating this movement referred to by Abu-Lughod. The first paper mill in the Abbasid Empire was built in Samarkand in present day Uzbekistan. This was on the Silk Route between China and the West. The Muslim army defeated the Chinese in 751 on the banks of the river Talas and expanded the Muslim empire further east. What is important is that some of the Chinese prisoners of war were knowledgeable in paper making, which the Chinese invented in the second century CE. These prisoners were taken to Samarkand and built the paper mill.¹⁴

This is similar to how the glass blowers of Murano in Venice were due to the conquest of Constantinople in 1204 by the Fourth Crusade. This opened Venice to the practices of the glass producers as many of the craftsmen were actually Byzantines displaced from Constantinople. Here exile plays a role in the development of an important industry for the West.

13 R. Patel and Jason W. Moore, *ibid*.

14 See J. Al-Khalili, *The House of Wisdom*. 2010, New York: Penguin.

I want to now draw on the example of chemistry to discuss the erasure of knowledge or what is considered knowledge. The following quote relates to the work of Geber the Alchemist (also known as Jabir ibn Hayyan), the father of chemistry:

[T]o those who will suggest that chemistry did not truly come of age until Renaissance Europeans such as Robert Boyle and Antoine Lavoisier, I would argue that their definition of chemistry as a proper experimental science is too rigid. Of course, the Islamic chemists were way off the beam with many of their theories. But science does not begin with the latest, most accurate, theories. For how then should we treat Newton's law of gravitation? We now know it to be based on the erroneous belief that the gravitational force acts instantaneously between bodies, however far apart they are. This magical 'action at a distance' was replaced by the more accurate description of gravity as a curvature of space-time in Einstein's General Theory of Relativity. But no one claims that Newton's work on gravity is not science. Indeed, it is rightly considered as one of the very greatest scientific discoveries in history.¹⁵

Jabir, according to Al-Khalili, combined in his work laboratory chemistry with mystical and 'bizarre' notions and obscure writing that is often difficult to follow. Despite this, he did turn chemistry away from its origins in superstition and into an experimental science. Some European scholars, such as J.M. Stallman in 1922, debated his credibility, claiming that his chemistry was too advanced and could not possibly have been attributed to him.

15 Al-Khalili, *ibid*, 2010, p.65.

Eurocentrism

Returning to this question – thinking of history and who contributes to history – we can think of the countless contributions of the Islamic world to the European Enlightenment. For instance, the book *Qanun (Principle of Medicine)* by Ibn Sina (or Avicenna in Latin) from 1025, was translated into Latin and other languages and was the main textbook for European medicine until the 18th century. Some consider that pharmacy as an institution is an Islamic invention, as the making of drugs from medical plants and the study of their effects on the human body was done extensively by Ibn al-Khatib who lived in the 14th century.

But Western culture is Eurocentric, an ideology that developed after 1492 that refers to European exceptionalism, which is centred on Western civilisation. And so it constructed precedents that Europe was and is superior.

[Eurocentrism] is a culturalist phenomenon that... assumes the existence of irreducibly distinct cultural invariants that shape the historical paths of different peoples. Eurocentrism is therefore anti-universalist, since it is not interested in seeking possible general laws of human evolution. But it does present itself as universalist, for it claims that imitation of the Western model by all peoples is the only solutions to the challenges of our time.¹⁶

The eternal West within this phenomenon did however of course have a counterpart that was created on mythic foundations, the Orient.

16 S. Amin, *Eurocentrism*. 1st ed. 1989, London: Zed Books, vii.

This Eurocentric view has even skewed our perception of viewing the world by reinforcing colonialist superiority.

Most maps, revolutionary at the time of their creation, are an inaccurate display of landmasses. They pump up the sizes of Europe and North America. They're used everywhere from textbooks to Google Maps. So how is design Eurocentric?

Design is Eurocentric

I will focus briefly on typographic hierarchy. Design champions itself as a universal problem-solving discipline, and in typography, universal is Latin and it renders everything else as non-Latin because it is not part of the canon.

96 As typographer Robert Bringhurst argues, typography is a practice that 'was once a fluently multilingual and [a] multicultural calling', but the last hundred years has seen an increase in 'typographic ethnocentricity and racism ... and much of that narrow-mindedness is institutionalized in the workings of machines'.¹⁷ For Bringhurst there are alphabets that have histories longer and more intricate than Latin, and 'typography and typographers must honor the variety and complexity of human language, thought and identity, instead of homogenizing or hiding it.' Categorising Arabic as non-Latin implies a hierarchy, an outdated method that ignores the multilingual audience, and some designers have called for abolishing the term. Recent advances in technology and desktop publishing have rendered the creation of special characters easier, but the 'non-Latin' category remains in place, and machines embedded with this binary.

17 R. Bringhurst, *The Elements of Typographic Style*. 4th ed., 2015, Seattle, WA; Vancouver, BC: Hartley and Marks, p. 90.

Another way to highlight that racism is embedded in machines is to refer to these devices like Amazon's Alexa. There have been countless articles documenting certain ways AI in general discriminates against specific populations. Think of the ways in which some accents are not recognised because it does not speak a particular type of English. Speaking English as an international language, as Stuart Hall reminds us, cannot speak the Queen's English. It speaks a variety of broken forms of English, for e.g. Anglo-Japanese, Anglo-French, etc.¹⁸

Who is Modern, Who is Contemporary? To Become Western is to be Contemporary

So who is modern and who is contemporary? Who dictates these? Who dictates what good design is and what is crafts? When we think of good design, defined as the expression of taste manufactured by tastemakers, the certifiably acceptable objects that are material counterparts of the reading lists approved by the Great Book clubs, we think of Western design. The West makes good design while the rest do crafts. Indeed, many craft traditions were dismissed, even those with proud artisanal histories, on the grounds that they might impede modernization.¹⁹ As Achille Mbembe (2015, no pagination)²⁰ writes in his article

- 18 Hall, S., 1997. *The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity*. In: *Culture, Globalization and the World System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. pp.19–39.
- 19 A. Rawsthorn, *Design as an Attitude*, Zurich: Documents by JRP Ringier, 2018.
- 20 A. Mbembe, 'Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive', 2015 [Lecture] Available at: <<https://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/Achille%20Mbembe%20-%20Decolonizing%20Knowledge%20and%20the%20Question%20of%20the%20Archive.pdf>> [Accessed 1 Dec. 2018].

'Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive', that appears in this book:

They [our institutions of higher learning] are indeed 'Westernized' if all that they aspire to is to become local instantiations of a dominant academic model based on a Eurocentric epistemic canon. But what is a Eurocentric canon? A Eurocentric canon is a canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production. It is a canon that disregards other epistemic traditions.

The frame of reference for the majority of design histories and theories is Europe and North America, which often exclude the dynamic histories of colonialism, imperialism, migration, slavery, and wars, in spite of the fact that they have always been involved in these activities (although perhaps not explicitly being called designers).

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The discussion on 'good design' is a question of who controls, profits from, or is protected (or not) by the ways in which intellectual forms of production and consumption are organized and this applies to the division of labour in Western design history. The West makes good design while the rest do crafts:

Design historian Cheryl Buckley (1986, p.5) emphasizes that... Western design has historically been organized along the hegemonic gender binary, where women are presumed to have 'sex-specific skills' that make them especially suited for work in the decorative arts, and in fields associated with domesticity such as embroidery, weaving, knitting, pottery, or dressmaking. On the other hand, fields like architecture or graphic design have historically been male-dominated. At the famed Bauhaus school, it was feared that the presence of women practitioners in these fields could 'weaken' these disciplines (Ray

2001). This division of labor trickles down to the production of knowledge in design, too: male theorists still enjoy disproportionate visibility, opportunities, and respect in design academia.²¹

To speak of 'good' design is to speak of, and from, the conditions of our own time, and our response to these conditions.

Returning to this question – thinking of history and who contributes to history – we may think that the world is much more global now, but as curator Gerardo Mosquera argues, while 'globalisation has activated and pluralized cultural circulation, making it much more international [...] it has done so to a great extent by following the channels designed by the globalised economy, reproducing its power structures.'²²

Returning to the title of this talk, how can we as designers begin to deal with this idea of imagining *otherwise*? Here is one line of thinking, from Mignolo:

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For example: one hegemonic political concern is to fight against poverty. Research is done to help decide how poverty can be reduced. But there is no research done to explain why we have poverty in the world. Decolonial knowledge aims to reveal the 'causes' of poverty rather than accept it as a matter of fact and to produce knowledge to reduce its extension.²³

This is how we begin to open up possibilities, spaces of accommodation, contradiction, and resistance.

- 21 T. Schultz, D. Abdulla, A. Ansari, E. Canlı, M. Keshavarz, M. Kiem, O de Prado, L. Martins, and P. Vieira de Oliveira, 2018. 'What is at stake with decolonizing design? A Roundtable.' *Design and Culture*, 10(1), pp.81–101.
- 22 G. Mosquera, 'The Third Bienal de La Habana in Its Global and Local Contexts', in *Making Art Global (Part 1) The Third Havana Biennial 1989*, London: *Afterall*, 2011, pp. 70-79, xviii.
- 23 W.D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012, xviii.

Shaping Collective Memory: 'Vilnius' everyday Life', a Photoalbum

Ieva Mazūraitė–Novickienė

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The Soviet occupation of Lithuania that lasted for half a century forms the dominant narrative of the nation (or state) as a victim of Sovietization, having suffered from this long-term brutal external influence. A sense of injustice at this oppression acted as a powerful catalyst for change in Lithuanian society in the late 1980s. Nevertheless three decades of independence have revealed that processes of political liberation are not equivalent to processes of cultural decolonization, especially in the minds of the country's citizens and attitudes in society more generally. In fact the sudden flurry of neoliberalism that hit Lithuania in the 1990s led to further ruins and grievances, but did not shift the cultural dogmas that were rooted during the Occupation.

And in some cases liberation has itself been embroiled in our own old myths. Thus the decolonization of Soviet cultural heritage is still a painful and slow process in understanding the degree to which various cultural forms were infused with colonial powers. The recent history of Lithuanian photography is no exception. During Soviet times, Lithuanian documentary photography grew into a powerful movement, forming the so called School of Photography, and was highly acknowledged in the Soviet Union and internationally, also acquiring administrative influence.

My aim here, though, is not to consider the School's artistic legacy, but to question the role that photography played at the time in a broader and longer-term historical and political context. In doing so, I would like to show the necessity for rethinking cultural phenomena as complex agents of social and political contexts, and argue that a liberal approach to artifacts of the past should not overshadow their complexity and problematic nature.

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This short presentation, then, read originally at the National Gallery of Art's interdisciplinary seminar on 'decolonizing' coincided with the solo exhibition of prominent Lithuanian photographer Antanas Sutkauskas. The exhibition entitled 'KOSMOS', curated by Gintaras Česonis, Jean Marc Lacabe, and Thomas Schirnböck introduced an impressive range of Sutkauskas' photographs. His vision presents a poetic universe of photoimages representing everyday life in Lithuania. Most of the photographs in the exhibition were made during the Soviet era between the 1960s and 1980s, and only the latest photographs in a series, 'Pro Memoria', were taken after independence and represented the first public commemoration of Holocaust victims of the Kaunas Ghetto.



Figure 1. Exhibition view. *Antanas Sutkus. KOSMOS*. National Gallery of Art, Vilnius 2018. Photography by Tomas Kapočius.

One might argue that the distinguishing feature of this photographer's work is a paring down or refining of humanity, of human-ness, which, with the composition of the pictures, speaks in an almost apolitical language of humanism. The historical context, the weirdness of the Soviet reality in many of the photographs, is somehow unavailable to us, since this background material doesn't concern the photographer. And yet, when viewed from today's perspective, the historical contexts present in the photographs inevitably gain in importance.

Such contextual dilemmas become even more pronounced when original photographs become integrated in or blend into thematic publications and, as sequences of images, they begin to communicate more coherent visual narratives. This is the case of the subject of this presentation: the photoalbum *Vilniaus šiokiadieniai* ('Vilnius' everyday life') published by 'Mintis' publishing house in Vilnius in 1965, which was on display in the exhibition, along with other publications.

This publication, co-authored by photographers Romualdas Rakauskas and Sutkus was distinguished by a modern design (by book artist Rimtautas Gibavičius), and was richly illustrated with black and white and even color photographs. It was designed to mark the history of the reconstruction of the city of Vilnius.

The production of a photo album for the city of Vilnius isn't an accident. The book represented a new beginning for the city and was a symbolic farewell to the past. Nevertheless, cultural projects of this kind demonstrated another message as well – the change of the status of the city. The romantic historic city went through huge demographic and social shifts during

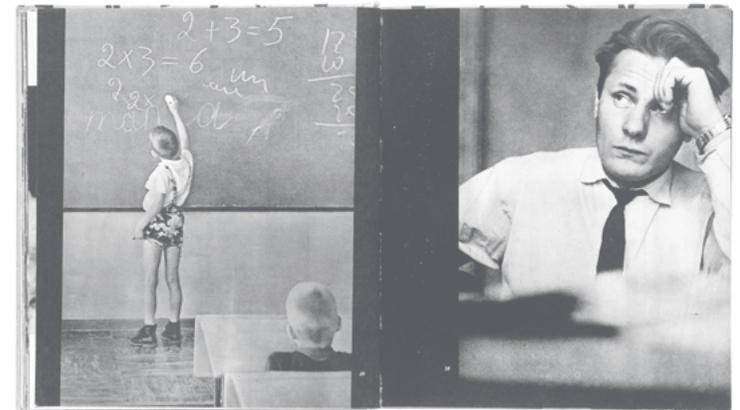


Figure 2. The photoalbum 'Vilnius' everyday life' by Romualdas Rakauskas and Antanas Sutkus. Vilnius, 1965.

World War Two, and in the post-war years. In order to better understand the scale and the impact those shifts brought on the city and the country as a whole, it is necessary to delve deeper into the history of Vilnius.

Before World War Two, and specifically during the Interwar period, the city of Vilnius and its region was under Polish administration. Vilnius was populated mainly by Polish nationals (65.9%), while Jews made up 28% of the population, Russians and Belarusians around 4 %, and Lithuanians constituted only 1% of its citizenry.¹

106 The Interwar period was marked by territorial tensions between the Lithuanian state and Poland over the subjection of Vilnius. Lithuania in 1918 had proposed restoring independence with Vilnius as the country's capital, but in 1920 after military intervention the city came under the administration of Poland. During the interwar period the political communication of the first Republic of Lithuania was anti-Polish, and sought to regain Vilnius. The non-Lithuanian ethnicity in the region was seen as a problem. The only ally of the first Republic of Lithuania in its dispute with Poland were the Soviets. Given this, it is no wonder that they returned Vilnius to Lithuania immediately after the second Soviet occupation in 1944. Folks still alive from that period have a saying: *Vilnius – mūsų, o mes rusų* ('Vilnius is ours, but we are under Russians'). This saying is still alive and well in the minds of Lithuanians.

The city and its inhabitants during World War Two underwent irreversible changes. Under the Nazis, the Jewish population was erased. After the second occupation in 1944, the Soviet government considered local Poles as disloyal, and signed an agreement with

1 VITALIJA STRAVINSKIENĖ, 'Vilniaus miesto etninė-demografinė padėtis: 1944–1951 metai', in: *Istorija*, t. 95, Nr. 3, 2014, p. 40–57.

the Communist authorities in Poland providing for the eviction of Polish people to Poland.

Statistics show that only around 10,000 residents stayed in Vilnius of the approximately 100,000 who lived in Vilnius before the beginning of World War Two. Subsequently the city's population plummeted.

After the war, the city's population gradually increased again because of compulsory migration. Until the 1950s it was mainly workers from Russia and Belorussia that moved into the city. Further, it was only after the forced founding of kolhozes [collective farms] in the country that inhabitants with Lithuanian ethnic backgrounds started moving to live and work to Vilnius.² Very soon the immigration of Lithuanians to Vilnius became even more pervasive. So, ironically, it was through the Soviet regime and by means of repression and forced migration that Vilnius was gradually re-Lithuania-ized.

107 In the 1950s and 1960s almost half of new immigrants were students and young people. Among them were young photographers like Sutkus and Rakauskas, and they represent the generation of young intellectuals who actively participated in reshaping the identity of Vilnius.

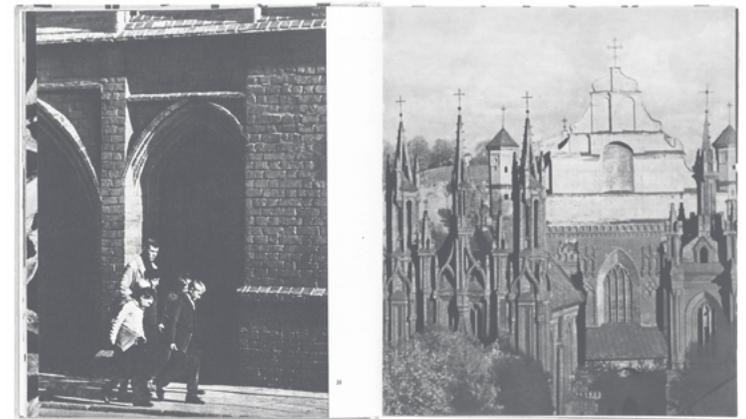
The above mentioned exhibition of Sutkus's photographs included a vast number of images documenting life in the streets of Vilnius in the early 1960s. As was typical of the visual language of the Thaw period, street scenes marked by optimism and youth dominate the photographs. Today these photos attract the gaze of the observer with a peculiar positivity, given the romantic look of the young

2 LIUDAS TRUSKA, 'Ilgas kelias į Vilnių', in: *Kultūros barai*, 2010, Nr. 4, p. 71–79, Nr. 5, p. 58–65.

photographer, and the great sense of style. These qualities create a parallel meta-narrative of universal humanism, crafted with the artist's sharp eye and sense of skill. The power of such a visual story persists and persuades, even today.

What makes the photo album 'Vilnius' everyday life' so special, and why is it worth talking about? Although the book was compiled as an artists' initiative, it was published by an official publishing house whose production was strictly controlled and thus required to conform to the State's ideological line at that time. Photography as a medium of communication represented official attitudes particularly well. Therefore, it is worth taking a closer look at the structure of the album, and the photo sequences, in order to understand the narratives encoded in it.

108 The album has only a short introduction, and the narration is mainly based on and emerges from documentary photographs. The compilation of images and the layout of pages in the album were arranged by outstanding graphic artist Gibavičius. The design of the book was undoubtedly in line with the most modern examples of book art at the time. In the exhibition the album is presented as an example of excellent photobook design, as a 'combination of youthful energy, maturity and visual delight,' as photography historian and theorist David Campany put it in a short introductory text next to the extended display devoted to the publication.³ This description coincides well with the message that the book intended to communicate back in the 1960s.



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Figure 3. The photoalbum 'Vilnius' everyday life' by Romualdas Rakauskas and Antanas Sutkus. Vilnius, 1965.

3 David Campany, 'On Album "Vilniaus šokiadieniai"', in: *Antanas Sutkus KOSMOS* [exhibition guide], Vilnius, National Gallery of Art, 2018, p. 30–31

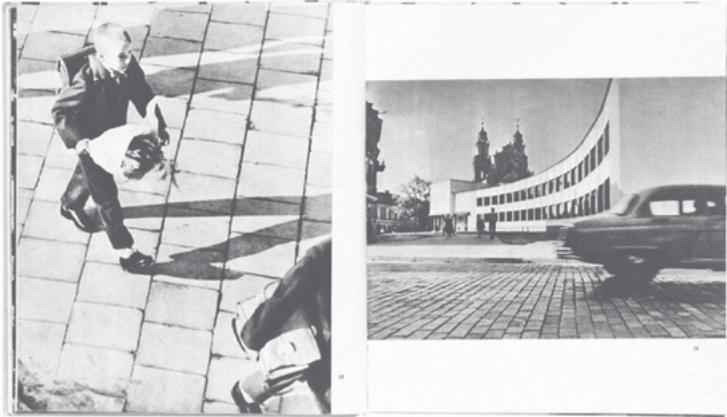


Figure 4. The photoalbum 'Vilnius' everyday life' by Romualdas Rakauskas and Antanas Sutkus. Vilnius, 1965.

Despite its modern form and innovative visual language, the book is filled with obligatory content about the new identity of the city: new and young citizens, their daring jobs and entertainment, modern communications and the new urban face of the city. The visual rhythm of the album is constructed by defined thematic sections that intervene between candid photographs and fill the book with the political content that is quick and easy to comprehend. Visual alignment, juxtaposition, or contrast were used to reinforce this effect.

The book delivers a romantic vision of historical Vilnius. The text commentary and images emphasize the decorative beauty of shapes and forms of the old town and omits the traumas of the intricate and tragic history of the city. Moreover, the juxtaposition of images often suggests that youth and optimism anticipates a better future set against a dark past. Just a few pages in, the book shows the (re)construction of the city, and features it as a site for grand new developments. It is worth noting that the story about the development and growth of the city is illustrated not with the portraits of officials (nomenclature) but features the most significant architects of that time. A young and ambitious generation of architects, like brothers Nasvytis or Vytautas Čekanauskas, did indeed play a crucial role in reshaping Vilnius in the 1960s.

The part of the book dedicated to the construction of the city suggests subtly that the young creators and inhabitants of the city are the new owners of the place. This idea of the new owner is even more pronounced in the follow-up to the album, which reflects the construction or decoration of cultural and scientific institutions, like schools, universities, institutes, libraries or museums.



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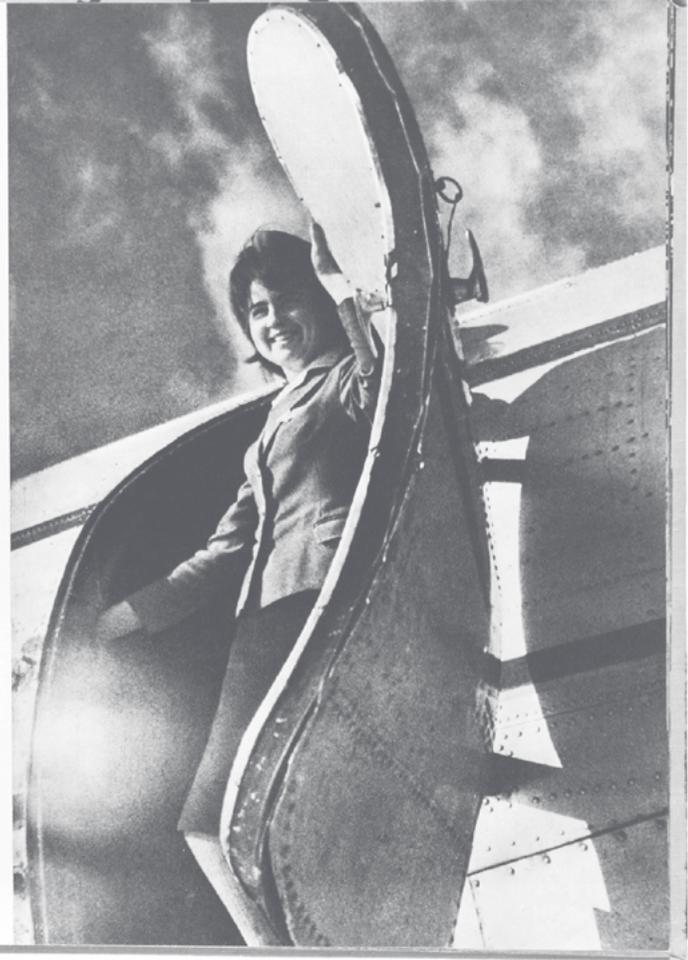


Figure 5. The photoalbum 'Vilnius' everyday life' by Romualdas Rakauskas and Antanas Sutkus. Vilnius, 1965.

As was usual for Soviet publications of this genre, the album ends with festive scenes, which are symbolized by people dressed in national costumes. It can be argued that apart from the astonishing photographs that fascinate viewers today, the album had two other parallel functions. It could be read as a compliment to the Soviet state and its ability to build a happy future, and as a representation of the city's new national identity. It impressively expressed the conviction that the past has been overcome, and reached the pre-war aspiration that the city is ours.

The selective collective memory displaced the narratives that did not fit into the stories of the country's dominant interests. In the 1960s the city finally formed a new identity, which survives into the 21st century, and such cultural projects contributed significantly to the consolidation of that notion in the consciousness of the new society. Researchers and museologists are constantly confronted with such unsustainability of collective memory. The biggest challenge while building museum exhibitions like this one is to uncover the episodes even if they are pushed to the margins of the dominant narratives.

Given all this, and given the context of this event at the National Gallery of Art, and this subsequent publication, my question is: how should museums, researchers, and artists deal with this complicated history, and how many layers of the decolonization of Soviet photography are necessary?



Figure 6. The photoalbum 'Vilnius' everyday life' by Romualdas Rakauskas and Antanas Sutkus. Vilnius, 1965.



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Figure 7. The photoalbum 'Vilnius' everyday life' by Romualdas Rakauskas and Antanas Sutkus. Vilnius, 1965.



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Figure 8. The photoalbum 'Vilnius' everyday life' by Romualdas Rakauskas and Antanas Sutkus. Vilnius, 1965.

All on the Ground

Michelle Williams
Gamaker

120 Hello everyone. I want to say thank you. I've really enjoyed being here and beginning conversations with you. I'm Michelle Williams Gamaker. I'm going to try to present something slightly different to the speakers before me, drawing from a very personal space but also from speaking as an artist, who is also a keen educator, someone who wants to think about art within the context of education. So I'm going to begin with an abridged quote from Queer philosopher Jack Halberstam's Introduction, 'The Wild Beyond: With and For the Undercommons', discussing black poet and scholar Fred Moten's co-authored text with Stefano Harney: *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (2013):

If you want to know what the undercommons wants... it is this – we cannot be satisfied with the recognition and acknowledgement generated by the very system that denies a) that anything was

ever broken and b) that we deserved to be the broken part; so we refuse to ask for recognition and instead we want to take apart, dismantle, tear down the structure that, right now, limits our ability to find each other, to see beyond it and to access the places that we know lie outside its walls.¹

This is a very important beginning for me because for the last few months, I've been working with another artist, ally and friend [REDACTED], alongside a number of other artists, activists and academics who are contributing editors to a text [REDACTED] and I am co-writing. And the interesting thing about this text is it hasn't been published. It may never be published. In many ways it is an exercise in articulation, an exercise in venting. Despite its rough, unfinished nature, I want to read parts of it to you in the draft stage, with the trust that what is said in Vilnius, stays in Vilnius.

So the process of writing is both therapeutic and arduous, and at times I've questioned if the text will have any effectiveness at all. [REDACTED] also feels this way. We question if we are paranoid, we expect that the text has to be rigorous, but fundamentally, it has to act as a provocation for change. So under this question – who are we and who is this for? – I'm going to read a small excerpt. ~~The passionate, co-authored:~~

~~This text is written by artists and educators across the UK who also work as activists and educators from grassroots to higher education contexts. We employ urgent language to describe lived realities and repercussions of traumas inflicted by racial and gendered abuse. We articulate these realness accordingly in the hope that the text will~~

1 Jack Halberstam, 'The Wild Beyond: With and For the Undercommons' in Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, New York: Minor Compositions, 2013, pp. 2-12, p. 6.

each its recipient. Many of whom consistently or unconsciously contribute to the unequal playing field through not confronting or empathizing. Empathizing with our situation as women or non-binary individuals who are also of color. We write as signatories understanding that through identifying ourselves to you, you might genuinely engage with us. Although we do not feel our concerns presently can be aired without a cloak of protection, in this statement we acknowledge that many have tried to express our frustrations and we take on these weights in the hope that a conversation can begin. Our consensus is as the undercommons finding ourselves with our backs against the wall. Duty bound to force a kind of break between locating ourselves and dislocating ourselves.

The individuals this letter is addressed to constitute publicly funded art museums and commercial galleries, auction houses and art dealers, art critics, art historians, academics and teachers across all levels of education. We are talking to our fellow artists and peers who are complicit in the continuous undermining of our place alongside you. This letter also speaks to the institution's advisers and marketing experts who help support the structures you maintain in bit of us are talking to you. We address multiple points in time, the present condition we find ourselves in, an acknowledgement of the past and a look to the future, to suggest strategies to improve the working conditions of many of our colleagues.

So this excerpt is the opening gambit, and I quite like the fact that when you start to speak to power, I realise that I shake as I read this text to you and I also think about what it means to try to articulate something and feel quite weak actually in that searching for words and

the passion and energy that it requires. This is why it can't go out yet, because it's as if [redacted] and I are trying to speak for many, many people whom we feel we can't let down. I'm now going to read another excerpt called 'Work in Context' and then I'll try to flesh this out:

Firstly, holistic remedy must be sought in education across all levels of the curriculum in the UK. We call for an intersectional approach to the rewriting and embedding of our black feminist, womanist and non-binary art histories. We resist an art historical canon that we have ingested and regurgitated for years, and that no longer serves us or the work we do. We are not leaving. We are committed to being within this society and we acknowledge that our investment is based on the love for what we do as artists, activists, and educators (culture workers). Our labour is emotional and skilled, but it remains unequal within the majority of high ranking and small scale arts based institutions throughout the country. We need allies to unite in an act of solidarity to support black and brown women and non-binary individuals working within cultural institutions. We propose that this can be achieved through genuine self-reflection and the application of change in real terms. Ribbons and badges won't suffice. We need to collectively roll up our sleeves to engage in hard work and hard truths because the current conditions under which we are expected to perform our labour to present as and continue to perpetuate a model of the case, that we compare to the atrocities of colonialism. Institutional racism which is also identified as colonialism, is also the same as capital and we could even say art and that is a relationship not between people and things, but between people. We as black and brown workers in the cultural industries encounter this

relationship in the form of our constant creation
of people with a culture or identity or in fact any
quality of personhood for us things. Art and culture
more widely demands it produces anti-blackness
in its central remit to demonstrate the universal
superiority of European culture.

I feel this is echoed through everything that we've been looking at over these last few days during the Intensive on 'decolonizing' at Vilnius Academy of Arts, plus screening some of my recent work here at the National Gallery of Art. I'm very interested in how these ideas are being articulated in multiple ways. So to give a little bit of context for how this is being applied at Goldsmiths College, University of London, where I work is a lecturer on the BA Fine Art course. I am a co-founder of something called the WOMEN OF COLOUR INDEX READING GROUP, which was set up in 2016 with artists Rehana Zaman and Samia Malik.² We've been looking at an index that was collated by an American artist Rita Keegan and it has 120 women in this index. Many of them do not make it into critical studies conversations. We recently just did our first international reading group in Helsinki with the Museum of Impossible Forms and we've been working at Tate Britain exploring the Panchayat Special Collection. But part of our job is to think about the long-term integration of these kinds of alternative histories into the curriculum. Frankly they should not be referred to as alternative. This shows you for how long these stories have been relegated or marginalized that they find no place at the centre of our art historical discourses. At Goldsmiths, after two years of work, we (the reading group) finally managed to get a lecture on the first year BA Critical Studies course

2 I worked with WOCI Reading Group between 2016-2019. Information about the Group's current activities can be found here: <https://wocireadinggroup.wordpress.com/>

at Goldsmiths and I am currently co-curating a talks series at Goldsmiths on collectives, which will feature WOCI Reading Group. So these are small steps. But you know in a way we're slowly chipping away at this institutional stronghold about which stories get told and which stories actually get regurgitated.

In the next section of my presentation, I return to the co-written text [redacted]: *how are black and brown bodies employed within institutions and within higher education?*

So we're calling this section, 'Tired of Being Diverse'. I don't know if this word is being used in Vilnius and maybe we can talk about that in the panel discussion.

'How diversity works within institutions? Racism with another face is diversity at work', another excerpt:

A word that we hear loudly across many institutions today is diversity. We share in your institution's decisions that our intellectual property is worth pursuing. And yet it is our black and brown bodies that are deployed with purpose by you to help diversify your classrooms, galleries, museums and panel discussions. We often feel humiliated by your claims, use of dated vocabulary. How you all too often assume that we are younger than we are, and how often our intellectual capabilities are disregarded in favour of more problematic readings such as the sexualization or deaestheticization of our bodies. The misreadings are exploitative and violent. This call is an urgent response to the sustained trauma, violence and neglect that on an economic, physical and psychological level is part of the perpetuation of a white supremacist, patriarchal and fundamentally capitalist mechanism. Racism, class prejudice, homophobia, sexism, ableism and ageism

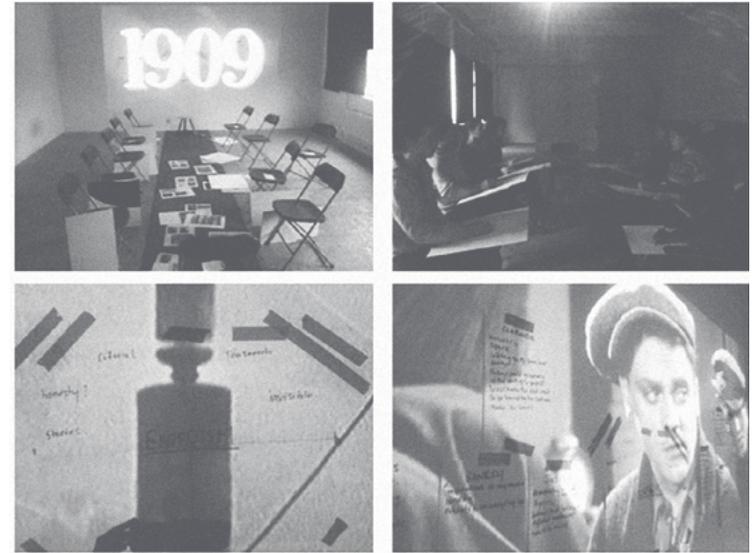
deflect responsibility of structural oppression back onto the oppressed and perpetuate an art historical canon that favors the historically privileged. We struggle against this history daily. Our challenge is to look at our imperial history and the economic rationale for maintaining structural racism and intergenerational abuse to ask, yes, our colleagues working within the art world, to be accountable for how your decisions uphold the imbalance that preserves and protects and reproduces whiteness and its power. Our bodies create diversity and that helps institutions generate funding. We keenly feel the glass ceiling pressing down upon us. There is no fair freedom of movement, as it stands. A block that continues to deny our progression. Our space we are so often called into contribute to is museum and galleries educational and public programming. It is not the job of art institutions or artists to design the absented curriculum. Instead institutions should be lobbying central government, considering their financial and political clout and artists should be paid accordingly as consultants.

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like this new power that I have.

I just want to now come back to Achille Mbembe's incredible text. And I want to ask questions about what a classroom looks like to you? When you're teaching or when you're studying? This is an example of one of my classrooms when I taught at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie (Fig. 1).

I don't want there to be spaces where we just sit down. I choose to teach outside. I teach my students on ferries, in the woods, in nail parlours, I teach on the streets. And in 2017, I began to do what I'm doing now, to speak a more performative lecture. I don't behave when I am asked to speak. Partly as the strategy of



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Figure 1. *An Exorcism* workshop (2013) Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.



Figure 2. 'The Effectiveness of Symbols: Psychogeographic Explorations of the Body, Material Cultures of Psychiatry' Conference, Hamburg, Michelle Williams Gamaker with Violeta Paez-Armando, Rosie Dowd-Smyth, Nina Kuttler and Hazal Kaygusuz Photo credit: Wenke Wollschläger, 2018.

breaking down what academia is, because academia is also fairly standardized in its presentation and that's a form of colonialism. So this is me asking the question now of what does a lecture look like? Here's an example of me presenting something in Hamburg recently and this is what my lectures look like. (Fig. 2)

And this is what I do to myself to kind of ridicule academic authority. Perhaps it's not about ridiculing but it's also about a disruption of the academic in favor of the artist.

And now I just want to quickly touch upon something that happened in the spring of 2018 at Goldsmiths. We had a lecturer's strike defending our pensions and what was really interesting or noticeable as one of the few academic women of color within Goldsmiths and within my Department, is that my body is on the line in a very very different way, and even the strike brought out those disparities. But together with my students with whom I often collaborate, we blocked the picket line. People had to walk over our bodies to cross over the line, which was a form of disruption and we endeavored to really make people slow down. And what we also did which I found fruitful, if I talk about teaching as activism, is that we turned the picket line into an open-air picket residency where the students, although they were denied education within the context of the studio, had an open-air residency and we produced the most wonderful interventions. Here Kalender Dogan petrified everybody as a 'soft, Queer Medusa' (Fig. 3) and here Christopher Bond and Rosa Brentnall brought up the question of many students who are paying their fees by having to participate as sex workers to be able to fund their education (Fig. 4).



Figure 3. 'Kalender Dogan petrifies onlookers as a *Soft, Queer Medusa*', part of the On the Line Picket Residency, Goldsmiths Photo credit: Michelle Williams Gamaker, 2018.



Figure 4. Christopher Bond as Hunter Hardstrike with Rosa Brentnall and Bradley Harrington discuss the rise of sex work to pay for student fees.

This is an absolute reality for some of my students. And by the way, they spanked Goldsmiths, by giving the building several lashes.

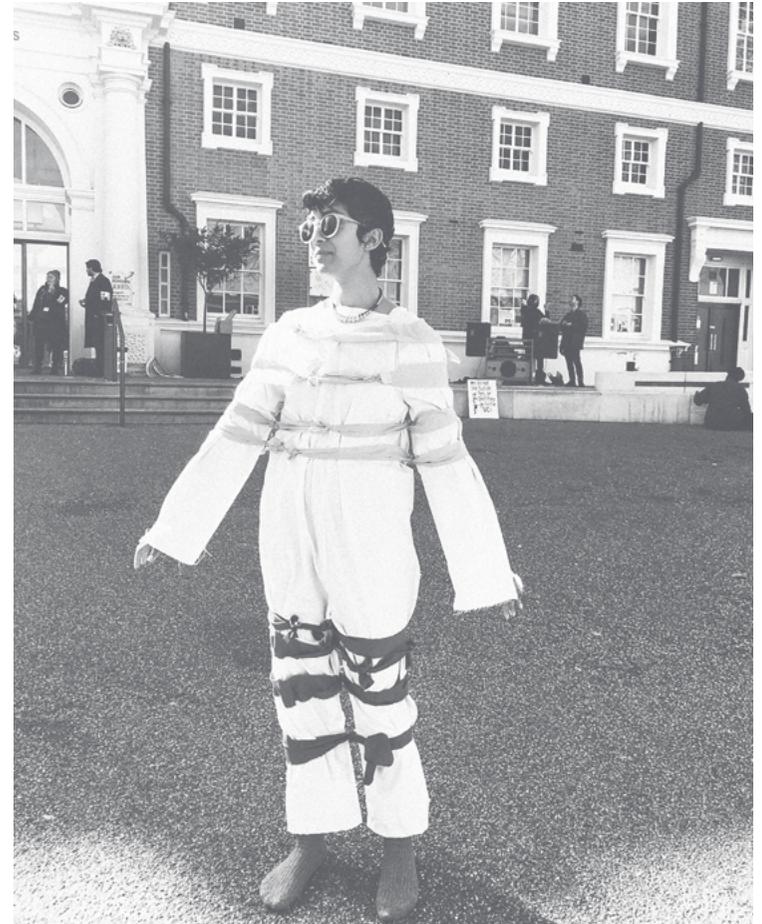
Here I am, wearing one of my student's Mai Magdy Ali Mohammed's costumes: On my Instagram post I say that when our union settles for a bad deal which ties lecturers and students in knots, we strike harder and in the glorious sunshine. (Fig. 5)

So the students really were able to make things happen on the line, and that was hugely productive. So despite the hiatus of the strike, we produced very beautiful things. And collaboration is also a space in which teaching can be a decolonized territory. How do we work with our students? How do we talk with them? Do we regurgitate existing hierarchies or do we adopt structures that embrace humility, by sitting on the ground *with* them?

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So, to end, here is another example of my students participating in a script called 'Parting Gestures' that I've written with them in mind. The text functions like a play and we each have our parts, including a narrator, the tutor and the student body. Future iterations of this work would involve co-authored scripts. (Figs. 6 and 7)

This is really about considering the role we have to play in teaching that is reciprocal and reflexive of our mutual experiences. I just wanted to leave it with us all on the ground.



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Figure 5. Wearing a costume designed by Mai Magdy Ali Mohammed.



Figure 6. Violet Culbo – On the Line, part of On the Line Picket Residency, Goldsmiths, Michelle Williams Gamaker with Goldsmiths BA Fine Art students. Photo credit: Julie Aractingi, 2018.



Figure 7. Michelle Williams Gamaker performing *Violet Culbo On the Line* with Goldsmiths BA Fine Art students. Photo credit: Julie Aractingi, 2018.



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Figure 8. Parting Gestures (2017)
Michelle Williams Gamaker with
Goldsmiths students at *Work,
Work, Tintype*, London. Photo
credit: Koko Li, 2017.

Decolonizing through Post-Socialist Lenses

Almira Ousmanova

Decolonizing – why here and now?

138 The key issues that I would like to touch upon can be formulated as follows:

- 1) What do we mean by *decolonizing*, and what does *decolonizing* mean for us (in the circumstances and contexts in which we live)?
- 2) How does postcolonial theory relate to the politics of knowledge in the post-socialist region?
- 3) How did the discourse of *decolonizing* affect the cultural and historical debates in a space which can be characterized as the landscape of multiple 'posts'?

I regret, that I will not be able to provide detailed analysis of all these questions, but at least I would like to identify what needs problematizing so that this might be helpful for further discussion.

The theoretical, genealogical, and political aspects of the problem of decolonizing have been long ago formulated in the framework of Postcolonial Studies, however, the re-actualization of this topic in the 2010s does not seem to be accidental.

In recent years the mourning over the end of the 'old world order' have become a kind of commonplace which we deal with each time we read the news in the media or the speeches of politicians (when they are a bit longer, or a little bit more than 'tweets'). Furthermore, some eschatological intonations can also be heard in the works of social theorists. The question of anxiety as a symptom of our time, undoubtedly calls for the attention of scholars (and not only from psychoanalysts) but first of all it would be worth asking the question: what kind of 'world order' are we talking about? Do we/they speak of the world-system that has established in the 16th century – at the very beginning of the modernization/colonization processes? What relation does this discourse have to the end of the European Enlightenment project? Or, does it relate more to that geopolitical order that was shaped after the Second World War and inaugurated the period of the 'Cold War' marked by the competition of two main world-systems – capitalism and socialism – and the tripartite division of the world onto the so-called First, Second and Third Worlds?¹ Or, maybe, this has to do rather with the unexpectedly speedy end of that 'New World Order' that was proclaimed in the early 1990s when the socialist system collapsed?

1 Walter Mignolo makes an important comment with regards to the seemingly outdated division onto the First, Second and Third worlds. He says, that these are the product of the 'conceptual division of the world', and 'as such, they existed and still exist, even when the configuration of the world is no longer the one that prompted the distinction', see Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012, p.112.

Whatever the answer (consensus is unlikely to be possible here), it is rather clear that the end of the unipolar world clearly marked not only the change in economic realities (along with the significant shift of geopolitical priorities in all spheres of life – from politics and technology to culture and education), but also it has put an end to what many postcolonial theorists have been talking about for a long time, claiming that the real world calls for the recognition of ‘diversality’, that instead of the abstract universality, *diversity* should be seen as a truly universal project.²

In the given context, as Mignolo writes:

decoloniality, then, means working toward a vision of human life that is not dependent upon or structured by the forced imposition of one ideal of society over those that differ, which is what modernity/coloniality does and, hence, where decolonization of the mind should begin. The struggle is for changing the terms in addition to the content of the conversation.³

In recent years ‘decolonizing’ has become a buzzword,⁴ and I would argue that it replaced in some ways a more definite notion of postcolonization for two reasons. Primarily because the postcolonial world has faced new forms of colonization. The term ‘postcolonialism’ now implies different forms of ‘neocolonialism’. From the point of view of international law, the division into metropolises and colonies is no longer relevant, but the phenomenon of colonization has not disappeared; it took other, more sophisticated and less visible forms in the framework of economic, political, cultural, linguistic,

scientific exchanges. Such an assumption allows us to identify colonial ambitions even in those cases when in the classical sense the word ‘colonization’ does not seem to be an appropriate word. Colonization always meant not just the seizure and exploitation of territory and its inhabitants, but primarily it meant renaming, setting a different symbolic order – as if the ‘colonized’ territories were empty spaces.

Nowadays ‘colonization’ is carried out not through the overt violence and unabashed exploitation of natural and labour resources, but through technologies, political discourses, economic mechanisms, language and the production of knowledge. In this sense, decolonizing as a continuous process, as a praxis, does imply the liberating impulse, without a promise of reaching the final destination – it can continue forever and does not have a common goal, as it depends very much on the local contexts and particular historical circumstances. Rephrasing Walter Mignolo’s idea of ‘delinking’,⁵ decolonizing presupposes to know *from where* one should decolonize. I would also add some complementary questions: *decolonizing from what and what for, under which historical conditions, but also, within which epistemological framework such a liberating process makes sense?* Needless to say, the position of a *speaking subject* as a participant observer of the decolonizing process should necessarily be taken into consideration, although in practice it is a highly problematic issue.⁶

2 Walter Mignolo, ‘The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference’. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101:1, Winter 2002, p.90.

3 Walter Mignolo, ‘Delinking’, *Cultural Studies*, 21/2, 2007, p.459.

4 There are projects and books dedicated to the decolonizing of knowledge, language, mind, art, being, gender, senses and so on. Some scholars even identify themselves as ‘decolonial researchers’.

5 The original thesis reads as: ‘De-linking presupposes to know from where one should delink’. See Walter Mignolo, *ibid.*, 2007, p.463.

6 In her article of 1995 on the New World Order, Gayatri Spivak argues: ‘We are all aware that the “new world order” after the implosion of the Bolshevik experiment requires a proliferation of military aggression for the reshuffling of recolonization without the Soviet presence – guaranteeing a so-called favourable climate for free enterprise.’ It also means ‘a new attempt to impose unification of the world by and through the “market”. But what does it look like from the point of view of the new or developing states?’ See

Thus, below I will try to elaborate on what exactly is at stake when we are applying the concept of *decolonizing* to the analysis of social realities in the former socialist spaces.

Decolonizing the politics of knowledge

For many East-European scholars, postcolonial theory works primarily as a critical epistemology, as a critique of a certain paradigm of knowledge – the one that produces ‘colonial subjects’ and engenders the forms of subaltern rationality. Such an ‘appropriation’ is not accidental, for it has to do, on the one hand, with the conceptual tasks of postcolonial theory itself, and on the other, with the specific circumstances that marked the arrival of these ideas into post-Soviet academia. (I’ll return to this issue in the next section.)

142 Ideally, such an analysis would envisage *not only* the review of the history of the formation, dissemination and reception of ideas that we embrace today as ‘postcolonial theory’ before 1989-1991 and after that, *but also* the examination of the intricate history of multiple ‘colonisations’ of different parts of Eastern Europe. Unable to do all that here, I will focus on the main points relevant to this discussion of decolonization.

To begin with, postcolonial theory has been shaped and then recognized as a distinct scholarly approach precisely because of its focus on the critique of the discursive matrices of colonialism and of the implicit colonial worldview, embedded in the production of knowledge and the development of the social sciences

Gayatri Spivak, ‘In the New World Order: A Speech’. In A. Callari, S. Cullenberg, C. Biewener, eds., *Marxism in the Postmodern Age. Confronting the New World Order*. London & New York: The Guilford Press 1995, p. 89.



Figure 1. Olga Sazykina *One very old story* (1999). Courtesy of the artist.

beginning from at least the 17th century. As Walter Mignolo argues:

[the] postcolonial theoretical practices are not just changing our vistas of colonial processes; they are also challenging the very foundations of the Western concept of knowledge and understanding by establishing epistemological links between geohistorical locations and theoretical production. By insisting on the links between the place of theorising (*being from, coming from, and being at*) and the locus of enunciation, I am emphasizing that the loci of enunciation are not given but enacted.

Mignolo also underlines that the 'location of the knowing subject in the social economy of knowledge and understanding' can be regarded as the main contribution of postcolonial theorizing.⁷

144 Postcolonial scholars have explored in depth how western social sciences 'naturalized' the histories of conquest, colonization, violence and oppression (both physical and meta-physical) of all other non-Western subjects. These discursive models have been validated as a universal theoretical matrix, with the help of which it is possible to explain the experience of all other nations and regions and for historical and social processes to be intelligible (whereas 'the West' itself managed to keep secret its own epistemic location). As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues in his influential book *Provincializing Europe* (2000), the 'entity called "the European intellectual tradition" that stretches back to the ancient Greeks, is a product of relatively recent European history, and 'this is the genealogy of thought in which social scientists find themselves inserted'.⁸ He

7 Walter Mignolo, *ibid.*, 2012, p.115.

8 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2000, p.5.

also reminds us that the very phenomenon of 'political modernity', that is:

the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise – is impossible to think of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe. Concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality, and so on – all bear the burden of European thought and history. One simply cannot think of political modernity without these and other related concepts that found a climactic form in the course of the European Enlightenment and the nineteenth century.⁹

145 Furthermore, 'Europe' remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones that we call 'Indian', 'Chinese', 'Kenyan', and other local histories.¹⁰ In other words, a priori all non-Western/European models of the explanation of the history are in the subaltern position. As Mignolo puts it: 'As a result, each local history of the planet, today, has to deal with the modern/colonial world, the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality. Each local history has its own language, memory, ethics, political theory, and political economy.'¹¹

Even though I quote here just a few scholars, it is important to mention that in the 1990s-2000s many important texts were published by postcolonial

9 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *ibid.*, 2000, p.4.

10 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *ibid.*, 2000, p.27.

11 Walter Mignolo, *ibid.*, 2007, p.497.

thinkers, who brilliantly explained the mechanisms of the invisible colonization through the models of knowledge shaped by western sciences. And yet this well-grounded critique, based on scrupulous analysis, did not reach mass audiences and was not taken seriously by the decision-makers (politicians, economists, sponsors, academic managers). Moreover, intellectuals continue to contribute to the post-neo-colonial forms of the production of knowledge.

Certainly, many of us share the believe that no geographic place or epistemic position possesses the ownership rights to the theoretical practices, but on the other hand, in reality we are confronted with the fact, as Mignolo reminds us, that the locus of theorizing (still) remains in the so-called First world.¹² Scholars from the countries that belong(ed) to the so-called Second and Third Worlds, make themselves heard by having to move to the centers and/or starting to produce in English. Theorists who write from the situation of marginalization and try to theorise their subordinate experience often find themselves in a position of the subaltern subject: in order for them to be heard or taken into account, they/we have to speak the hegemonic language of theory, using 'its' concepts and interpretive schemes.¹³

Most importantly in all this, unfortunately, is the fact that the Subaltern is a subject whose significance for the centers of power and autonomy is too insignificant to be worth talking about. As Sergei Oushakine notes:

the figure of the incomprehensible subaltern has become a paradigmatic example of colonial

12 Walter Mignolo, *ibid.*, 2004, p.178, p.183.

13 With all those connotations that this concept implies, see Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Macmillan Education: Basingstoke, 1988, pp.271–313.

subjectivity. Usually, the subaltern's discursive and social indiscernibility (often mistakenly equated with self-imposed silence) is understood as a doubly coded phenomenon. Subordinated to power structures, the subaltern, at the same time, unsettles these structures from within – precisely as someone who inhabits them only partially, lacking adequate discursive tools and/or access to crucial social levers.¹⁴

At the same time, I think that the impulse of decolonizing that we are discussing here and now is probably a long-awaited effect of the growing recognition of postcolonial theory, which has finally stepped down to the streets and opened the doors of the university to audiences other than itself.

Decolonizing Knowledge and Postsocialist Academia

The acquaintance of East-European researchers with postcolonial theory took place in the early 1990s. It is, however, an on going debate in these countries, not only on the applicability of postcolonial theory to the analysis of epistemological and political situation in our countries, but most importantly on the question of whether the USSR represented an empire in its universal meaning and whether its politics in relation to the 'national question' fits into the definition of colonialism.

David Chioni Moore was among the first scholars who posed this question: 'Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?' In his essay he draws

14 Sergei Alex. Oushakine. 'How to Grow Out of Nothing: The Afterlife of National Rebirth in Postcolonial Belarus', *Qui Parle*, 26, no. 2: 2017, p. 429.

attention to 'two silences' that prevent the possibility of applying postcolonial optics to the analysis of post-Soviet realities:

The first is the silence of Western postcolonial studies today on the subject of the former Soviet sphere. And the second, mirrored silence is the failure of many scholars [...] specializing in the formerly Soviet-controlled lands to think of their regions in the useful postcolonial terms developed by scholars of, say, Indonesia and Gabon. South does not speak East, and East not South.¹⁵

In the last decade, a whole number of important texts have been published on the comparative analysis of postcolonialism and postsocialism, that examine the postsocialist context through the lens of postcolonial studies and embrace such different regions as the Baltic States and central Asia.¹⁶ As Sergei

148 Oushakine notes:

since [the early 2000s] answers to this question have come in many forms, and the tentative

15 See: David Chioni Moore, 'Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique.' *PMLA* 116, no. 1, 2001, 111-28. Online version: Atlas of Transformations (<http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/p/postcolonial-post-soviet/is-the-post-in-postcolonial-the-post-in-post-soviet-toward-a-global-postcolonial-critique-david-chioni-moore.html>)

16 See for instance Violeta Kelertas, ed., *Baltic Postcolonialism*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006; Jill Owczarzak, 'Introduction: Postcolonial studies and postsocialism in Eastern Europe', *Focaal*. (53), 2009, pp. 3–19; Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization. Russia's Imperial Experience*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011; Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, 'Thinking Between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography After the Cold War', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 51(1), 2008, pp. 6–34; Radim Hladík, 'A Theory's Travelogue: Post-Colonial Theory in Post-Socialist Space', *Teorie vědy*, Vol. 33(4), 2011, pp.561–590; Madina Tlostanova, 'The postcolonial condition, the decolonial option and the post-socialist intervention', *Postcolonialism Cross-Examined*, 2019, pp. 165-17, et al.

equation between the two 'posts' has also been significantly extended. Post-Soviet and postcolonial are routinely lumped together with postmodernist and posttotalitarian; just as the 'Soviet' has been habitually equated with the 'colonial'. Yet these 'posts', as many scholars pointed out, do not sit comfortably together.¹⁷

Thus, in relation to the countries that re/appeared on the global map after 1989, a series of interrelated questions arise. Firstly, how has the discourse of postcolonial theory been used/appropriated/reworked by scholars from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, and elsewhere throughout the 1990s? Secondly, which concepts, borrowed from the well-grounded vocabulary of postcolonial theoreticians (such as the subaltern subject, otherness, representation, asymmetric ignorance, exoticism, mimicry, hybridization, etc.), seem(ed) to be most helpful in understanding the 'postsocialist condition'? And thirdly, how have the geopolitical realities of the 2000s influenced the re/interpretation of the 'postcolonial condition', and the understanding of its theoretical premises?

The ideological vacuum that arose in former Soviet countries after the collapse of socialism produced, as I have written recently elsewhere, not only 'a certain epistemological confusion and disciplinary chaos', but also 'a kind of methodological anarchism, both in [the] Humanities and [] Social Sciences.¹⁸ Over night, everything became possible – in the Feyerabendian sense that "anything goes"! The agenda in the 1990s for post-Soviet scholars can be best characterized as a need for a similarly comprehensive 'decolonizing of knowledge, of mind and the language', a phrase I take

17 Sergei Alex Oushakine, *ibid.* p.429.

18 Almira Ousmanova, 'Jacques Derrida on The Territory of Ghosts'. In *ATHENA: Journal of Philosophical Studies*, No. 13:, 2018, p. 116.

from Achille Mbembe's text 'Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive' (reproduced in this book), although Mbembe is not here writing about the postsocialist condition.

In the first decade after the collapse of socialism, at that historical moment which can be defined as a 'negative moment', as Achille Mbembe puts it in relation to other spaces, post-Soviet scholars desperately needed fresh theories and new languages for their analytical work.¹⁹

And that is when and how cultural studies, gender studies, and postcolonial theory arrived almost simultaneously in the mid 1990s in the postsocialist academia. I would note, however, that 'their arrival was clearly marked by the birth trauma, as they came and got established on the ruins of Marxism-Leninism.'²⁰

This problem calls for special attention, if we want to understand why a very particular, considerably redesigned version of postcolonial discourse has subsequently become handy and trendy among postsocialist scholars.

The degeneration of marxism into dogma during late socialism seriously affected the fate of this theory in the post-Soviet countries. In addition to the fact that marxist theory was heavily compromised by the guardians of ideological orthodoxy in the Soviet Union, later it was held responsible for the entire experience of 'real socialism' (along with the political repressions and economic failures of the 'society of labour'). In

19 According to Achille Mbembe, 'a negative moment is a moment when new antagonisms emerge while old ones remain unresolved. It is a moment when contradictory forces – inchoate, fractured, fragmented – are at work but what might come out of their interaction is anything but certain. It is also a moment when multiple old and recent unresolved crises seem to be on the path towards a collision.' See Achille Mbembe, 2015, reproduced in this book.

20 Almira Ousmanova., Ibid., p. 117.



Figure 2. Antonina Slobodchikova. *What is a Tradition?* 'Vyjaulenchaje Mastactva' Magazine 12'93 (2020). Courtesy of the artist.

this context, the 'decolonizing' of knowledge for East-European scholars meant getting rid of the 'fetters' of orthodox (Soviet) marxism. By the beginning of the 2000s, then, marxism was pushed entirely out of postsocialist academia, whereas (Western) marxism as a critical intellectual tradition continues to be developed in other spaces.

That said, when speaking of the inseparable connections and genealogical proximity between postcolonial theory and marxism, it would be useful to recall here, as Robert Young argues:

[that] the historical role of Marxism in the history of anti-colonial resistance remains paramount as the fundamental framework of postcolonial thinking. Postcolonial theory operates within the historical legacy of Marxist critique on which it continues to draw but which is simultaneously according to the precedent of the greatest tricontinental anti-colonial politicians. For much of the 20th century it was Marxism alone which emphasized the effects of the imperialist system and the dominating power structures involved, and in sketching out blueprints for the future free from domination and exploitation most 20th century anti-colonial writing was inspired by the possibilities of socialism.²¹

The contribution of tricontinental theorists was to mediate the translatability of Marxist revolutionary theory with the untranslatable features of specific non-European historical and cultural contexts. Marxism, which represents both a form of revolutionary politics and one of the richest and most complex theoretical and philosophical movements in human history, has

21 Robert Young, 'Postcolonialism and the Politics of Postcolonial Critique', in Robert J.C. Young, ed. *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction*. Blackwell Publishing, 2001, pp.1–11.

always been in some sense anti-western, since it was developed by Marx as a critique of western social and economic practices and the values which they embodied. The Bolsheviks always identified their revolution as 'Eastern'.²²

To make the distinction of the historical experience as it relates to the applicability of Marxist theory with respect to concrete social realities more comprehensible, it would be important to listen to East-European theorists. The complex relation to marxism in the East-European countries was well articulated by for instance Dorota Kołodziejczyk and Cristina Șandru who argue that 'applied Marxism' was:

like industrial capitalism, a purveyor of enforced modernization; many of its policies – rapid industrialization and urbanization, development of infrastructure, fight against religious prejudice, tribalism and 'traditional ways' (seen as barbaric by the colonial masters and 'bourgeois by the communists) – are similar to those deployed in newly-colonized countries.²³

This, probably, explains why in postsocialist countries postcolonial theory was welcomed not as a particular type of 'engaged knowledge' with overtly marxist approach but mainly, as I've already mentioned, as an epistemological critique which allowed for many post-Soviet scholars to distance themselves from the recent historical past and simultaneously to inscribe East-European scholarship into the global debates on decoloniality.

22 Robert Young, *Ibid* p.6.

23 Dorota Kołodziejczyk, and Cristina, Șandru, 'Introduction: On Colonialism, Communism and East-Central Europe: Some Reflections', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 48(2), 2012, p. 115.

Decolonization as Desovietization: Debates on the Essence and Politics of the 'Soviet Empire'

Nowadays postcolonial theory reveals its significance not only as a discourse that problematizes the question of alterity/otherness and power, but also as a theory that provides the possibilities for rethinking the socialist past and its aftermath from a different angle. Here, however, several problems arise.

Firstly, in post-Soviet countries one can observe quite diverse (sometimes conflictual) attitudes towards the Soviet past (from overt hostility in the Baltic States to a growing sense of nostalgia in Russia or in the former 'Red East'), and, secondly, a discussion arises about the concepts that are often used for asking/describing: 'what was it?' – which is to say, was it an *occupation* or *colonization*?

It is important to mention, that all former Soviet Republics and the countries of the socialist block pursue different strategies of reworking the memories of the Soviet past. There is a certain consensus (politically and historically grounded) in the Western (European) part of the former socialist camp, whereas to the East (from Russia and Belarus to Ukraine, Moldova, and to Central Asia) one can come face to face with a striking diversity of attitudes (from the manifest hostility to overt nostalgia). These views have been shaped not only (or not exclusively) by historical experience of different social groups, but to an even greater extent they are the result of 'fresh determinations'; they have been shaped by the contemporary political agenda and are the products of the new hegemonic narratives of the established nation-states (which are presented as proud

nations that suffered in the past, while struggling for their independence).

To give an example, if you mention 'occupation' or 'Partisan' in Belarus and Lithuania, these words will connote completely different things in each country. The memory of the Soviet period (1944-1990) in the Baltic States is strongly associated with the discourse of 'occupation' (i.e. annexation in 1940 and then, after liberation from the Nazis, in 1944, by the USSR). Thus, in Lithuania 'occupation' would imply the Soviet period, and 'Partisan' refers to the 'forestbrother', the one who fought against the Soviet regime in the post-war period. In Belarus, 'Partisan' as well as 'Occupation' would both refer to the armed fight against Nazi occupation (1941-1944) and definitely not against the Soviet regime.

An American scholar Kevin Platt argues in the case of these two terms – occupation/colonization – that we come across two strikingly different 'macrohistorical chronotopes':

Both of these terms describe a situation in which an alien power holds sway over an 'other' territory and society for military, geopolitical, economic, and other reasons. Yet the implications of 'occupation' are quite distinct from those of 'colonization' with regard to the meaning and consequences of this domination for the subject population.²⁴

And Platt continues:

An occupied polity may be subjected to trauma, humiliation, and abjection, yet the term implies a

24 Kevin, M.F. Platt. 'Occupation versus Colonization: Post-Soviet Latvia and the Provincialization of Europe', In: U. Blacker, A. Etkind, and J. Fedor, eds., *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*. New York: Macmillan, 2013, p. 133.

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Figure 3: Sergey Shabohin, *Flag Practices of Subordination: Sickle, Rainbow and the Eye of Fear Cycle: Practices of Subordination Series: 18* (2018). Courtesy of the artist.



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Figure 4: Igor Tishin, *Light Partisan Movement*, 1997.

certain continuity of identity over historical time: the occupier came, dominated, and then was expelled, leaving the essence of the polity unchanged. Colonization, on the other hand, entails something more involved – the colonist comes to stay and enters into permanent relations with the preexisting local population, which is integrated into economic, social, institutional, and political relationships, that essentially change it.²⁵

Kevin Platt points out that in the case of European empires, colonization was seen (and 'legitimized') as a 'civilizational tutelage' that promised the 'gift of progress'. But in the Baltic states, the Russian Empire and then the Soviet State were never seen as the 'superior' culture, nor economically and technologically more advanced than the Europe it occupied (or the Europe it didn't for that matter). I would add further that the process of technological and political modernization that the USSR realized within two decades in between the wars was not considered to be a 'gift of progress', and it is precisely the remainders of the Soviet industrial infrastructure that became 'the stumbling block' in contemporary discussions of whether there were any economic achievements and advantages of the regime that was established during the 'occupation' period in the Baltic states. It is quite obvious that for the Eastern regions of the USSR (Central Asia in particular) the history of Soviet 'colonization' is seen quite differently: here the Soviet state did indeed assume the role of civilizer (starting from 'the woman question' and proceeding to educational policy and the modernization of culture and economics).

In discussions of the Soviet past in terms of postcolonial theory, some post-Soviet scholars draw attention to the fact that the Soviet expansion was not

25 Kevin, M.F. Platt, *ibid.*, p. 135.

about the notorious 'flow' of wealth from colonized to a colonizer, but rather about the manifestations of cultural colonialism, which consisted of the establishment of 'structures of cultural dependence' (through the Russification policy in the spheres of education, book publishing, art, and so on), where even the economic aspect of colonization can be discussed from the point of view of control over material resources in the field of culture.²⁶

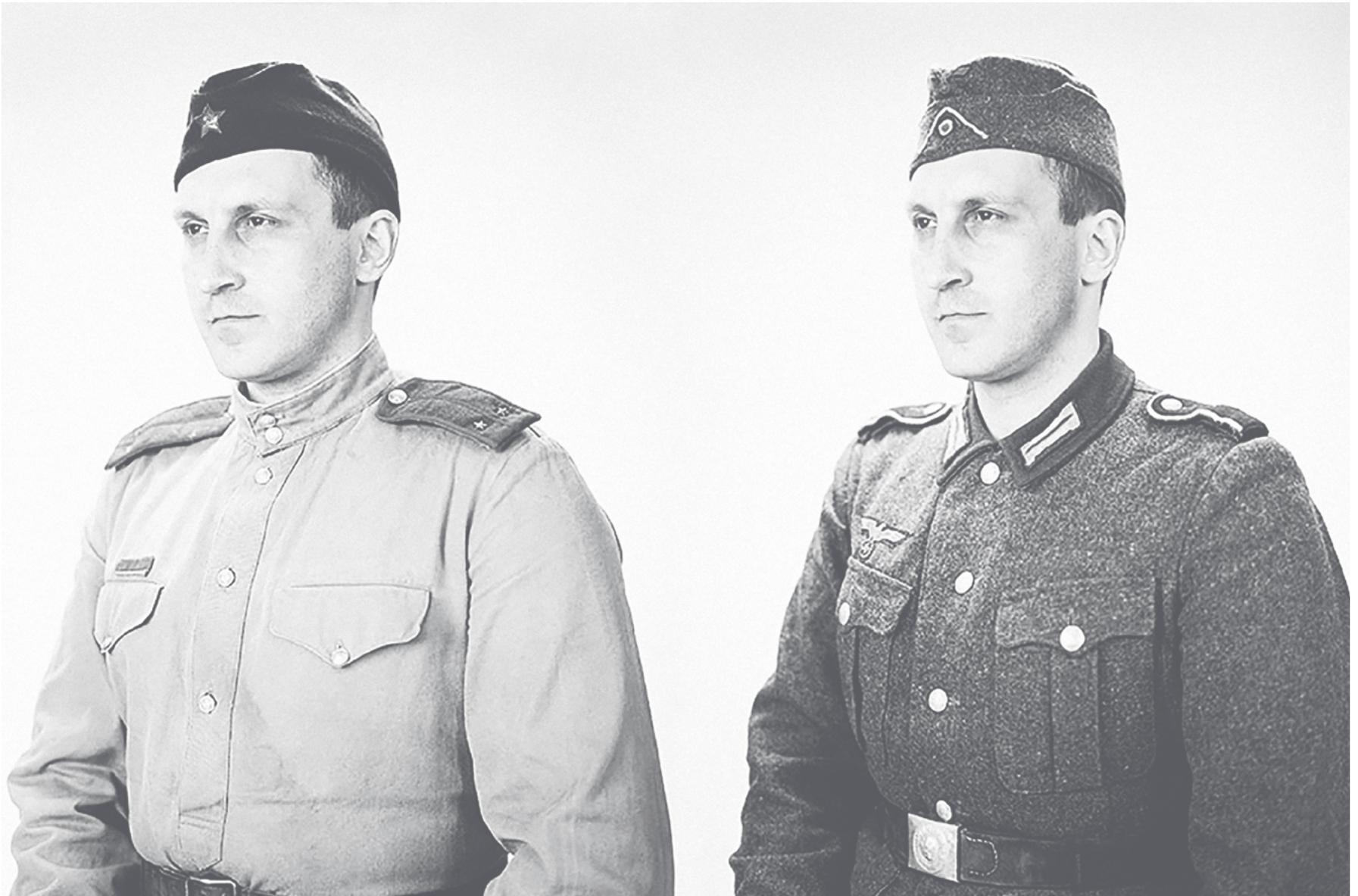
Now it becomes, perhaps, clearer why decolonization in some of the former socialist countries is rarely perceived as a striving for a different future; rather it is predominantly viewed as a 'war in the name of the stolen past', as 'a fight for enabling "disabled histories"'.²⁷

From this prospective, it probably does not look so strange any more that in former socialist spaces postcolonial discourse is often used for quite instrumental purposes – for defending the rebirth of the Nation(s), a process that has become the hegemonic ideological discourse in the 2000-2010s in the entire Eastern Europe.

In my view, the discourse of 'Soviet occupation' has blocked the possibility of the overt recognition of socialist cultural heritage (including national cinema or architecture) in the Baltic States and made impossible its reintegration into the contemporary culture and political discourse – thereby producing an effect of the 'blockade' of the damaged sites of collective memory. I agree with Sergei Oushakine when he argues that externalizing the radical modernism of the

26 Марко Павлышин, «Казачи на Ямайке: проявлення постколоніалізму в сучасній українській культурі». В: Перекрестки, Журнал досліджень східноєвропейського пограниччя, 3 – 4: 2005. с 6)

27 Sergei Alex Oushakine, *ibid.*, p.431.



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Figure 5. Andrei Liankevich, *Double Heroes* (from the project 'Farewell, Motherland', 2011. Courtesy of the artist.

Soviet period as a form of colonial heritage makes problematic the alternative models of modernization upon which to rely. As a result, 'the re-inscribing of a newly independent nation in the current global context is conducted in strikingly pre-modern and pre-capital(ist) terms.'²⁸

It should be noted, however, that during the last decade one could observe the gradual and steady process of 'the return of the repressed', that has been carried out within a number of art projects in the Baltic States (here I note a few titles of exhibitions including 'Woman's time' [Vilnius, 2010], 'Soviet Woman' [Tallinn, 2010], 'Modernization' [Vilnius, 2011], 'Our Metamorphic Future' [Vilnius-Tallinn, 2011], 'Possible Modernism?' [Vilnius, 2012], 'Soviet Design' [Riga, 2011], the conceptual reworking of the permanent exhibition at KUMU in Tallinn in 2016 under the name 'Conflicts and Adaptations: Estonian Art of the Soviet Era (1940-1991)', and so on).²⁹

This revision is taking place within a contemporary view on socialist modernity and is shaped by a different ideological optics. That what had once embodied the idea of culture as 'national by form, socialist by content', is proclaimed now to have been a manifestation of the 'national spirit', that fostered the development of 'Baltic creativity', as it revealed itself, for instance, in non-conformist art, which persisted and even challenged the hegemonic Soviet (and Russophone) official culture. I would argue that these processes can be seen as a vivid example of what Charles Taylor would have called the 'ethnocentric colonization of the past'.³⁰

28 Sergei Alex.Oushakine, op. cit., 2017, p.433.

29 See: <https://kumu.ekm.ee/en/syndmus/conflicts-and-adaptations-estonian-art-of-the-soviet-era-19401991/>

30 Charles Taylor, 'Two Theories of Modernity'. *Public Culture* 11, no. 1, 1999, pp.153-174

Postscriptum

The issue of decolonizing in different countries in Europe (those that have historically been colonizers and those who have experienced the consequences of colonization on a global and regional scale) has been, remains, and will remain in the future a rather uncomfortable question, as it is the question of economic, political, and discursive power (the right to 'name things (not) by their own names'). For me, decolonizing sounds more as a utopian appeal. What remains for us? To hope for what postcolonial thinkers propose, and I end with the words of Walter Mignolo: that 'epistemic decolonization is necessary to make possible and move toward a truly intercultural communication; to an exchange of experiences and significations as the foundation of an-other rationality.'³¹

31 Walter Mignolo, 'Delinking', *Cultural Studies*, 21, 2, 2007, p.499.

Discussion

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Marquard Smith (MS):
I'd going to open the floor for questions.

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MS:

OK, it's lucky I have a Plan B, I'm wondering if any of the contributors would like to comment on or ask questions of the other contributors?

Almira Ousmanova (AO):

I want to return to Michelle's presentation, because I'm very interested myself at the moment in the structural inequalities that are plaguing academia, and within institutions. There are multiple ways that one can begin to approach these inequalities, and that change might begin to take place, and I'd like to raise three ways here:

First, let us reflect on our situation here, at this event at the National Gallery of Art in Lithuania, and consider gender balance. There are four people on the panel, and we are all women. This is worth mentioning because it's now a fact, having been confirmed by a recent initiative by political scientists that at the top conferences and panels, and when one audits keynote speakers in different academic contexts, we discover that there are no more than 7% of women participating at top political events where serious decisions are made.¹ So what do we do? As individuals we can for instance support the No Women No Panel Campaign, pledging not to be part of male-only panels.² This mood is in the air, and this issue of equality in representation – in public debate, but also in universities and cultural institutions – will transform the decision-making process, and the decisions themselves.

1 For details see the OSF brief, 'An End to Manels: Closing the Gender Gap at Europe's Top Policy Events' (<https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/uploads/c3f34e39-bcc2-43bc-9cca-cab57e445869/an-end-to-manels-20180308.pdf>).

2 See, for instance, the 'toolkit' for improving gender balance at conferences, prepared by Brussel's based organization 'Binder' that aims to bring more women's voices into European debates (<https://brusselsbinder.org/toolkit/>)

A second point for me would be to mention Sarah Ahmed's recent book, *Living a Feminist Life*, which I really like very much. She raises the issue of the politics of citation and re-citation in academia and academic publishing, and disagrees wholeheartedly with this culture.³ I found this not just completely refreshing, but actually revolutionary! It might seem boring or inconsequential, but we should be thinking about indexes and reference sections of books and articles. There's a politics here, even if it's not that visible, and many aren't even familiar with it as an issue. This politics of citationality is a matter of huge concern for feminism, much as it is at the heart of the whole 'decolonize the curriculum' debate. Quoting and referencing authors who are women, and in particular authors who are women of colour is another idea. Recognizing this, and *doing* this, is an essential starting point, I believe, for our curriculum, for our teaching, and for our research and publishing.

Third, I would like to note in relation to the former socialist spaces: the relations between center and peripheries there were quite problematic, though in a different way than it happens under capitalism. On the other hand, I realize that working on the Soviet cinema or Soviet visual culture, I came to understand that there was always the co-presence of others. If you watch a film for instance, you understand that there are people of different colors, of different languages, this already means something. Now in a postsocialist context, in our new and independent states, the question of co-presence of others, of other ethnicities and of other languages and cultures comes on to the agenda even more.

3 Ahmed writes: 'In this book, I adopt a strict citation policy: I do not cite any white men. By white men I am referring to an institution [...] Instead, I cite those who have contributed to the intellectual genealogy of feminism and antiracism.' Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017, p.14.

I like very much artistic projects by the likes of Russian graphic artist and activist Victoria Lomasko.⁴ In her recent book *Other Russias*, which consists of two sections (one is entitled *Invisible*, and another, *Angry*) she brings back into visibility many 'others' by representing women sex workers, or truck drivers or peasants, as well as men and women who are so often made invisible like those living with disabilities or the homeless, those who are disappeared from representation, and, at least to a certain extent, here they are given a voice.

Oh, and a fourth point relating to us all being here, and relating specifically to questions of nation and nationality, of belonging and not belonging, of home and of being somewhere other than home, of heritage, and of thinking community otherwise – which is also to think about colonialism, post-colonialism, and de-colonizing: we are four women, one a Lithuanian born under Soviet occupation, one a Belarusian now living in exile in Vilnius, another a first-generation Londoner of Sri Lankan heritage, and one born in Kuwait of Palestinian heritage, who grew up in Canada, and is currently living in London. What could be better, what could be more interesting!

MS:

Thank you Almira. I'm going to open the floor for questions again...

4 Victoria Lomasko, *Other Russias*, Penguin Books, 2017.

Audience:

My name is Ian, and I'm from Wales. I'm thinking of my own country Wales, not Britain. I'm thinking about what's been going on here, and what's happening to our culture. Perhaps only 20% of the country's population speak it; I do. I want to say that when it comes to smaller nations, there are inequitable power relations, or structural inequalities, to pick up on Almira's term, that are tremendously hard to stop. We, the Welsh, but so many of us in smaller nations, end up like players on a stage. When there's a football match or a rugby match, when one's sense of oneself as a citizen of a nation comes to the fore, we sing and we become puppets, we become ridiculous. Our neighbors, they like our singing, but their pleasure in us is belittling, demeaning. I've become very aware of the differences between large nations and smaller ones. Lithuania has a rather large neighbor, so do we, in exactly the same way. I'm wondering how do you get out of a situation such as this without playing the game, without making a fool of yourself? How on earth do you get out of that? That's my question.

MS:

Thank you. Your reference to singing reminds me, I love hearing about the Singing Revolution here in Lithuania, but also in Estonia and Latvia, a term used to commonly describe singing demonstrations between 1987 and 1991 that led to the restoring of the Baltic States as independent. This seems like a very successful way of finding a solution without being foolish.

Audience:

I'm German, and I'm living in Vilnius for 20 years. Danah, I'm sorry I arrived at your presentation late, but you had interesting things to say about us not knowing the reasons for poverty worldwide. First is my question

if I do understand you, I think it was the last slide on your presentation, that we don't know the reasons for poverty in the world.

Danah Abdulla (DA):

I was saying that we need to look at the causes of the issues, rather than trying to find band-aid solutions, yes, that's the point I was making.

Audience:

Your lecture was quite an answer! I think we know the reason for poverty: it's patriarchy! What would you answer, Michelle?

Michelle Williams Gamaker (MWG):

This is an interesting thing about the text I'm co-writing with [REDACTED]: As soon as you start to speak to power, as soon as you try to utter...

Within my academic role, I'm called into institutional spaces, often not too different from this one, and I have to stand and speak for something. It's so hard to speak to power, you become extremely small and your words sound pathetic. Or they become melodrama. I obviously read the text with a bit of drama, because that is who I am, but the point is... and this is to address your point, Ian, there's a level of puppetry involved in all our stage presentations of ourselves as we walk through space. So I'm fully aware that there are these structural inequalities, these inequitable power relations – patriarchy is exactly this – and what I *do* know is that I need to find a way to articulate this through what I make and how I try to write about things.

Ultimately there are huge and diverse inequalities that we experience – gendered abuses, race relations, around sexuality, ableism – there are so many

things; it's a minefield. However, people are extremely tired, certainly within the context of the UK. We have experienced many articulations recently – the ME TOO movement being one – where people say: 'I'm not going to be quiet any more!'

Such articulations are the reason why we used the quotation from Jack Halberstam about Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's *Undercommons*, because we think there needs to be an absolute dismantling of organisations, of systems, of structures, of monuments, and so on! We see that in the Achille Mbembe text that we were discussing earlier today and yesterday with the PhD students at the Vilnius Academy of Arts. We try to reshape infrastructure; because actually it's the infrastructure that's fundamentally holding people in positions. We have to perhaps move some of our positions of power, and float a bit more, and maybe that's just wildly naive of me, but when I walk through certain spaces, I feel the *entrenched* positions in which (and by which) some people hold on to their power. I know it, because I feel an invisible wall, when I'm speaking to certain people or when I'm in a specific building; not here. The point is that it really is a barrier and I can feel it, and that means something's not working.

MS:

I think this question of feeling at home, of belonging or not, of feeling comfortable or not, of being in spaces or places – classrooms, art schools, museums and galleries, etc. – that feel as if they are 'owned' and utilized by those other than ourselves (those with privilege, with entitlement, with power), that are *for* them, that are not for *us*, is really urgent.

This is, as Michelle points out, both an issue of structure and infrastructure. Her point reminded me

of a story a friend told me recently about sitting on an interview panel to appoint a new senior executive at the British public-service free-to-air television network where she works. My friend told me that the shortlist of candidates was strong, but there was obviously one candidate who stood out for their quality, expertise, professionalism, and what they could bring to the role. 'Yes', affirmed everyone (apart from my friend) on the panel, 'but *will they fit in?*' This was their question: *will they fit in?!?!?!?*

The candidate might have been male, or female. They might have been black or brown or white or whatever. They might have been working class. Disabled. It doesn't matter. The point is this: that the members of the interview panel would ask *this* question!

What does it mean to ask this question? The first implication is that the candidate would need to, and should, fit in. And, oh my goodness, what might it mean for them to not fit in – for the candidate, for their colleagues, for the organization?!?!? Now, wouldn't that be uncomfortable!

The second implication relates, I think, to Michelle's point about structure and infrastructure: To entertain the idea of the candidate *not* fitting in, and appointing them *because of this*, would be for the panel to begin to imagine the possibility of changing the entire organization, how it works and operates; how it holds and wears and distributes its power; how it and all its staff behave, both publically but also within the organization itself, and towards one another. Such an appointment would, it could, it *should* effect every aspect of the entire organization. Not because they've appointed one senior exec who's pushing an agenda *because they're* a person of colour, or have mobility issues, or didn't go to Oxford or Cambridge,

or whatever, but because *their very presence* should necessitate that everyone in the organization (and thus the organization itself) *step up and take seriously, every day*, its philosophy and ethos, its HR and staffing practice, and its policies on access-inclusivity-diversity, on the environment, on Equal Opportunities, Ethical Fundraising, and so on.

This would be a productive dismantling, as Michelle referred to it earlier, of organisations, systems, structures, infrastructure. Such a wholesale dismantling – of structural inequalities, of inequitable power relations – is what’s really actually necessary when decolonizing this or that place. And the tools are there to do it. One can do worse than be reminded for instance that policy documents do, or should, have the power to enact such change. Policy is power! A policy document isn’t a tick-boxing exercise; it’s a leadership document! Step up!

Audience:

My name is Mikko Waltari I’m from Finland, and based in Lithuania. I’d like to add two comments, both connected with a seminar I attended a couple of months ago organized at the Finnish Embassy with a Finnish writer, a theater director, and the author Veijo Baltzar, who prefers to refer to himself as a gypsy, rather than Romani. Two things Baltzar said especially stuck in my mind. One was that he was reviewing the history of Finnish gypsies, and, in talking about the current situation, he pointed out that at some point in the 1960s or 1970s the government said it was going to get the gypsies off the streets, and provide them with flats in the new suburban areas of towns in the country. Baltzar noted that this was very much against their lifestyle. Perhaps the ambition to help them through assimilation was good, to provide them with higher living standards, etc. But the Finnish government

simply didn’t understand, that this was not their way. They were materially poor but their life was rich. This is an interesting lesson in how you try to handle the fear of difference, of the other, of how you try to assimilate or integrate the other to dilute or weaken their otherness. The second thing Baltzar said that sticks in my mind was that he doesn’t like the word ‘tolerance’. If for instance I say to my wife that I tolerate her, she will be very hurt! Such an understanding of tolerance is for sure tied to questions of diversity, the processes of otherness and othering, integration and assimilation, etc.

DA:

In terms of my own experience, I work in a Product and Industrial Design program, within a College of Engineering, so their understanding of design is different. Despite having very diverse faculty, conversations on decolonizing the curriculum or the art school/university or the cultural institution don’t happen. In a few months I’m going to present the idea of decoloniality to the final year students and I’m really excited to see what’s going to happen; given that most of our students are white and middle-class, with very few students of color in the group.

Within this engineering space, you will have students and staff who want you to conform to a certain way of teaching, not in a disruptive way. We find this kind of demand often in Anglo-American higher education: ‘I’m paying money, you need to comply with what everybody else does, which is that you don’t give me readings because I don’t read, and you teach technically because that’s what I need to learn!’

I think I’m going to be on the margins for a very long time, and even at the institution where I worked at before I was still on the margins, I think. Marq, you

were just talking about hiring people, that it's going to actually begin this change. But people like me are never hired in positions such as head of department. We're maybe appointed, and maybe get promoted, but if I were to go for, say, a role as head of department or Dean, it's highly unlikely that I would be given a role like that, because I'm disruptive! They would rather have someone who wasn't. It's very easy to give up or just leave.

MS:

I'd like to return to Michelle's reference to exhaustion. And what it means, for instance, to be the only woman in the room, and what it means to be the only person of color or the only woman of colour in the room. And that you're having to be there as representative of others, to represent everyone... else! You're representative, and a token, and more often than not a token gesture, a half-hearted gesture, an empty gesture by the department, the institution of higher education, the cultural institution, etc. Maybe for a change you just want to speak on your own behalf?! Or, maybe you look around and say: 'Well actually it's *everybody's responsibility* to be thinking about gender in/equality (*especially* the men in the room, not only the women), and maybe it's *everyone's responsibility* to be thinking about institutional racism (*especially* white folks in the room, not only the people of colour), right?' This is how one shifts the institution, the power, the dynamic, the behaviour, when *everybody* in their role takes seriously their responsibility in that role of arguing for, for instance, equal pay.

MWG:

I think it'll be interesting for us to reflect on how employment works for us in the respective spaces in which we work. If you are or become the minority within a work place, what happens is that *your body*

actually has to count for the other minorities in that space. Unlike Danah's department, we in Fine Art at Goldsmiths have quite a mixed cohort of students, but I am one of two tutors of color amongst a very large body of teaching staff, on a big course with 330 undergraduates alone. The representation of staff to students is really imbalanced, and how that plays out in terms of my role, as a lecturer is that students of color seek me out in the corridors, in lifts, in my office, by email to ask me for a tutorial or to speak on behalf of them. And now that is a tall order, and one that I cannot fully fulfill, and so when I endeavor to do that, that's incredible additional labor because I'm fighting not only for my own space within a field, within a department or an institution, but I'm also fighting for them.

I've said on many occasions at Goldsmiths that there are ways in which this situation could be quite simply rectified: hire more people like the students, hire more people like me. How are we trying to tackle this? We've had working group meetings, where we try to work out how is it that the institution so easily reproduces its whiteness as a condition. These are small, but meaningful changes. We have for instance changed the wording in our job applications to state very clearly that we are looking for what in the UK is now generically called BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) candidates and LGBTQ+ candidates as standard.

Then there were other small changes that can be made. In the UK there are of course so many people of color that have PhDs! But when one applies for a job, gets an interview, and walks into the interview room, most of the time you can be sure that the panel is mostly white, and if they are not white that person who's not white is more than likely to be from the Human Resources department; and they have little or no say in the decision-making. I can be

sure of that because this has happened to me on a number of occasions. Now I can handle it because I've been working in a very institutionalized way for the last 17 years. But ultimately many people who are not like you have to come to an institution and be confronted by this wall of whiteness or confronted by this question: will they fit in? The answer is; No, they might not.

These are all sticky points around how very easy it is to come undone institutionally because there's been a hierarchy, inequitable power relations, structural inequalities for years, so, if we now see institutional spaces as the Undercommons, where something new *really* can take hold, what could previously marginalized workers do to shape their careers and environment for the mutual growth of the individual and the workplace as community?

182 One further small policy decision: for the last two years, all our visiting tutors have been tutors of color. Now you can see this as positive discrimination or affirmative action. Ultimately I think it's about diversity in the most positive sense: finally, we have these other voices in the room! Which is great for the students of course, and also, an additional benefit is that when in the future we advertise for posts, and we get to the shortlisting stage, these visiting tutors will have already been tested and because of this will be more likely to make the cut for the shortlist. The paranoid part of me knows that this strategy enables more people of color into teams faster, but there is a concern around the 'sticking plaster' effect, which offers only temporary solutions (as temporary as the short-term contracts) to this systemic issue.

So we are seeing changes. But it's a long-term goal in our Department. And, finally I'd like to acknowledge that for the last four years it has been academically very lonely in my Department as me.

DA:

In terms of decolonizing the institution, in the UK in particular, to add to Michelle's comments, what the people you're hiring look like is vital, but so is their research. Employing a person of color is fine, but if their research is on, let's say, the design history of Victorian dress, who cares! I want to know about the new innovative research they're producing, that's actually relevant to the students, and relevant to how design is progressing. And that's true of new colleagues, but existing colleagues also. I have a lot of colleagues who are from everywhere, which is very rare for a design department, and their research is superb in a lot of cases, but it's not really politically charged or engaging, or relevant to design now. This happens a lot of the time: staff get hired, and you say to yourself: 'what's your research about? What's new and innovative about it? What's new or different that you bring to the classroom that's actually addressing concerns that students have?' Whether that research, that teaching, is being done by a person of color or not, that's another point.

MS:

183 I'd like to pick up on that last point, Danah. There's an assumption, an expectation even, that people of colour in higher education are always and only going to be doing research and teaching Critical Race Studies, Postcolonial Studies, white supremacy, race justice, decolonizing, and so on. Maybe they do want to work on the design history of Victorian dress, and maybe that should be OK! The flip side of this is equally complicated: do we expect all academics who are white to conduct research on 'whiteness', not least because most of them believe they research 'neutral' subjects (which is to say, subjects that they might not know or believe to have been shaped by questions of race, colonisation, Empire, slavery, etc.)? Or, what

about me doing research or teaching Critical Race Studies? (I know how it makes me feel when I see other white folks doing that, very awkward, but what if there's no one else to do it, no one else who can do it or wants to do it, when it needs to be done? What if I'm the only option, god help the students!) Going back to what Michelle was just saying, given that students of colour seek her out, what the hell does it mean for me to be the only one around for them to seek out, and for me to have to speak on their behalf?!? This whole situation, it's a veritable can of worms, a real double bind, in Gayatri Spivak's sense of that term.

MWG:

I think we should ask some questions of the audience. I'd like to understand, what's going on in your institutions or within your jobs? Do you think the issues that we've collectively raised are relevant? It might not be about color per se, but do you feel that there are equivalent blocks, because if I speak about a wall that I'm up against, is that something lived?

MS:

Otherwise we'll take the audience's silences as complicity or disinterest! Perhaps this is evidence of the legacy of the comprehensive and successful colonization of the mind during the period of Occupation of all Lithuania by the Soviets! They are unable to speak or don't care...

AO:

You joke, Marq, but I think you've inadvertently identified what we might call a vacuum between our concerns around decolonizing and the expectations of the audience. Not everyone in this auditorium will be interested as a researcher or as an artist in these questions. But it's significant nonetheless, so indeed it

would be really interesting to know what is important or interesting for you the audience, if anything, in this question of decolonizing.

MS:

As a way of trying to build a bridge, it's worth saying that we've been speaking with the students today and yesterday about Western epistemology, about the legacy of the Enlightenment's establishing of systems of knowledge, and the ways that we continue to find ourselves in, and thus having to engage with all of these systems of knowledge; and this includes the status and legitimacy of knowledge in the university and art school system, the public museum and its collection, commercial galleries, the creative and cultural industries, capitalism itself! If you're being an artist or a designer or a curator, or a culture worker of one kind or another, you're working within and thus a part of those systems, right? And what about laboring in these institutions and industries, and issues of unstable and insecure, precarious labour, of the precariat, aren't these issues always already related to the question of decolonizing? You'll recall earlier when Danah said that there's no conversation about modernity that isn't a question about coloniality, right!

MWG:

I think the silence is really interesting. If something's truly unraveling then it takes time to articulate.

AO:

Another issue could be the question of language. Here of course English is the language of colonization! Pretty much for everyone in the age of digital cultures, it's even more popular than before. I would actually propose that the audience be invited to speak in their own languages. There are enough people here who

can translate, if you speak in Lithuanian or Russian or other languages. It's not necessary to speak only in English.

MS:
or German or Finish or Welsh...

Audience:

My English is not so good... I just want to comment on Michelle's presentation, I like very much the photos where you sit together with your students. I'm working in Lithuania for 20 years, with teachers and with students at a university, and one of the most important questions is *how we sit together*. This is one way to raise the issue of democracy in education and pedagogy, which is also to talk about decolonization, when we point out what it means for the teacher to continue to sit at the front of the classroom, and continue to behave as though they know everything better than the students. An auditorium at a contemporary art museum does raise similar issues.

MS:

For sure, the last thing anyone wants is for a bunch of foreigners turning up, telling you what and how to think, and then demanding that you talk to them, right!

Audience:

I think I'm on both sides of the fence. Part of my life is in London, and part of it is here as an artist, so I can relate to what you're talking about but the same time the reality here is very different. I want to discuss this language issue. I don't know if ___ is here? He is one of the PhD students at the Vilnius Academy of Arts. He emailed me because he's writing on Chinese culture and he was told that he couldn't use Chinese references; for the obvious reasons that nobody here would understand them. He said he didn't understand

why he couldn't use Chinese references, when he's writing about Chinese culture! While the answer is obvious, at the same time, given how useful a research resource such material will be for him, can it be true? And, if so, why?

MWG:

The example you give of the student being told not to incorporate references to material from China in the Chinese languages, in their PhD that is on Chinese culture is highly relevant. Basically that's really violent. This has also happened in 2018 within my Department where students were asked to take out bits of their identity as a reference point or framework to their studio practice. Now why that's so violent is because you're denying the self and you're denying the things that drive people, their passions, their anchor points to which they refer and by which they can operate.

It's worth asking, at this transformative time, in an instance such as this, where does whiteness sit or where does otherness sit in our contemporary phase of wanting or actively fostering a decolonial uprising?

The text that I'm writing with [REDACTED] cannot go out yet, because it's too fiery or passionate. I understand that there are actually structural problems even within the writing itself, namely who should contribute to the writing of this text? Ultimately I do think we have to move towards a territory that breaks down factions or splinter groups. There are indeed trans/non-binary and cis men, who are contributing to this text. They are not named yet because everybody is in a process of working out how they'll contribute. But ultimately operations within factions, or identifying with one group can actually be deeply disruptive. I think we have to assert our differences and also find ways to meet in our discussions with parity.

Colonialism has divided and conquered for years in so many different iterations, and the division is so profound that what we are asking for is the dismantling of a structure and a rebuilding with parity, with equality. These discussions are ongoing and sometimes circular, the 1960s in the Civil Rights movement for instance; we've been talking about it in the early 20th century, when women asked for/demanded the right to vote! It's the same drum that's being banged, but these cases of equality need so many allies, it needs such collective action. And I don't know if just a few bodies can do it. That's why it feels lonely, there is a deep and desperate frustrating madness that develops in articulating this with my colleague and fellow artist [REDACTED].

DA:

To draw on that last point on the connections between early 20th century and the 1960s, I think the main difference between that and our decolonizing thought is that, back then, they were well aware of poverty, inequality, and so on, but they didn't really look at the *causes*, they looked at what they could do *now*, but without actually questioning the underlying structures of knowledge and power that create poverty, that create inequality; and I'm trying to unpack that.

Audience:

I really want to thank you for this conversation I am right now dealing with so many of these questions myself. I'm an undergraduate student at the Academy studying design. I have two questions. One question for myself is what it means for my personality to be sitting in a classroom? Because I've been going to school for 18 years sitting in a classroom with a teacher and fellow students, and then I went to university and I'm *still* having this same system where the lecturer comes in, still stands over me, and still has

this power over me and my ideas. So this was just a question to myself: how am I *still* here?

My second question relates to the time I was living in Germany, where I had to deal with the same situation every time the question of nationality came up in conversation. I was on Erasmus, so there were many other students around from England, Belgium, and so on. When I told people I was from Lithuania, the conversation would always be about where Lithuania is, not what it means to live there, or to come from there. And they'd say: 'Oh I know, Lithuania, that's Riga, right?' Every time! And I'd have to reply: 'No man, I come from Vilnius!' And then they'd say: 'So where is it?' And I'd say: 'OK, so, here's Russian, here's Poland, here are the Baltic States, which are, yes, independent of Russia, that's right, very good...' And then some other student would say: 'Yeah I'm from Britain' or 'I'm from Belgium'. And, suddenly, because you're from a little country, and nobody knows where it is, or anything about it or your history or culture, people aren't interested in talking with you any more!

AO:

Both of these comments are really good examples to the key ideas of postcolonial theories. One of them has to do with the problem that Dipesh Chakrabarty, one of the key thinkers of the postcolonial condition, identified as an 'asymmetrical ignorance'. In the given case it relates to the current state of the academic publication industry, in which English is 'set' by default as the 'lingua franca'. What it implies, as one of the consequences, is the problem of the representation of others' experience and thinking that was formed in original (non-English) languages. In this sense, asymmetrical ignorance would also mean that the academy, which reproduces a particular type of knowledge and particular scholarly traditions, would

not allow not only the other language to get into it, but also it would suspect or have a fear there might be some sort of Theory outside of this particular academic, English speaking or Anglo-Saxon world.

Another thought related to your comment, Michelle, it's really interesting that you see different forms of inequality or misrepresentation, or misunderstanding, that you are speaking not only *for* people of color or of different genders, and ages, but in fact also having to speak *to* the very structural position of inequality, which can be the same for different subjects.

Finally, a quick comment about the concept of the Subaltern, a key concept for postcolonial theory which doesn't simply refer to someone who is subjugated, but who is actually so insignificant, because the Other, *the big Other*, is not interested to know about this small and insignificant other.

MS:

It's time to finish, officially, but let's carry on speaking together until someone kicks us out, it seems quite important to stay.

Audience:

I've been thinking about the silence, that was coming from the audience and I think it's symptomatic of a couple of issues. First of course coming from and still being a post-Soviet, *you would have to fit in*. Marq, you made a comment about fitting in, asking the question about how well you would fit in, and in Soviet times you would have to fit in; you wouldn't be able to stick out because that would make you *wrong*, not in the line of correctness, and I think that this feeling is still present today, even here in this hall with higher education and art world representatives. And I think that this reticence cuts across gender and profession,

and whether or not you have kids, and whether or not you come from a family of artists, have networks, know how to use those networks, and then of course there's the matter of class.

MWG:

Absolutely! Class is often overlooked within higher education, certainly in the UK. If you're working class, the barriers to entry are often insurmountable. There are fees to pay, and to access further studies you have to take out a loan, but other than that, many of these students work additional inhospitable shifts on top of their full-time course to support their living costs!?! Working class and want to go into higher education, especially to art school? Forget it! Class of course underpins and structures completely any kind of industry. It's felt in different ways by different bodies of course, but essentially it's a very powerful holding tool: how you open your mouth, how you say what you say, the words you use, how your accent is perceived, etc. What I'm saying to you now is conditioned by years of education and I'm fully aware that if I spoke in a different way, with a different accent, a different intonation, you might not be listening to me now.

It gives me a chill to say that.

Essentially my conditioning keeps me in certain spaces, and sometimes not speaking keeps you in a space; by keeping quiet, by going under the radar, just to exist. I really want to acknowledge the point that being different actually causes a headache, causes stress, causes mental anxiety, and creates unnecessary problems within your workspace. And sometimes it's easier to be a part of a wider, more anonymous group; I fully accept that.

At the moment I'm going through a phase of being a troublemaker, but I can't carry on doing it forever. Marq mentioned exhaustion earlier, well, with my troublemaking, I'll carry on doing it, but I will go away soon, and then I come back again if I feel like it. I really think that you are absolutely right, Danah, that you can't carry on being the outspoken one for a long time and I think that's true for many of us.

Audience (in Russian, translated by AO):

I am very glad to be here and to take part in the discussion. I am from Russia and I would like to note, that in Russian institutions of higher education (that this is probably true in other countries as well) it's really difficult to find spaces and to find moments when people in academia would actually speak of this political attitudes and stakes, of the questions of power relations, etc. It's absent. Universities are not considered to be political spaces.

192 The size of the country is not always important, and that there might be some other factors in play that speak to a country's significance, despite its size. At some conferences or workshops that I attend, it is not rare to come across the situation where all papers related to Russia are grouped and presented in the framework of separate panels as if Russia would itself be a methodology.

In one of the panels in which I recently participated, my paper was scheduled as the first one in the session, and the organizers of the panel said it's just logical that I should start, since the case of Russia represents their past, so me, going first, would simply enable to session to fall naturally into a chronology.

Being from Russia, and speaking of this recent experience of participating in that conference in the West and with western collaborators, I would like to stress that the situation which I described, had become a norm. But now being in Lithuania, and being at this event, I feel like this is something new, something that is completely different from my previous experience. I will need to rethink what it means to continue my research, but now from this space. And again, I would like to say, that I am very glad to have this opportunity to do so.

Audience:

There's been a discussion today about fitting in, and I'm very interested in that. I've been here in Lithuania for only three months. I've noticed how the discourse on racism in the Baltic States and Eastern Europe is pretty invisible. We don't hear a lot about black people, and about the conversations from elsewhere in Europe about race. I've been trying to fit in, as a black man in a country with very few black men, but I've realized that I'm trying to fit into my understanding of, and familiarity with a western European discourse of race, racism, and racialization. So, I'm wondering, is this idea of fitting in a legitimate wish, desirable, possible even? Or have we left the idea in the past, along with what's perceived to be the general failure of multiculturalism – to integrate as difference – as opposed to a more obviously assimilationist (and racist) model? Or is the idea of fitting in coming back, albeit differently? What I'm seeing, for instance, is how this assimilationist model is being transferred to a discourse of Islamophobia; and for sure here I feel racism, especially Islamophobia in terms of hostility towards a minority. That said, I grew up in France, I studied Portugal Studies in England, and now I'm in Lithuania. And this is the best place I've ever been so far!

Ieva Mazūraitė-Novickienė (IM-N):

Lithuania is a country that is very closed and its people keep their tradition. I think that *now* the common notion, the common consensus is that we have to begin to understand that there are people of other origins and of other religions in this country. Immigration is still something very new for Lithuanian society. And I think that there will be a reaction, a backlash. For the moment, everybody is trying to understand what the implications are of having new students coming to study, new working people coming from elsewhere in Europe, from China, etc. We are just at the beginning of all these processes; it's very difficult to predict what will transpire. And of course we carry our history of trying to get rid of Jews from Lithuania, and, as I tried to show in my presentation, bad attitudes towards ethnic Poles, who has once been integral to Vilnius. And these questions will need to be raised. The situation is still too fresh.

Audience:

In Lithuanian society there are generally two attitudes towards Muslims. We have the older Muslims who are Tatars, the ones who lived with us together for 600 hundred years and which are considered OK by our society, and then there are the new Muslims. This is a problem I think for the whole of Lithuanian society, this anti-Muslim gaze directed at this recent generation of immigrants.

AO:

I feel that we have to take into account the question of political discourse, because it's clear that there are and there have been Muslims in Lithuania for many years. That said, in the context of the events of the last two decades, I think this anti-Muslim sentiment is everywhere in the world, and in particular at the levels of top politics, where there's a fear of fundamentalism,

which is quickly conflated with Islam per se. So it's a *mediated fear* – a fear that has been spread and reinforced by the media.

DA:

They're the new other, I think. There's a hip-hop artist called Narcy (Yassin Alsalman) and in 2004 he said 'Iraq is the new black', because of the Iraq war. Being seen, being Arab, I obviously face a very different discrimination from you. At the airport my name is likely going to flag a lot more than your name, Michelle, maybe. But then when you look at us at a glance you might be flagged up before I would be flagged up.

MWG:

We were joking earlier... I spent a lot of years being Michelle Williams, before adding Gamaker, which complicated things because people get scared about pronouncing my name. Michelle Williams could also have been (to quote my friend and artist Femi Dawkins) a Trinidadian track and field athlete or the singer in Destiny's Child or the Golden Globe winning actor. Names are very powerful things, when it comes to the freedom of movement too. I'm fully aware of that, of how we move through an airport, I'm stopped a lot; I'm sure you are too, Danah. So these questions of who passes, of invisibility, smallness, bigness, who is looking, who stays under the radar or who precisely is taunting or teasing? I think they're all really important things to consider as we operate on a day-to-day basis.

So I'm intrigued about that because I think the privilege is in traveling. It's not only in traveling but it's also in feeling insecure, and the privilege of being able to take the opportunity on a theoretical level to know what difference *means*; to try to speak in another language or to try to live somewhere else where you become a

minority. I think that's massive, if we make that choice; that doesn't come easily to so many who have to flee, who have to move with none of that freedom in the decision making. But when you do know it from a position of having lived, say, in the Netherlands for seven years on and off, and to understand all of a sudden the color of my skin in a very different way, to when I grew up in London. These are just small things but I think placing yourself temporarily in the position of a minority can be a very healthy thing to do, to understand what it might mean to be 'the Other'.

DA:

On that last point, I had to go to border control to get here because I went through Frankfurt. Every time I go to Eastern Europe they look at my passport a little bit too long. I have a Canadian passport, I was born in Kuwait, my name is Danah Abdulla, but I'm Canadian, and I don't want to seek asylum here. In Denmark they consistently look at my passport like it's forged! It's a biometric document that you have in front of you. Being a designer, you know how these documents are designed, and knowing what's inside of it and then he still continuously spends time marveling at it; I marvel at their suspicion! And I look at myself, and I look around me, and every brown body is there and I'm like, 'hey, how you doing?', you know because you're part of that club. And all the white people are going through, right? And even with this document that proves you're real. It's interesting because in some places they don't even bat an eye, they just let me through, but in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe it's always just extra time, as if I'm there to seek asylum because I have an Arab name. Or maybe they've just never seen the name, because my name can be either Christian or Muslim, it's quite vague.

MS:

I think both of you, Danah and Michelle, have spoken today and also yesterday about that feeling, and I think trusting that feeling is really quite important. This situation of what happens when you feel disempowered or discriminated against by the system or spaces in which you find yourself (whether that's a classroom, as Aurelija, the designer who spoke from the audience put it so well, or the art school or the art museum or the gallery, or the creative and cultural industries, etc.), and what it means to be part of asymmetrical power dynamics in these systems or spaces, as Almira and others have discussed. And I think trusting that feeling, and working out how you start from there, from that feeling of... injustice, is crucial, right, for all of us? When one feels that feeling, that's when one realizes one's long term commitment to fighting *for social justice* was actually always a fight *against social injustice*!

Thank you, thank you all.

Afterword: Nobody Wants to Deal with this Shit Internally¹

**Teresa Cisneros and
Andrea Francke**

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Andrea Francke: (AF):

Our brief is to raise issues, discuss the debate around decolonization from the perspective of the Americas. We can do this through an artistic, activist, academic point of view, or perhaps best a combo of all of them. Marq added that our thoughts on border thinking would be interesting, and also a bit about fucking up the institution.

Teresa Cisneros (TC):

I began thinking with democracy in the centre, because it feels that the decolonizing project, at least

1 When Marq asked Teresa if she might consider writing an afterthought to this publication, because of her collaborative practice she invited Andrea to be in conversation with her. Their conversation took place in Hackney, London, in Teresa's flat under an English grey sky over coffee and teas. The conversation continued over wine and lunch, following no particular order and it is similar to the conversations that Andrea and Teresa engage in when they meet to chismear.

in the case of this project here, is to aspire towards democracy.

AF:

The Post Soviet and South Africa perspectives framing this book are interesting in the context of decolonization and in relation to democracy. In Latin America, the thinking that emerged in relation to decolonization doesn't move towards democracy.

TC:

How do decolonization and democracy sit together? They seem disparate to me. Thinking of Nicaragua and El Salvador in the 80s and how the US interfered in their governance to establish democracy, but it's really neo-colonial rule.

AF:

What does that have to do with decolonization?

TC:

It doesn't. Quite the opposite, it's democracy as colonisation! So then the question becomes: what is the democracy the contributors to this publication look towards when speaking of decolonization?

AF:

More generally, it's questionable how decolonizing is appropriated and universally applied. Concepts which are experience- or situation-specific are transformed by academia, culture, and the arts, and then applied everywhere. Latin American decolonizing theory is a situated conversation trying to understand and act in the world through the embodied experience of living in a world created at the moment of colonization.

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TC:

Decolonization is not a universal in concept or application. When it's used in this way it generally doesn't feel reflective or antagonistic enough; it needs to be complicated.

AF:

Decolonizing just becomes a moral good. Decolonizing is a good thing so we do it and call what we're doing decolonizing, so we're doing a good thing. It's a 'virtuous circle', but a vacuous one composed of empty rhetoric.

TC:

That's true, whether it's inclusion/diversity work across the board, repatriating objects in museums, or decolonizing the curriculum in higher education. For instance, the 'Why is my curriculum so white?' project initiated by the National Union of Students is framed as
200 decolonizing, but can the curriculum be decolonized? The curriculum uses a colonial framework, so you can change the curriculum but that doesn't change the framework.

AF:

On the other hand, it's confusing how different theories and uses of 'decolonization' are mixed and interact. You have the Latin American texts from Anibal Quijano in Peru and US based Latin American scholars, such as Maria Lugones and Walter Dignolo. Then there are African scholars and activists such as Mbembe. African states' history of independence struggles and decolonization is different from Latin America. The 'theory' has a meaning directly in relation to the activism. Mixing these two concepts – of the decolonial in Latin American and Africa as it is 'situated' with regards to 'theory' and/or 'practice' – blows my mind and I find it hard to follow.

TC:

The Americas had a colonisation akin to erasure as the Spanish arrive with a desire to re-inscribe the land. Africa is a different project. How then does decolonizing apply to England, what is it to decolonize here?

AF:

Who is being decolonized? I think decolonization in England becomes a strategy: 'How can I keep my whiteness at the centre without having to carry any guilt?'

TC:

Or white innocence, the 'it wasn't my intention' line. Because 'I know your pain', 'I understand your pain'. But my white construction is the status quo, and it does not change.

AF:

And I can change the curriculum and teach some black scholars but my whiteness is still intact.

TC:

Still white people using white power.

AF:

Going back to Quijano. I think we need to read what Quijano wrote beginning in the eighties as part of a larger movement of thinkers that have similar projects from very different perspectives. You can trace affinities between Quijano's *Dominación y cultura*, Gloria Anzaldúa's *The New Mestiza*, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, Hortence Spillers 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe', among others. Everybody's breaking things apart and questioning self-evident truths from their own bodies and experiences. Quijano

said we needed to lay claim over all the concepts that have been imposed on us. They are ours.

TC:

They are proposing a different set of questions, not taking what they're told is the question. Fundamentally coloniality/whiteness dictates the questions. Colonisation is about power through infrastructures and administration, it ensures we move towards said power, it creates the framework. Quijano is saying: should we be moving in that way? However, in much of the decolonizing discourse today academics or cultural workers are moving in the 'white' way. They talk about undoing, reconstructing, but they're still playing the same fucking white games. It's the same shit again and again.

I am apprehensive about decolonizing. I don't get the 'lets strip things back' and restart, where are we trying to get to? I think we need to be reconditioned without forgetting the past but not returning to a past. It's not 'I'm going to unlearn coloniality so I can get to the position which allows me to access a life-style'. Doing that follows a colonial administrative path.

Mignolo uses delinking: to decolonize you have to delink, meaning there has to be a shift from thinking there is a universal into recognising other philosophies, knowledges, ethics, politics, ways of being. Such an unnamed space has various ways in mind; western ways don't teach us to think like this, they teach us thinking that is always singular.

Another issue is that the people doing the 'decolonizing' still maintain their power. They don't want to give up their fucking power. To decolonize is to give up power or share it. What would it mean to give up power and share agency?

AF:

Power is linked to centrality and the subject at the centre. Thinking about Anzaldúa's borders and margins and the subjectivity that develops when you are always already between cultures or categories. Never being at the centre is not comfortable but how can we learn to be uncomfortable if that hasn't been forced on us? If people want to decolonize they need to learn to be comfortable *not* being at the centre of every fucking concept. I never think about galleries, universities or the curriculum in relation to decolonizing. I think about people and movements in South America who only do things in Spanish because they don't want to speak to the fucking 'centre' (implied irony). They do their thing. Like Feminismo Comunitario or Sylvia Rivera Cusicanqui. They don't translate their work into English. Because time and again people (academics and artists) come and appropriate it. They find it and decide: 'this is about me!', and suddenly they place themselves at the centre and push these voices out.

TC:

In the decolonizing museums 'sector' some are centring indigenisation or similar experiences but the voices doing this are white (you can be BIPOC but think through whiteness). I think: 'how dare you colonialist take *our* (I'm not saying I'm indigenous but I am brown from a colonised space) tools to decolonize?' Shouldn't they flip it and say: 'if you want to decolonize why don't you have my job?' They should be using their tools on their terms, not taking my tools, or 'letting' me borrow their tools.

AF:

Maybe they should be saying: 'lets eliminate my job'. Maybe 90% of the jobs white people hold in the arts and cultural industries are useless.

TC:

Middle management especially – shit, I'll do myself out of a job. The tools of decolonizing are a problem. We should start by asking who is most disenfranchised because of colonisation, and instead we should be thinking through collectivity; through forms that are not self-centred, white western, or capitalist, but collective.

White majority institutions want to decolonize, undertake repatriation and restitution without doing the real fucking work. It's done in name only, it's just 'shuffling papers' to make superficial efforts. Nobody wants to deal with this shit internally. To actually decolonize is to ask: 'what can I do from my position?' And, you know what, the answer might be as simple as: 'okay, I cannot decolonize'.

204 I exist in a colonial state. I studied arts administration, mastered colonial administration, and came to understand its methods. And growing up on the border and being an othered subject I learned to think with several positions at once. A white straight abled bodied person can't. Because they'll never fucking know because they've never had to. So as much as they want to write about decolonizing they don't actually apply it to themselves because they don't know how to or maybe don't want to because that would mean giving up or sharing power.

AF:

What does it mean to assume decolonizing is the tool that everybody needs to apply to themselves? When did British people decide they needed to decolonize themselves? I find the operation weird because it's so extractivist at its core. What are you doing? You go to Africa, go to Latin America, you appropriate the concept, then you occupy it and then you decolonize your museums. What does that mean?

TC:

Then produce knowledge that's not theirs, own it, modify it, and be the expert in it.

AF:

Then they have consultants, 'experts' with the zealotry of the recently converted, and that come and decolonize their institution.

TC:

205 Colonialism or coloniality. Decolonizing itself simply becomes a destination enforced in a specific way. It becomes a communication tool. There's a group of professionals in London whose destination is to decolonize and detoxify museums. Can a museum be detoxed? What the fuck does that mean when museums are inherently toxic? Recently Tate Britain had an exhibition on Baroque British paintings and members of this group and the public were triggered when they saw a painting depicting black slaves. The group said Tate had a responsibility to give trigger warnings and that seeing the painting caused people trauma. On their Twitter they linked to the NHS for mental health support. I was like: 'for fuck's sake seriously; a fucking trigger warning sign is what you want!?!?!'

AF:

Who are the people triggered? Because if you are black or brown you go through the world being triggered every day all the time. Who are these bodies for whom this symbolic thing is so painful and causes trauma?

TC:

I also thought: 'how dare you take my fucking agency away by putting a trigger sign up?' I can choose. Perhaps they could request the context of

the artworks be made clearer. Someone can't assume that something is triggering. There is something around decolonizing here that is about taking people's agency away. People in power decide who has agency and who doesn't. I was pissed off with this situation because I thought: 'who the fuck are you to police me?!?' If I believed their intention was to reconstruct a museum, then that's an interesting proposition because you're thinking beyond one group and their singular glory.

AF:

The way museums function is also situated, and can illuminate the thinking of decolonization in different places. Much like Mexico, in Peru we have an indigenous past that feels heroic. It does not allow the denial of the cultural and intellectual value of the people present before colonization. Therefore, whiteness had to find a way to relate to that and own it. Archaeological and historical museums are an important part of the infrastructure that ensures the past is shared, but race is strategically distributed. We do have some interesting recent examples such as a museum reflecting on the Internal War years, the Lugar de la Memoria, la Tolerancia y la Inclusión Social (LUM). I think you could see it as a decolonial 'take' on the museum. It's a museum as a place that is alive and holding space for politics, epistemological disputes, and social justice.

TC:

The museums you mention are political and living. As opposed to museums organised from a colonial positionality that are usually dead. For instance, Mexico's museums created a heroic indigenous identity, which is problematic, without indigenous people in the conversation. Remember there was lite colonisation in Mexico's making. We know the Aztecs

for a reason: because they colonised too. How do we sort those layers of colonisation?

AF:

I wouldn't necessarily agree that the Aztecs colonised. I like the idea of colonisation being a specific process. Groups have power and conquer but not every power relation is a colonising one.

TC:

To some extent, it can be said the Aztecs colonised others across Mexico, wiping them out through assimilation and integration. Taking people as tribute for sacrifice, monetary tributes and then culturally assimilating them through violence.

AF:

I still wouldn't say that's colonisation and that's one of my problems with the use of colonization to cover very disparate processes. For example was the Soviet Union involved in a colonisation, or as some have said in this book, an occupation? 207

TC:

What do you call it when one group takes over another through power? Do we name it differently?

AF:

We name it differently for different places and historical moments. For example, in the case of the Incas in Peru; there was an empire and they conquered many peoples and territories, but their administrative processes were different from the Spanish processes. Their economics were different from colonial extractivism. Bodies were managed differently. It was an empire, but I don't think we should name the process colonization.

TC:

It conflates what we are talking about, but I sort of agree with you. I think there's a romanticisation of decolonizing and colonisation, especially towards the Americas. For instance, when decolonizing is thought of as going back to the before. Stripping away the colonisation that happened to 'return' to these spaces in those times. What are we returning to?

AF:

Feminismo Comunitario in Bolivia have this critique: Why do white people in the US and Europe think there's something to go back to? A feminism led by indigenous and mestizo women, they're asking: 'What are they talking about?' Oppression has always existed. Their feminism is constructed around the idea that we need to constantly fight oppression but the fight is always circular. We have solutions, make change then other oppressions emerge and we deal with them. We're always moving towards and realising how to be and do better as we go.

TC:

There is no one solution or singular end. Recently I met a white composer who shared a story about receiving a grant from the British Council for South America. His plan was to redistribute the grant to local people. The project was to create an archive of ancestral stories from carvings on a cave. No extraction. During the project, the carvings were destroyed by a mining business as a way to destroy indigenous claims to land. The composer offered to recreate the cave by using the memories of those who knew the caves and to create the cave via 3D printing with contacts in Madrid. This became the project on their terms; that's to say, on the terms of the local people, influenced by the white composer who can access certain technologies.

AF:

It just sounds shitty, it's what someone told you they wanted on their terms.

TC:

Maybe I'm naïve, but I find the negotiation of intention and non-extraction interesting. Who are we to judge what indigenous people want. The artist co-presented with a local activist at a conference where she was asked by a white man why she would want this plastic cave. She said: 'why wouldn't I, you don't think we have access to this technology or want it?' We presume someone is telling them what they want. I thought the cave as archive for land rights via a fucking 3D object in Madrid was wild. The local people will use the fucking technology because this is how they can claim their land and history, it's the only way they can prove they exist. It's relayed to me by a white man who co-claims the project and has agency.

AF:

OK, but decolonizing as a process remains intact. Funding from external agencies is not redistributing, it's a dependency or co-dependent. I read agency from a nihilistic perspective so it's always limited. But agency is having the capacity to react to things, we all have it and it's not like some of us have agency and some of us don't.

TC:

Agency as in 'he has the power because he is a white man from the UK'. I think of agency in terms of how I make decisions based on how they affect others. Collective agency, even if spoken through one person. What's nihilistic about what you are saying?

AF:

Agency is spoken through belief in the self. If you attain a level of power, you can actually do what you want. You make the decision. I find agency in that sense an unhelpful concept. That's what I mean by nihilistic. Humans can never achieve that level of selfishness. We all impact the narrative, many agencies like the British Council, the host, the activist, the artist, there are many layers. The redistribution of money is a problem. British Council money comes from the lottery or taxes from working class people. We're actually missing something: decolonization as an idea that questions the concepts and the structures of how things are.

TC:

We're not addressing the before, when the British Council gets created to redistribute money as diplomacy. What about the bodies that exists there, that have been affected by British colonialism? It's convoluted, with regards to positionality and navigating institutions that are created and framed through colonial infrastructures that, currently, are most widespread, whether that's in the work place or more widely across society. What position does a body that's been colonised through education or society have? My education was white Western, but my Mexican parents taught me another way of being. A body fed two ways. What does it mean to navigate spaces as colonised bodies knowing you will be recolonized when for instance you start a job? I'm talking about what it means, and how it feels to be required to think through certain structures to survive those structures.

There's something interesting here about decolonizing and surviving. Thinking about the positionality I occupy because of education or whatever, I've survived

somehow. I have very little privilege, but could be perceived to have it. I started life as a working-class immigrant from the border. But somehow figured out how to navigate these structures by being in constant self-reflection and critique. A colonised body, but also a colonising body. People don't reflect on their own fucking colonising. I'm a coloniser and I admit it. I cannot undo it. I can just rethink it in a different form.

AF:

We live in coloniality and it's experienced differently wherever you are. In Latin America it's structured in a certain way. Here in the Empire coloniality functions in a different way. It's complicated how decolonizing gets used, in relation to decolonizing yourself, it's not possible! We live in coloniality, it's real. You can't wash colonialism out of your body. Time, education systems, museums, gender, sexuality, race are all part of coloniality. There's no essence of human outside of culture. I like decolonizing when it is used towards how we can rethink structures, redistribution, and, in a political way, actively look at reconstruction.

TC:

It's a reconstruction or reformation project. I'm thinking of Saint Teresa of Avila where she adds mysticism to the language of the church, it's a different way of feeling, being, intuiting. Reforming what is spiritual. To decolonize we have to reform, but first deconstruct: do this so everyone can access the same things for one another and on behalf of one another. It feels impossible, but I like the potential idea of a project in continuous process, decolonization as a process instead of a destination.

It's a process that can occur in institutions, it's why I appreciate them and policies: they are the language of being today. Decolonizing or reforming a system may

allow for different ways of being. Like border living which is being in the unbecoming, collective living, filthiness, corruption and community. In a state of undoing and redoing itself, it's unsettled, living on the threshold of death so unsafe it's safe. I want to bring this to London. I want to teach people to exist in that type of space or feeling. You and I, we do the work we do because of where we are from. I exist in a state of unbecoming because of my history. It's the best place to be. Unlike aspiring to become this one safe certain lone agent.

TC:

May be better to sit with the discomfort. To add to the complexity of all this, there's also the confusion around what happens when there's conflation of decolonizing with inclusion or diversity. This happens way too often, and is possibly due to ignorance or a lack of thinking politically. To simply 'include', to push an agenda of inclusion or diversity, is much easier than the challenge of having to actually shift a political system or yourself, right?

AF:

Back to Quijano, What he is asking is: what is art in Peru? Art is a Western category that through its own existence racializes and excludes local practices and ways of making/thinking. Then the big issue is not getting people from indigenous backgrounds into art school! It's about fucking redefining what art is! If you include all people in a definition or understanding of art then there has to be a constant dialogue. The more you include different people *with* their concepts of art, the more you need to constantly reconceptualize the definition of art.

TC:

Everything's becoming part of it, it's a way to include various ideas without watering any one of them down or erasing any one of them. It's not separate things in one.

AF:

Not inclusion, you can't just include people, you have to fucking rethink the whole thing from the ground up, to be able to hold it together. When people that were excluded get inside, they're going to change it again. And you're going to be constantly changing and redefining things. People included in the concept/institution should get to redefine it by being present. But what is happening now seems to focus on how to get people in, so they don't disturb or rearrange what we have.

TC:

To keep the status quo, fold them into it. As opposed to saying: how do you want to fuck it up, rethink it, reconstitute it, reform it? People don't want to lose their power, to replace their knowledge, and they're afraid to admit they don't know. It's how they are taught to behave. If you are taught to admit not knowing, it raises a different set of questions. In my institutional practice, I arrive knowing I don't know and propose questions, as opposed to offering solutions.

I'm interested in why certain things are not considered in institutions, that's why I love them. Think about how they behave; how they hire, work, and why they do what they do; why curators think within certain art constructions. I would rather get to the source of the problem, versus pretending I know what the problem is. In decolonization, many think they know what the problem is. It takes time, honesty, and vulnerability to admit you don't know. Where do you start? Do we fire

everyone in the institution, everyone who's part of the community, who's assembled? Do we challenge them on how maybe they've created the same hierarchy, that's the problem, right? We know we want collective structures, but somebody always has to be the fucking leader! So we end up in the same place again.

AF:

I'm a fan of institutions too, and Western colonial structures. Decolonizing in South America takes a political activist form. It's not destroying things to start from zero, it's a movement of adding things up. It may relate to our earlier discussion of democracy, but I don't have a problem with hierarchy. Structures are useful as you need to know who's in charge, who's doing what, and the process decisions get made through. A lot of times, when you speak here about decolonization or democratisation, it becomes a discussion in which everybody's obsessed with proving the way they work is horizontal, it's consensus. When it fucking isn't! Own the hierarchy!

TC:

It's related to power and democracy. People fucking vote without knowing what they're voting for, making bad decisions on behalf of other people because they vote for themselves. There's a romanticisation of democracy and consensus voting, because democracy is understood as a way of being and thinking which is individualised, one vote one person. I am not allowed to say, 'Andrea, have my vote', because people don't share this power and systems don't allow this. But in the act of voting I think we actually share agency. Agency, democracy and power are all linked. I trust people, I think we're all trying to do good for one another, but most people possibly don't think like this.

AF:

I'm unsure if it's a cultural or a personal similarity between you and me, both being from the Americas. We have the lived experience of embodied collectivity. It's not a fetish. I do a lot of collaborative work (because that's how I do things in my life not because the collectivity is a moral good). There's a basic rule: doers decide. If I'm not around, then my collaborators can make the decision, because doing shit takes a lot of work. The decision maker has to deal with the consequences. It's how you survive collaborating with people; parenting and friendship are similar.

TC:

It's queering situations of beingness with and for one another.

AF:

That makes me think how decolonizing is fashionable now. Five years ago this book would be on queering instead of decolonizing. What is useful in changing the terms? Are we expanding our way of thinking and acting through those changes? Or are we just moving on to the next thing. I like queering and I use Queer Theory a lot in my thinking. It's useful to think in relation to an embodied lived reality. For instance, in relation to my family and child, that my child is not only mine, that sometimes others have to make decisions for him too. Is there even a point in calling that something?

TC:

It goes back to a Latin American way of understanding collective thinking and being.

AF:

Collective dependency.

TC:

Interdependency, raised on the border I was taught the philosophy: 'If You're Okay I am Okay'. Decisions you make are on behalf of the group. You know your actions impact others, this is how I move in the world. I lived it in how my parents acted as counsel to our family of 100 relations. It's beautiful to see this roll out in real time, like waves. The phone calls, the calling out for support, this familial way, the relations which are different in the Americas, perhaps indigenous practices, it's not white Western.

Kim Tallbear writes about such relations. It was comforting to read her, to know there's a term to describe how I had been living and live which is for her 'caretaking relations'; I just use the term relations. What does living in relation mean? Not the relationality of the fucking art world. It's how to live with humans, non-humans, animals, nature, etc. Such decision-making considers your relations, not just yourself. It's how I practice and possibly why I always work collaboratively, this is why we're here in conversation. I don't want to write on my own, I choose not to write on my own. I was never taught to write on my own. I studied Ancient Philosophy that went against what I was taught growing up because it was so individualistic; and it was challenging studying with only white men. Different from that, the relations, decision-making, the interconnectedness, the 'we're never alone', all this is a way of being foreign to coloniality.

I'm interested in being-together-ness. Holding everyone, arriving and living together. In that togetherness, we permission each other to make decisions for one another. It's not Western, this trusted permissioning. For instance, I worked with a group of professionals as advisors on a work project. It was a way for me to admit I needed collaborators, but also

to invite critique and critical conversations, giving them permission. I needed others to think with me and in the process created a space of mutual trust for critique.

AF:

Returning to the concept of positionality. I'm trying to teach BA students how to be in a group discussion and hold marginal or border positions. How can I resist the temptation to occupy the centre? How can we all share a position of not knowing and being together? I haven't found the proper pedagogy or narrative to explain this. Natasha Trotman in your advisory group at the Wellcome Collection on Inclusive Practices during one of our discussions referred to a ceremony of power amnesty. I love this idea because I can understand how painful it is not to be in the centre and then to hold the centre empty.

TC:

We are not taught how to do this in Western cultures.

AF:

Is there a pedagogical framework to retrain ourselves to share and to recognise that our relation to the centre and to the margins is very different? I grew up as a white person in Latin America and became a brown person by moving here so those dynamics have become quite visible for me. That there are different forces that regulate who can occupy the centre: gender, race, citizenship status, etc. People are raised to believe the centre is what you should aim for to exist as a human. Students that have experienced the world always being the 'universal' or 'neutral' subject at the centre find it difficult – to admit they don't have access to what they would need to understand something, or that something is not for them. So instead they are defensive and want to shut shit down. They will say

that those things are not art, or they are not good, or they are not 'credible'. They don't know how to sit at the margin and listen.

TC:

It's knowing power doesn't just lie at the centre. Because I've been othered. In Mexico I am too white, in the US too Mexican, and here I'm a queer brown immigrant. The only space to occupy is the margin. There's power knowing you occupy the margin, owning it and saying it feels good here. You understand you can challenge the centre, because you can organise those around you and reconstruct the centre.

AF:

So much nicer to be on the margin.

TC:

218 I was taught or conditioned to live in communion and on the margins. The centre is not the goal, it's to commune with those not allowed to have a voice. The value of communing with others is to live, die, laugh, feel one another's pain. It's compassion. It's not self serving; unlike for instance thinking of decolonizing through psychoanalysis which helps keep your ego intact, unlike methods where you have to radically reconstruct yourself in relation to others. At work I ask if it's possible for my white colleagues to behave differently, even if it goes against their custom of holding white colonial power in their bodies? Seeing the world through their whiteness shows their ignorance. Power can come from being vulnerable, open, honest, in how you position yourself for the sake of your relations. Like unbecoming in public: what I mean by this is I will make myself vulnerable for the sake of the real work, the work that really needs to be done, and by doing so I illustrate to others that it's okay, that you can stay intact when being honestly critical. You

know, asking the question, 'what makes white people uncomfortable?', and then seeing them cry, I think to myself: 'those are your tears not mine. My people have cried enough.' It's OK to be simply showing them another way to be, even if they think it's unbecoming because you show all your cards whilst they sit there with their stiff upper lips. That is productive work. I appreciate behaving differently, there's a comfort accepting we're all the same ultimately, we're all going to die so you might as well fucking rock it while you're here. What else is there?

AF:

What you may be asking is if it's even possible to decolonize an institution. Personally, I don't understand what that means. But if that process was possible, then you would have to work on the body on the inside of the institution – both the human bodies themselves and the institution itself as a body. You can't just do it abstractly.

TC:

219 You can heal/cleanse the building but colleagues need to be undone and reconstructed. Institutions cannot exist in themselves, they exist in relation to a cosmos of institutions, and institutional practices and behaviours. Begin to deal with one, but that one is still in relation to those behaving badly and upholding oppressive systems! I'm interested in the idea of an institution undoing its bad behaviours and patterning. Can an institution for instance require its collaborators, those it's in relation to, to undertake a process of undoing in order to learn new behaviours? Where I work, we fund science research, I've suggested that the grants we offer include charters for grantees to undergo bad behaviour retraining.

AF:

I love it. The fact that you can say, 'I'm undoing bad behaviours', that we don't have to jump into 'decolonizing' – the word, idea, the empty rhetoric. The word itself becomes an excuse! It's really not the same as actually correcting bad behaviour: a simple way is paying cleaners a proper wage, it's practical and it can happen. It's not hiding behind an academic term. Decolonizing feels like an esoteric process, a ritual that you can perform to an institution and then it will be good.

TC:

Decolonizing has to be embodied because it contains the erotic and spiritual, it's how we see and feel. The erotic is how we come to relate to one another and in turn love one another which is how we form community/collectively. And the spiritual links to how we are in caretaker relations. We hold institutions in ourselves and are colonised. We are all things at once. I think to myself: how can I embody this notion of decolonizing that also considers the erotic and spiritual everyday? It's not a workshop and you're done. It's a way of being and living. Being in a constant state of reflection, intuition, and self-critique.

AF:

Maybe when you get rid of the word decolonizing you can be more self-reflexive and politically self-reflective about how you behave and participate in the world and in constructing the world. You can examine things in a practical way and have actual effect. I'm thinking about Cynthia Cockburn's *In the Way of Women* and her examination of organisational change in the 80s in relation to feminism, work, and power. Is creating change employing 30% more female managers? Cockburn discovers the biggest impact would be to pay cleaners properly as most are women,

however most female managers would not increase their pay as the impact is invisible and disproportionately increases costs. The cleaners are worthless people. It's easier to convince an institution to hire three female curators versus doing the real work. A problem with decolonizing is it's often used to avoid thinking about the fundamental things, like for instance the employment ecology around black and brown cleaners rather than an institution's addition of yet another female curator, for instance. Instead of taking ownership and responsibility for thinking politically with others.

TC:

A lack of imagination and a desire for institutional power can lead to believing power lies in a type of victimhood I see performed by white women and BIPOC women as well. The notion that if they claim a victim position the world will bow to them, and I see it performed so that this one person benefits the most or is the named hero in an action and they access power and enact the same bullshit that the white colonial machine behaves through, and then still treat other women in a shitty way. But what is the problem, is it men, is it whiteness, is it coloniality? Or could it be that it's fucking unknown? Or that some have never had to know? Do we need to re-educate colleagues to comprehend the world in a different way to believe a cleaner is equal to their colleagues? Cleaners are dehumanised, like what the Spanish did to indigenous populations. In institutional practices, some people are not seen as humans.

AF:

They're all women fighting for their positions.

TC:

It's different though because cleaners for instance are a category of women not registered. It's easier to 'decolonize' by bringing in BIPOC curators and educators, etc., but for me it's uninteresting to invite in othered bodies simply for being othered. I don't care what you look like, as long as you're challenging institutional practices to make them equitable. It's easy to invite the colourful, some of whom just want white power. I prefer to think with decolonizing as a redistributive power. Collectivity centres redistribution. We're taught in the West to be selfish, egocentric, it's tied to colonial behaviours and administrating bodies for the few. There's also this thing about language and power in the rhetoric and deployment of decolonizing that concerns me.

AF:

222 Yes, using words, including those of the discourse of decolonizing, including by its advocates, yields power and can be used to shut people out. It seems to be constructed to make you feel stupid if you don't know the meaning or its genealogy.

TC:

Sometimes English is undecipherable, maybe it's because my native tongue is Spanglish. Processing in a third space, I only knew Spanglish was two languages when I entered formal education. I find academic writing a bit off, because it presumes you have to have a specific understanding, and that you already have it. I think fuck that, how about I just make sense of it, how can I do what I need to do and what needs to be done with what I have?

AF:

I think there is a lot of value in dealing with academic writing in this way, As refusal instead of extractivism: instead of: queering is about me, decolonizing is about me, the undercommons is about me, everything is mine. I look at the centring of these concepts and I'm happy to refuse them. I don't use decolonize, intersectionality or self-care. I have issues with how those terms have been appropriated and occupied (and emptied out in the process), but I also feel they are not the right terms for me. And I think a lot of those terms are used to shut down conversations. As if once you name something the problem is miraculously solved.

TC:

I question the concept, it's embodiment, and it's understanding. I need to ingest the concept, map it on my body to see how it fits. What you've just said makes me think of writing and why I don't write, and I like the idea that it's a politics of refusal. I'd rather talk about how I do things, as that's the thing I know, not theory. Writing feels extractive for someone like me. There's a desire, especially by white people, to write about everything, but what if you don't name your ways or don't hold up writing as the medium through which your doing is communicated? Simply how the fuck am I supposed to write the who and how of me? For me, Anzaldúa recognising that theory-making is informed from life, makes sense. I just don't want to centre myself as my ways are informed by all my interactions with everyone from my Mami to my friends. I am me because of everybody else. A collective collection of knowledge from many encounters, an exchange. People want to claim they do it solo, don't acknowledge the exchange. They talk about the change but not about extraction or potential mutual benefit.

AF:

Maybe that's how decolonizing links to the idea of the moral good. You don't have to talk about what it actually is because it is just a good thing.

TC:

There is very little space to unsettle decolonizing in this though.

AF:

What we do in our everyday lives is more interesting, living not performing inside an institution. I love Feminismo Comunitario's tv show *¡Despatriarcalizacion ya!* in Bolivia (available on YouTube) which centred feminism, queerness and indigeneity. It doesn't have to be an art project or an academic enterprise.

TC:

224 It's not named or a special thing. This living and doing that can't be commodified – it refuses commodification. Refusing may be linked to knowing collective living/community. You don't have to participate in the ways of here when you are here, but refusing to do so may be easier for us because we're coming from Latin America. I say I practice from where I am from not where I am at, and I have no desire to become from here. The here, England, people just have a different sensibility. I am not of this place. I will always be from over there.

AF:

Is this a Latin American thing? Or is it more personal, about for instance in my case growing up in my mother's bohemian life-style as a way of being in the world? My mom's relations with people are not like most white middle class relationships. Coming here, there are specific ways of living or being. Like

my coming out from a heterosexual coupling formation through divorce became linked to embracing a queer way of living. Have the ways I think about family, friendships and ways of being always been like this? Or did I learn them here?

TC:

You call it queer, I don't call it anything. It's having relations, it's an everyday way of being. My parents weren't bohemian types, but I grew up always thinking in collective ways. Is this linked to class or survival?

AF:

Or the desert thing?

TC:

The desert thing, of course, you can't survive without collective trust and collective decision making. Can you transpose that sensibility into these colonial spaces or adapt them without naming them? I don't use 225 the word queer, because I wasn't taught to name these sensibilities or practices. Because that's taxonomical and colonial. Like my parents being Curanderos, I could see how they counselled our community but never realised it had a name until recently.

AF:

I name everything, I don't have a problem with this. The Curandera and curanderismo practice is not named? You just recognise it?

TC:

I name it now because I was asked to, but to name it allows it to be commodified, which it's not supposed to be. You realise you have grown up not naming practices of life and then you encounter coloniality and everything has to be named to be owned.

AF:

I used queering as a process after divorce to justify a new family form. My child couldn't understand why we practiced family in a different way from my ex-partner. I needed something for him to be able to hold on to and allow himself to recognise that the people around us that we love, that we depend on and depend on us are our queer family. You realise when you have to name things, that you're doing it either to understand them or to defend them.

TC:

In England you have to define everything. Things fit differently for me. People want to use their colonial administrative ways. I have no interest in using them how they do, because we're all taught administration through our own cultures. I studied arts administration, so I know their ways and I know my ways, and I twist them up. I tell colleagues they can name my practice for the sake of the company, but I refuse to be part of that naming.

AF:

Refusing is a great underappreciated strategy. We fetishize visibility and productivity. As if presenting something is more important than actually doing it.

*

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ANDREA'S REFERENCES

These are three references that are important to me and that are hardly ever accessed within the mediation of US and Europe-based academics. Just a few of Quijano and Cusicanqui's texts have been translated, and those seem to float in the ether of English-based theory. This not only reproduces extractivist power relations but means that they are usually decontextualized and things are missed by not accessing the writing in Spanish. Feminismo Comunitario has explicitly refused translation. In this theory context, English-only speakers lie at the margins, whether they feel comfortable or not.

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Biographical notes

Danah Abdulla

Dr Danah Abdulla is a designer, educator, researcher, and Programme Director of Graphic Design at Camberwell, Chelsea, and Wimbledon Colleges (CCW), University of the Arts London. She has previously held positions at Brunel University London and London College of Communication (University of the Arts London). Danah is a founding member of the Decolonizing Design research group, and the Creative Director and Editor of *Kalimat Magazine*, a non-profit publication about Arab thought and culture. She holds a PhD from the design department at Goldsmiths, University of London. Danah's research is particularly focused on decolonizing design, possibilities of design education, design culture(s) with a focus on the Arab region, the politics of design, publishing, and critical views of social design.

Teresa Cisneros

Teresa Cisneros is a Chicana Londoner. Originally from 'La Frontera', the Mexico-Texas border, she practices from where she is from not where she is. A curandera and arts administrator by choice, currently she is Inclusive Practice Lead at the Wellcome Collection, part of agencyforagency, and recently at The Showroom she curated Object Positions to explore cultural equity, decolonial processes, and colonial administration (2016-18). Cisneros has worked with numerous art institutions and universities including Nottingham Contemporary, Tate, Goldsmiths, Iniva, Central St. Martins, and University College London to explore care, policy making, colonial infrastructures, institutional change, and rethinking museums. In 2018, she published *Document0*, a series of scripted conversations exploring art institutions, diversity, and administration. She is interested in reconstructing systems and cultural institutions to begin working towards forms of transformational and institutional justice by holding staff accountable for their bad behaviours. Cisneros centres her life and work practice in collaboration, caretaking relations, and collectivity.

Andrea Francke

Andrea Francke is a Peruvian artist based in London. Her work focuses on the political implications of categories constructed through (and for) knowledge-making processes. Although Francke's work is mainly framed as social art practice, she has recently traded a paradigm of visibility for one of invisibility. Her most recent projects focus on smoothness, the production and maintenance of infrastructure as a way to redefine categories and produce long-lasting political change. Current projects include: the development of the evaluation framework for Gasworks' Participatory Residency as FOTL, her collaboration with Ross Jardine; FRAND, a play and toy-making collaboration with Francis Patrick-Brady; and 'Knowledge is Made Here', an education project with Sara Greavu that looks at local intellectual production and activism in order to develop theory with young people in Derry. Previous projects include 'Invisible Spaces of Parenthood', 'Wish You'd Been Here', and 'The Piracy Project'.

Lolita Jablonskienė

Dr Lolita Jablonskienė is a contemporary art critic and curator based in Vilnius. From 2000 she headed the Contemporary Art Information Center (CAIC), which spun off from the Soros Foundation, and joined the Lithuanian Art Museum to work for Vilnius' forthcoming National Gallery of Art (opened in 2009). In 2002 she was appointed Chief Curator of the National Gallery. Jablonskiene was the Commissioner of the Lithuanian pavilions at the Venice Biennial in 1999 and 2005. She has curated contemporary art exhibitions in her home country and abroad, contributed art critical texts to Lithuanian and foreign press, and is Associate Professor at the Vilnius Academy of Arts. She is currently writing a book on the development of contemporary art practices in Lithuania during the 1990s.

Achille Mbembe

Dr Achille Mbembe is Professor in the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research at University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. He is co-founder of Les Ateliers de la pensee de Dakar, has held honorary professorships at UCL Berkeley, Yale, UC Irvine, Duke, Harvard, and been awarded numerous awards including the 2015 Geswichter Scholl-Preis, the 2018 Gerda Henkel Award, and the 2018 Ernst Bloch Award. Professor Mbembe's extensive publications include *On the Postcolony* (University of California Press, 2001), *Critique of Black Reason* (Duke University Press, 2016), *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press, 2019), and *Out of the Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization* (Columbia University Press, 2020).

Ieva Mazūraitė–Novickienė

Dr Ieva Mazūraitė–Novickienė is a curator at the Art Information Centre, National Gallery of Art, Vilnius, Lithuania. A researcher of Soviet era Lithuanian photography, she is author of articles including 'The analyses of photography concept in the discourse of Lithuanian photography of 1960s' in *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis* (2014) and 'Medium of photography as artistic problem in late Soviet Lithuanian photography' in *Menotyra* (2016). She's curator of exhibitions including 'A Place of Images: Lithuanian Photography in Illustrated Magazines of the 1960s-70s' (2013) and a retrospective of Algimantas Kunčius, 'Visual Scripts' (2015).

Almira Ousmanova

Dr Almira Ousmanova is Professor at the Department of Social Sciences at the European Humanities University (Vilnius, Lithuania) and Director of the Laboratory for Studies of Visual Culture and Contemporary Art at EHU (<https://www.viscultstudies.org>). She is an author of *Umberto Eco: paradoxes of interpretation* (2000); and editor of several collective volumes: *Anthology of Gender Theory* (ed., with Elena Gapova, 2000); *Gender Histories from Eastern Europe* (co-edited with Elena Gapova and Andrea Peto), *Bi-Textuality and Cinema* (ed., 2003); *Gender and Transgression in Visual Arts* (ed., 2007), *Visual (as) Violence* (ed., 2008), *Après Simone de Beauvoir: Feminism and Philosophy* (ed., Topos, 2010), *TechnoLogos: the social effects of bio- and information technologies* (ed., with Tatyana Shchytsova, Topos, 2014). *E-Effect: Digital Turn in Social Sciences and Humanities* (ed., with Galina Orlova, 1/ Topos, 2017), *Roland Barthes' Time* (ed., with V.Fours, Topos, 1-2/2019).

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Ieva Pleikienė

Dr Ieva Pleikienė is an art researcher. In 1995 she graduated from Vilnius Academy of Arts (VAA) with an MA in Art History and Criticism, and in 2005 defended her PhD thesis in Art History under the title 'Lithuanian Small Graphics. Forms of Artistic Communication by Mail (1960-1990)'. Since 1995 she has been working at the Institute of Art Research in VAA. From 2005 to 2010 and from 2015 to 2019 Ieva held the position as Head of the Doctoral Studies Department of the Academy. Since 2019 she has been a Pro-Rector of Studies at VAA. She is a member of the Lithuanian Society of Art Historians, and her major research interests, on which she's published widely, are Lithuanian art of the Soviet period, marginal art phenomena, and art and politics.

Marquard Smith

Dr Marquard Smith is Professor of Artistic Research at Vilnius Academy of Arts, Lithuania, and Programme Leader of the MA Museums & Galleries in Education at UCL, London. Marq is Founder and Editor-in-Chief of *Journal of Visual Culture*, a Board member of Arts Catalyst, and of the Live Art Development Agency. As a curator, his recent exhibitions include 'How to Construct a Time Machine' (MK Gallery), 'Solitary Pleasures' (Freud Museum), and 'Do the Right Thing' (Titanikas Gallery, Vilnius). As a writer, Marq has published over twenty books, edited collections, and themed issues of refereed journals on arts education, research-as-praxis, and the archival impulse, as well as on the art, visual, material, and immaterial culture of 'the human' in capitalist modernity.

Michelle Williams Gamaker

Dr Michelle Williams Gamaker is a moving image and performance artist. With a focus on 'fictional activism', her work explores the fiction-making machine of 20th century British and Hollywood studio films by restaging sequences to reveal cinematic construction, and recasting characters to propose alternative endings that counter their often doom-laden plight. Michelle is Lecturer in BA Fine Art at Goldsmiths College, University of London, Chair of Trustees at Pavilion in Leeds, and was co-founder of the Women of Colour Index (WOCI) Reading Group with Samia Malik and Rehana Zaman (2016-19).

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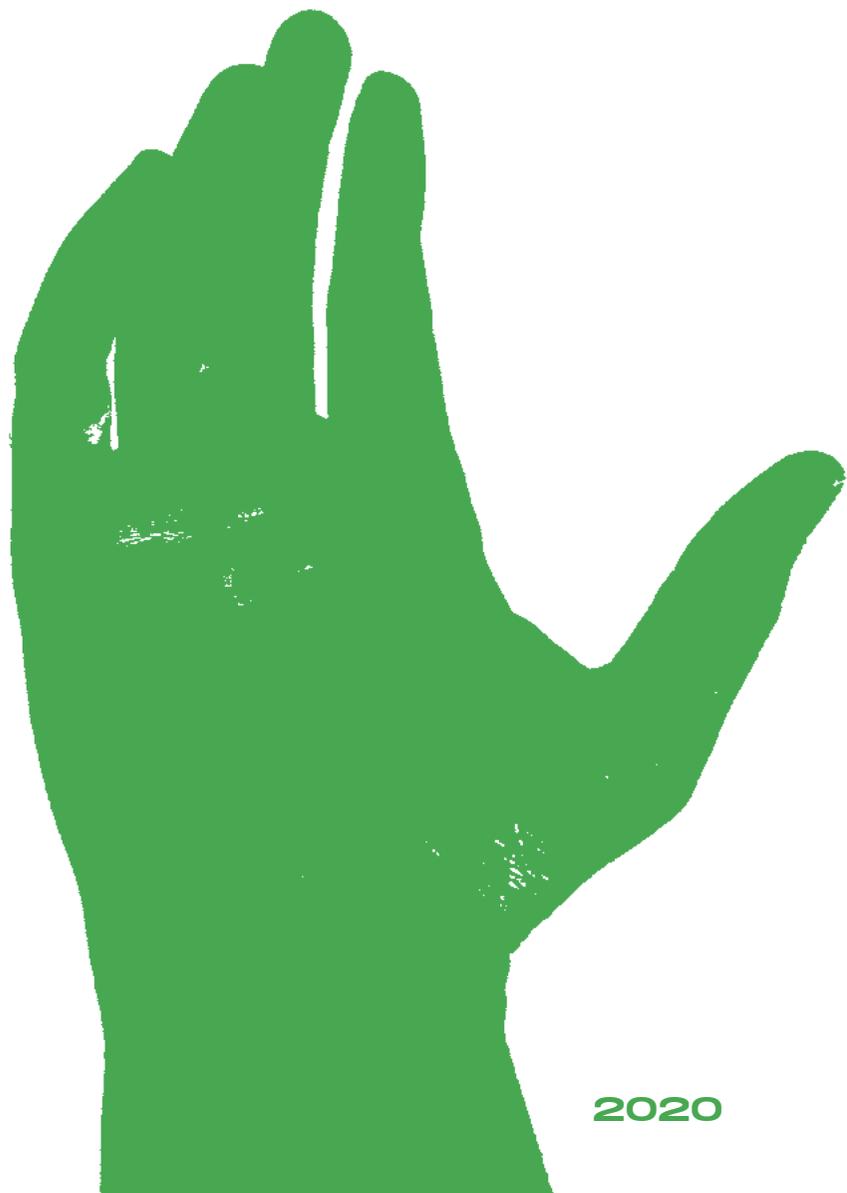
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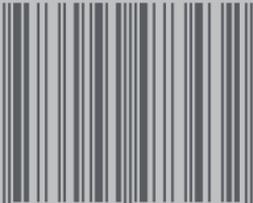
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