

CIMAM 2021
ANNUAL CONFERENCE
PROCEEDINGS

MUSEUMS IN TIMES
OF XENOPHOBIA
AND CLIMATE EMERGENCY

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MUZEUM SZTUKI
IN ŁÓDŹ / POLAND

NOMUS NEW ART MUSEUM/
BRANCH OF THE NATIONAL
MUSEUM IN GDANSK / POLAND

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**DAY 1, FRIDAY
NOVEMBER 5**

**CONFLICTS, CRISES,
AND THE POLITICS
OF GROWTH**

KEYNOTE 1

DIPESH CHAKRABARTY

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Biography — Dipesh Chakrabarty is the Lawrence A. Kimpton Distinguished Service Professor of History, South Asian Languages and Civilizations, and the College at the University of Chicago. He holds a courtesy appointment at the School of Law. His books include *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, published by the Princeton University Press. He is the recipient of the 2014 Toynbee Prize, which is given to a distinguished practitioner of global history, and the 2019 West Bengal Government's Tagore Memorial Prize for his book, *The Crises of Civilization: Explorations in Global and Planetary Histories* (2018). His most recent book, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* was published in March 2021 by the University of Chicago Press. He currently serves as the Faculty Director for the University's center in Delhi.

THE ANTHROPOCENE: ON ENCOUNTERING DEEP HISTORY

The Anthropocene is a slice of geological and inhuman measure of time. The smallest unit in the periodizing schema used to describe the earth's geological history, an epoch can last for tens of millions of years. If geologists agree to formalize the Anthropocene, then the Holocene—the name of the interglacial epoch we are in—will turn out to be one of the briefest epochs in the geological history of the earth. We may already be in the Anthropocene, but we *Homo sapiens* may cease to exist long before the Anthropocene runs out. The Anthropocene, in that sense, cannot be a periodizing device for human history, or we would have to create two Anthropocenes, one covering the period of human existence and the other a name for an epoch that continues into the post-human period in the earth's history. If a sixth great extinction really happens in the next 3–600 years, we may even have to upgrade the name to that of an era, the Anthrozoic era. These are not categories for periodizing human history even if we accept—as I do—the Earth system scientists' proposition that, thanks to their numbers, technology, spread, and domination over other forms of life, humans today

have acquired the dubious glory of being a geological force on this planet. I leave it to stratigraphers who are properly trained for this task to decide if there is indeed enough evidence in the rocks to suggest that we have exited the threshold of the Holocene.

The time of modern human history—as Koselleck famously said—is constituted by our being placed somewhere between our experiences of the past and the horizon of expectations and concerns. This may be why some scholars have translated the Anthropocene into the more human-centric categories of the Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Econocene, or such like terms to bring the phenomenon of global warming firmly within the categories with which humans classify their experiences. But these moves, to my mind, miss out on what I think of as the real challenge of the Anthropocene: it makes humanist historians confront the work of deep history—the geobiological history of the planet—that they otherwise mostly take for granted. It is, of course, true that as individuals we are immersed in deep history, for we are also, at the level of our bodies, products of it. No human artifacts—from the ordinary pen to the space shuttle—are made without the assumption that humans have opposable thumbs and binocular vision. We may, understandably, think of our bodies as our own, but it took millions of years of evolution for the human body to be designed. But for humanist historians, this fact was simply a part of what they took as given, a part of the givenness of the world, and of



Dipesh Chakrabarty

specialist scientific knowledge. In writing humanist history, we took that givenness for granted.

This givenness of the world is now breaking down. Everyday news is making us aware that by using fossil fuel and emitting greenhouse gases, by cutting down forests, and by increasing consumption and urbanization, humans are warming up the planet, acidifying the seas, and raising their levels, making the cities hotter, ushering in an era of pandemics, and possibly precipitating the Sixth Great Extinction of Life. Think of Wittgenstein's question: we ask of buildings how old they are, but why don't we ask the same of mountains? Well, we didn't do so because mountains were once part of the givenness of the world, but now with planetary environmental crises all around us, this is no longer so. No discussion, even newspaper ones, of the Himalayan glaciers and rivers in India these days fails to mention, for instance, that the Himalayas are young as mountains go, that they are rising every year, that they are an active mountain range, and that therefore it is dangerous to undertake the number of blasting projects that different nations have initiated in these mountains. The confrontation with deep history in writing humanist histories of

humans is indeed the challenge of the Anthropocene. We now realize that humans, with their technological capabilities, are much larger in their impact on the planet than we once thought and that the planet in turn does not seem as big as it once appeared to humans! Humans have themselves become a thing-like entity, a nonhuman planetary force, as it were, that can change the geobiology of the planet.

Yet, until very recently and with a few notable exceptions (most of whom have been scholars of the human environment), historians of our time have evinced strong resistance, even indifference, to the Anthropocene hypothesis and its attendant vision of humanity as a planetary force or a "thing-like" entity. A case in point is an essay entitled "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era," published by the respected Harvard historian Charles S. Maier in the *American Historical Review* in the year 2000 as a gesture of saying farewell to the century. It is an erudite and thoughtful article, trying to see what structural changes, moral questions, and issues of periodization the passing century had thrown up for historians. Though published twelve years after the

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had been set up by the UN, there is surprisingly not a word in this essay on global warming as a cultural fact of the twentieth century. Maier ponders some of the moral questions that the century posed to the West, reminding his readers of humanity's "dark historical passage" through world wars and genocides, and of Isaiah Berlin's remark that this was "the worst century that ha[d] ever been." He observes with a refined sense of nuance and irony how "modernity" would have had different meanings for the likes of Adorno and Horkheimer and the leaders of postcolonial nations of Asia and Africa.¹ But missing from the large visual field of this essay is any discussion of what may be now regarded as the biggest problem of the twentieth century, cutting across the East-West divide: anthropogenic climate change and the onset, according to Earth system scholars, of the Anthropocene.

One of the missed opportunities, in retrospect, of this essay must be its discussion of the themes of "delay and acceleration" in modern history. Maier disagrees with Koselleck on this point: "Our modern concept of history," Koselleck wrote, "has initially proved itself for the specifically historical determinants of progress and regress, acceleration and decay." Maier demurs: "But acceleration is not a sufficient condition for ascribing some epochal quality to the century."² But that must also be the greatest irony about this essay, since, barely a couple of decades into the twenty-first century, we have more or less accepted the point that the second half of the previous century was mainly about what climate scientists and historians today call the "Great Acceleration." And not only that. With the "Great Acceleration" came an epoch—humungous in terms of human time, the smallest unit in terms of geological periods—the epoch of the Anthropocene. There was indeed an epochal quality to the second half of the twentieth century, a very large epoch in fact, one that might even see our civilization out!

How did a historian of Maier's gifts and erudition miss the news about climate change? Is this an instance of the occupational hazards historians face in our time in making sense of their own times? Why does that happen? Are our presently operative philosophies of history the most hazardous inheritance from the end of nineteenth century? There were clearly some political and philosophical questions of

history that shaped Maier's essay, in particular his concern with futures of democracies and the twin threats of populism and authoritarian rule, concerns that very much resonate even twenty years after they were expressed. Those were indeed the humanist concerns of the late twentieth century. Coming at the end of the twentieth century, Maier's essay reminds us of the extent to which the very ideas of modernity, modernization, and democracy—and the associated question of human freedoms—occupied theorists and practitioners of history as they took various post-colonial and anti-Eurocentric turns in the last few decades of the twentieth century. While any naïve trust in history's capacity to deliver "freedoms" was by the end of the last century seriously depleted, human—and even historiographical—struggles seemed to make sense only when we saw them as part of a struggle to make the world more democratic and modern, and all that in plural and non-Eurocentric ways.

Maier, like many other humanists, was concerned with the aspirational side of human history in the twentieth century and influenced by the way discussions of decolonization, the movements for different kinds of rights and democracy, and the search for a more prosperous but equitable world shaped our collective imagination in the second half of the twentieth century. While Rachel Carson's book, *The Silent Spring*, came out in 1962 with grave warnings about environmental damages caused by particular human inventions and the Club of Rome 1972 report, *Limits to Growth*, argued that it was not possible to have infinite growth on a finite planet, it was precisely the economic growth and the expansion of the middle classes that fueled the discussions and struggles around the phenomenon called "globalization." Issues of race, cultural difference, and imperial leftovers marked the literature on postcolonialism that emerged and dominated the scene between, say, Edward Said's publication of *Orientalism* (1978) and Homi K. Bhabha's book, *The Location of Culture* (1994) and Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity At Large* (1996), two of the most influential cultural analyses of themes related to postcolonial criticism and globalization.

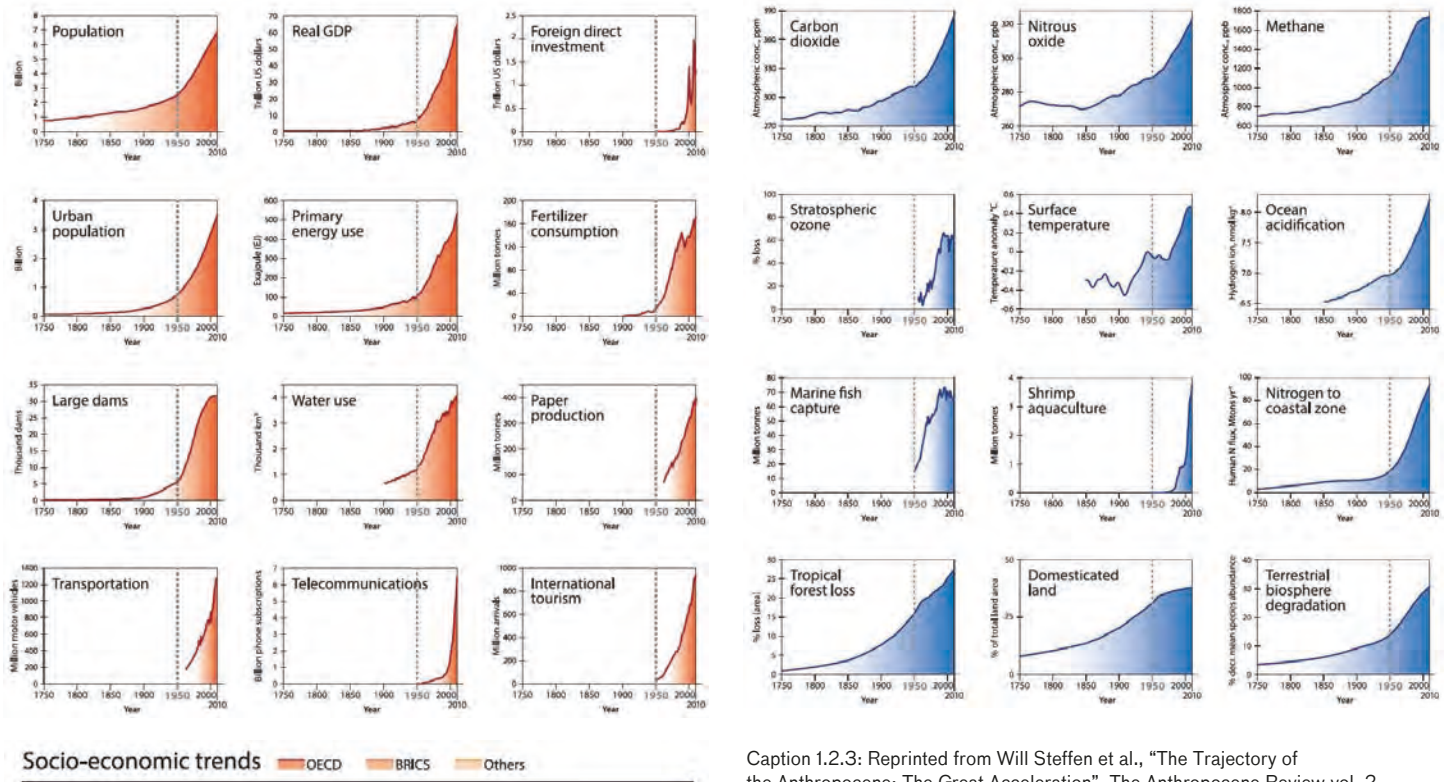
Seized with these exciting debates about human aspirations, most humanists did not note that the twentieth century was also a century of phenomenal and unprecedented growth of the human realm and hence of the human footprint on the planet. Or, if they

1 Charles S. Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era," *American Historical Review*, 105 (3), June 2000, p. 812
2 *Ibid.*, p. 811. Emphasis added.

did, they celebrated this growth as a welcome movement towards more improved human lives. After all, what could one say about more humans living better and longer, thanks to the invention of, say, antibiotics or greater consumption? Since then, however, everyday news about more frequent erratic and extreme weather events, wildfires, cyclones, flash floods, and droughts, oceanic warming and sea-level rise, and loss of biodiversity has made us aware, however unevenly, that human flourishing has, over the last

several decades, interfered with planetary geobiological processes that help to keep in place all the different forms of life we see around us.

We only need to consider some simple statistics to realize the extraordinary extent of this growth of the human realm in the twentieth century. Over these one hundred years, the world's irrigated area increased by about 6.8 times, population by 3.8 times, urban population by 12.8 times, industrial output 3.5 times, energy use 12.5 times, oil production 300 times,



Caption 1.2.3: Reprinted from Will Steffen et al., "The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration", *The Anthropocene Review* vol. 2, no. 1 (2015), pp. 84, 86, 87.

water use 9 times, fertilizer use 342 times, fish catch 65 times, organic chemical production 1,000 times, car ownership by more than 7,000 times, and the CO₂ in the air by thirty per cent.³ Globalization speeded all this up. A recent (2017) report from the Brookings Institution informs us that:

It was only around 1985 that the middle class [with capacity for purchasing consumer gadgets] reached 1 billion people, about 150 years after the start of the Industrial Revolution in Europe. It then took 21 years, until 2006, for the middle class to add a second billion; much of this reflects the extraordinary growth of China. The third billion was added to the global middle class in nine years. Today we are on pace to add another billion in seven years and a fifth billion in six more years, by 2028.⁴

This is indeed the story of the intensification the process of globalization has undergone at the beginning of this century with China emerging as an industrial-military powerhouse of the world.

Most of this increase of the human realm in the twentieth century, however, happened after 1950—first with the economic reconstruction of the OECD countries after the end of the Second World War, then with the development programs adopted by nations emerging in the process of decolonization that unfolded in the 1950s and sixties, the population growth in India and China, and eventually the economic liberalization of and fast urbanization in the latter two countries and the rise of new middle classes in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This is the process that earth system scientists—working with the reputed environmental historian, John McNeill—has called the period of Great Acceleration in human history, the period that begins from 1950. It is from the 1950s on that both the indices of the expansion of the human realm (like economic or population growth) and those of the set of planetary environmental crises we call “climate change” or “global warming” begin to rise in tandem with each other.

Globalization and global warming are thus deeply connected but somewhat different phenomena. What connects them are the phenomena of modern capitalism (using the term loosely) and technology, both global in their reach. After all, greenhouse gas emissions have increased almost exclusively through nations trying to pursue industrial and postindustrial forms of modernization and prosperity. Climate

change does not mean an end to the project of capitalist globalization but the arrival of a point in history where the intensification of the forces of globalization discloses to humans the domain of the planetary. The Cold War produced atmospheric science and comparative planetary science in a big way: nuclear fallout in the atmosphere, weaponization of weather, and the colonization of Mars and other heavenly bodies became security concerns of the superpower nations. It was the very technology of space exploration that came out of the Cold War and the growing weaponization of atmosphere and space that eventually created Earth system science in the 1980s in the US. The connection may even be seen in the fact that climate scientists would not have been able to bore into ice of eight hundred thousand years ago if the US defense establishment and the much-denounced oil and mining companies had not developed the necessary technology for drilling that was then modified to deal with ice. Whether we are in the Anthropocene or not, the scientific explorations of the condition of global warming allow scientists to construct—through use of satellite measurements, drilling into the polar icecaps, oceanic measurement, etc.—a hyper-object called the “earth system.” It is this that I am calling the planet. It is an abstract scientific construct that is meant to explain how this planet, where geology and biology have long been connected phenomena, has a life support system that works as just that: a “system.” Planetary processes including the work done by phytoplankton, for instance, maintains a certain measure of oxygen in the atmosphere at levels that are helpful for the survival of animals (including humans) and plants. This atmosphere is critical for our existence, but it was not made with humans in view. The planet has maintained this atmosphere for nearly 375 million years.

The planet is thus a different category from the globe, and I list below some of the major differences that mark them:

The global is human-made; it involves the work of empires, capitalism, and technology. Humans are at the center of its story, the main protagonist of the story of the making of the globe. The planet—also a human construct—decenters the human. Humans come too late in the geological and biological histories of the planet to be at the center of these narratives. The “category” planet has built into it the stance, for

3 Clive Ponting, *A New Green History of the World*. London: Penguin Books, 2007, p. 412

4 Hannes Bergthaller, “Thoughts on Asia and the Anthropocene,” in Gabriele Dürbeck and Phillip Hüpkes (eds.), *The Anthropocenic Turn: The Interplay Between Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Responses to a New Age*. London and New York: Routledge, 2020, p. 78.

example, that the planet would have been 4.5 billion years old even if there were no humans to count its age.

The global belongs to the recorded history of the past 500 years. The planetary is about deep history, the geobiological history of the planet.

The global is uniquely and singularly human. The planet is comparative, emerging out of human attempts to answer questions such as the following: Can Mars be made habitable for complex life? Did Venus become hot because it experienced runaway planetary warming? Technology becomes a planetary question when we ask, is a high-tech civilization necessarily unsustainable? But I am putting these questions to one side, for the purpose of this discussion.

Sustainability is a global and humanocentric term. It asks if today's humans could leave the planet in a sustainable state for humans who come after them. The planetary is about habitability, an issue that is raised for instance when we ask: How does a planet become habitable for life? Here "life" does not necessarily mean life in human form only.

The global is about a human-dominant order of life on this planet. The geobiological history of the planet, on the other hand, makes us realize that we are a minority form of life, and that the majority forms of life on the planet, both by weight and numbers, are microbial—bacteria, viruses, protists, fungi, etc. In human terms, the situation calls on us to develop minoritarian forms of thinking with regards to other forms of life.

The globe, the earth, and the world are all categories that assume a relationship of mutuality between humans and their worldly environment. We express this when we say, "the earth is our home, it is made so that we can dwell on it." The planet is different in its relationship to us. We are not the end that the planetary processes that support life have in view. Humans are a product of contingencies in the history of life on this planet. The planet does not return our gaze in that we cannot assume any special relationship of mutuality in the way that we do when we use words like "world," or "earth."⁵

The globe, made by humans, lends itself to moral and therefore political questions. It is amenable to issues of fairness and norms. Planetary forces, on the other hand, can reduce us to our creaturely lives. That is to say, when we are faced with planetary "fury"—such as a tsunami, an earthquake, a firestorm (all of which could be triggered by our interference with the earth system)—our politics is reduced to

the politics of survival, something that Kant or Arendt would not call "politics," for it is bereft of any sense of morality.

The final point I wish to emphasize is that we have one planet, but that does not mean that humans have one world. I should explain what I mean by "one" planet. Admittedly, there have been many different ideas of the planet in human history and, more recently, different ideas of planetarity. Some people point out, rightly, that humans have thought about this planet from pre-historic times. From ancient people navigating themselves by looking at the night sky—such as the humans who settled the Pacific islands—to peasants who followed the cycle of seasons or astrologers who predicted the influence of planets on human affairs to astronomers who worked out the workings of the solar system or the movement of stars, they all exercised forms of planetary thinking. Many aspects—though not all—of such thoughts about the planet, however, were dependent on what humans experienced and on things whose existence humans could either perceive with naked eyes or the telescope or rationally infer. The knowledge of the earth system is different. The earth system, as I have said before, is a scientific abstraction trying to explain how the life support system on this planet works. It includes modern scientific knowledge about the roles of microbial and very small forms of life—such as bacteria, viruses, phytoplankton, in maintaining complex, multi-cellular life on earth. And it includes knowledge of the role that places humans have never inhabited (and therefore have no direct experience of) play in maintaining the planet's climate system, for example: the deep seas, the Himalayan glaciers, Siberian permafrost. This planet is one.

Humans, however, create an intimate experiential world out of the earth—as Heidegger would say, they world the earth—in so many different ways that they have many worlds based partially on what is sometimes called "anthropological differences." And this mismatch goes to the heart of the "climate emergency" that was highlighted in the very title of the CIMAM conference in Łódź. The planet is ONE, human worlds are MANY (a new version of the old theological problem, as it were). The IPCC gives us a calendar of action on a planetary calendar. This calendar refers to the oneness of the planet. Nations, reflecting the not-one condition of humans, bargain for the accommodation of their worldly differences. Their politics refers to the not-one-ness of humans.

5 For more on this distinction, please see in chapters 3 and 8 of my recent *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020.

Yet the fact is that humans are a minority form of life on a planet where microbes comprise the majority. But our actions are disturbing the existence of other forms of life. The pandemic is yet another reminder that stoking “planetary fury”—by unacceptable levels of deforestation, say, that brings wildlife close to us and makes possible the spillover of viruses and bacteria—reduces us to our creaturely selves, it presents us with existential threats, leaving us only with the politics of survival. To move back and away from the possibility of such dangers in an age when we cannot avoid being global, we need an ethical-existential relationship to the earth system that I have called here the planet.

PERSPECTIVE 1

JAROSŁAW LUBIAK

Ph.D., Art College, Szczecin, Poland

Biography — Jarosław Lubiak is an academic teacher, art theorist, and freelance curator. In 2014–2019, he was artistic director at Ujazdowski Castle Center for Contemporary Art (Ujazdowski) in Warsaw, Poland. In 1996–2014 he worked at Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź as a curator and head of the Modern Art Department. He recently curated *Angelika Markul: Time Formula at Openheim*, Wrocław, Poland, 2021; *The Plasticity of the Planet*—a long-term program addressing climate catastrophe, including two parallel exhibitions *Human-Free Earth, Forensic Architecture: Centre for Contemporary Nature* at Ujazdowski, and publications: *Becoming Earth and Plasticity of the Planet: On Environmental Challenge for Art and Its Institutions* (2019). Among many other projects, he co-curated (with Ula Tornau and Anna Czaban) the Lithuanian and Polish exhibition in two episodes *Waiting for Another Coming* at the Contemporary Art Center, Vilnius and Ujazdowski, 2018–2019; curated *The State of Life: Polish Contemporary Art within the Global Context* at the National Art Museum of China, Beijing, 2015; and co-curated with Małgorzata Ludwisiak *Correspondances: Modern Art and Universalism* at Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, 2012. He was a member of the curatorial team of *Europe (to the Power of)*—the project led by Barbara Steiner on behalf of the Goethe Institute, London, and co-realized by ten partners in Europe and China (2012–2013), and of *Scenarios about Europe*—at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Leipzig, Germany (2011–2012). He has authored numerous articles and edited several books and catalogues, including *Pandemics: Science, Art, Geopolitics*, with Mikołaj Iwański (Szczecin—Poznań: 2018); *The Afterimages of Life: Władysław Strzemiński and the Rights for Art* (Łódź: 2012); *Museum as a Luminous Objects of Desire* (Łódź: 2007). As a curator and art theorist, he focuses on the crossovers between contemporary art, philosophy, and the social sphere, clashes of aesthetics and politics, friction among art institutions, political economy, and environmental crises.

CURATING RESOURCES: MUSEUMS AND DEEP ADAPTATION

When we think about museums and the environmental crisis, we immediately face the question of sustainability. Museological discourse on ecology seems to be almost exclusively dominated by this perspective.

Just to give the two examples, it is worth mentioning CIMAM Toolkit on Environmental Sustainability in the Museum Practice (2021) and the ICOM 2019 resolution “On Sustainability and the Implementation of Agenda 2030, Transforming Our World” to implement 17 Global Goals for Sustainable

Development that was proposed by the United Nations in 2015 to “provide a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.” (The 17 Goals: History)

And yet, this year's UN report clearly shows that we are very far from achieving one of the primary goals, namely to stop global warming. Inger Andersen, Executive Director of United Nations Environment Program, says sharply in the Foreword to the Report: “Climate change is no longer a future problem. It is a ‘now’ problem. As we saw this year, devastating impacts are spreading across the globe and growing ever stronger.” (Andersen, 2021, p. XV)

Her statement resonates strongly with arguments developed by Pablo Servigne, Raphaël Stevens, Gauthier Chapelle, and Daniel Rotary, who established collapsology, the transdisciplinary study of the risks of collapse of industrial civilization. It aimed to help us face the predicament in which we are

trapped. To describe our situation, they propose a truly devilish alternative:

If we choose to “save” the industrial civilization by pursuing growth of consumption of materials and energy, the earth systems will even faster encounter a possible tipping threshold, which in turn could end life as we know it. If, on the contrary, we choose to preserve the biosphere, it means that we must stop the race of our civilization within a few months, which would amount to an intentional social and economic collapse. Imagine: that would mean extending (and even strengthening) for 10 years the strongest economic effect of the Covid-19 lockdown. (Servigne et al., 2021, p. 111)

How are museums located within this alternative?

Jem Bendell specialized in sustainability management, policy, and research until he was struck by the revelation that it might be too late to avert an environmental catastrophe. This discovery triggered his investigation into deep adaptation—an agenda based not on predictions or forecasts, but on assessing probability. This led him to the conclusion that in our predicament, we are facing “inevitable collapse, probable catastrophe, and possible extinction.” (Bendell, 2021, p. 84)

He rejects sustainability because it is based on the presumption that “it is possible to maintain capitalism while integrating concerns about the environment and society.” (Bendell, Read, 2021, p. 25.) Contrary to this, “the deep adaptation perspective sees the pace and scale of dangerous levels of climate change and ecological degradation to be so fast that neither a reform of capitalism nor of modern society is realistic. Therefore, deep adaptation is a form of ‘post-sustainability’ thinking.” (Bendell, Read, 2021, p. 25)

To relate his argument to the museums, I would like to present two ways of action. One of them aims at sustaining museum activities unchanged and protected despite critical environmental changes—in most cases through infrastructural investments.

Ferdinando Adorno discusses a particular example in his article “Stronger Than the Storm: Museums in the Age of Climate Change”:

[At] the Perez Art Museum the management of water, whether rain, sea or condensation, became the key feature that informed almost every other decision. Air conditioning and irrigation is provided by the building itself through high trellised structures that shade the decks,

and convey sea breezes and water to make the subtropical exterior setting comfortable for people and plants. The sustainable design of the building is associated to the metaphor of a forest of mangroves with its flexibility and porosity to air, light, water and ecological functions. The structure is made of stilts and horizontal layers ending with a light-filtering canopy. The trellis on the roof is made of slats that are more open to the north and more dense to the south, in order to allow better light control where the galleries are located. Museums are renowned to be highly energy consumptive because of their narrowed climate control for preservation. Because of this, specific attention was given to the HVAC system, positioning ducts under the floor allowing a better optimization of indoor air flows. The use of concrete was minimised through the use of the Cobiax System, a constructive method that involves recycled plastic domes as voids where concrete is not needed for a structural reason. The first floor is elevated 5.50 meters above the high-water mark left by Hurricane Andrew in 1992 (Category 5), acting as a cushion from potential effects of climate change. Majestic entrance doors are made of teak, with a multi-prong pin system that lock the doors in several places to secure them against Category 5 hurricane winds. Windows are the largest hurricane-resistant panes ever installed in the US. (Adorno)

The other way of responding to our predicament is not to avoid but to face the consequences. The destruction of Brazil’s National Museum by fire might be considered a case of a societal collapse. The fire broke out due to years of neglect and underfunding. It destroyed the building and most of the museum’s 20 million artifacts. At the 11th Berlin Biennial, the photo by Léo Corrêa presented a meteorite from the museum’s collection as the remnant of the fire. The picture was meant symbolically to open the work of mourning. However, it also may be seen as an ironic image of the idea of museological sustainability. Another example may be a small private museum in Lytton, BC. The town is located in an area that suffers an air temperature rise of 10–15°C when compared to the 2014–20 average (Lederman, 2021). This summer, a BC town was burned to the ground in record-breaking heat. The wildfire also destroyed the Chinese History Museum focused on East Asian contributors to the development of this area.



Jarosław Lubiak

After the apocalypse, some artifacts were found in the cinders and the debris. The museum owner, Ms. Fandrich, says: “[...] In the end, I have peace with that. Because we did all we could to retrieve pieces, and they’ll tell a story in the new museum. They’ll tell the story of what happened to them.” (Lederman, 2021) Decimated, destroyed, melted, and reshaped objects are witnesses of entirely different history than they used to be before. How can we encounter this history?

The owner of the Chinese History Museum in Lytton went through the process of deep adaptation. According to Jem Bendell, it consists of four moments or stages:

“Resilience: what do we most value that we want to keep, and how?”

Bendell opposes here physical or material adaptation. Instead, he advocates a psychological understanding of resilience as a “process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress [...]. It means ‘bouncing back’ from

difficult experiences.” He also stresses that the psychological concept “does not assume that people return to how they were before.” (Bendell, 2021, p. 88)

“Relinquishment: what do we need to let go of so as not to make matters worse?”

“It involves people and communities letting go of certain assets, behaviors, and beliefs where retaining them could make matters worse.” (Bendell, 2021, p. 88)

Restoration: what could we bring back to help us with these difficult times?”

“It involves people and communities rediscovering attitudes and approaches to life and organization that our [...] civilization eroded.” (Bendell, 2021, p. 89)

“Reconciliation: with what and whom shall we make peace as we awaken to our mutual mortality?”

It requires “...recognition of how we do not know whether our efforts will make a difference, while we also know that our situations will become more stressful and disruptive ahead of the ultimate destination for us all.” (Bendell, 2021, p. 89)

It is crucial here to translate Bendell’s categories to concepts and practices relevant to museums’ functioning:

Relinquishment

Museums definitely followed the late-capitalist logic of growth, expansion, and endless accumulation. To overcome this logic, we should consider the following questions. Can we imagine an actual downsizing of museums? Could we get rid of some venues, digital assets, and eventually collections or parts of them? What tangible and intangible assets, material and immaterial values, would we have to preserve? Is it possible to distribute differently the collections and resources that have been accumulated in the museums?

Restoration

It is obviously a well-known word in the museum world. However, the set of practices it names is almost exclusively limited to caring for objects, to eternally maintaining their material status. Let’s consider broadening its meaning to embrace the relations with human and non-human agents. The climate psychologist Adrian Tait says: “What humankind is collectively doing to our planetary home

is undeniable, but its significance is also unthinkable and unbearable.” (Tait, 2021, p. 128) And then he argues: “Climate science backs up the evidence of our senses, but scientific detachment is definitely not what’s needed in the journey of comprehension, which climate psychology sees as necessary. If we have not been racked by grief over what is happening, then we are shutting its meaning out of our hearts and bodies. But if we remained immersed in grief alone, we would become part of the wreckage. The loss is continuous and mounting, which prevents us from moving on as in normal mourning. We need relief from the pain.” (Tait, 2021, p. 128) What is necessary then is the affective help on both individual and collective levels that would allow for the work of mourning. Since museums are the institutions of care, they could become the sites for emotional labor. They could engage in the grieving process. I believe that art institutions are especially predestined for the work of mourning for the worlds lost in the collapse and for the affective work of adaptation. The most powerful tool in these processes can be art with all the imaginary machines at its disposal.

In some aspects, Bendell’s idea of deep adaptation meets Catherine Malabou’s philosophy of destructive plasticity, even though his approach is pragmatic and hers purely theoretical. For Malabou, plasticity should be opposed to elasticity. (Malabou, 2008) Whereas the former works through irreversible destruction of form in shaping, the latter is the susceptibility to temporary deformation combined with the ability to return to the initial shape. Plasticity may open a way to reparation, but only when the irreversibility of destruction is acknowledged and accepted.

As the ability to give and receive form, plasticity refers to transforming processes of organic and inorganic matter—to the life of human and inhuman individuals and collectives. In 2019, I curated a program called "Plasticity of the Planet" at Ujazdowski Castle Center for Contemporary Art, Warsaw. The program aimed at rethinking with the help of Malabou’s concept the function of contemporary art and its institution. (Malabou, 2017) One of our purposes was to make the Center a plastic institution that means malleable to certain kinds of destruction and reparation necessary to adapt deeply to the crisis. (Malabou, Majewska, 2019)

Reconciliation

In the museum world, reconciliation may start only from recognition of our ignorance. That means acknowledging the very limits of our knowledge and

expertise in order to start looking for friends and allies.

The experiment of the "Plasticity of the Planet" program showed that it is impossible to make an institution plastic for collapse without reformulating the idea of curating. I propose Daniel Falb's idea of curating storage as a starting point for this reformulation. (Falb, 2019) The philosopher reinterprets Deleuze and Guattari and presents defossilization and refossilization as key processes of our civilization. The defossilization of the first kind means “undoing sedimentations” and extracting the strata in order to burn organic fossils, and of the second kind “a biological, but also a cultural mass extinction event.” Whereas the refossilization of the first kind is a creation of “the material infrastructure of the planetary Technosphere—buildings, machinery, transportation infrastructure” and figuratively is producing and storing data through digital infrastructure. The refossilization of the second kind appears by “explosion of storage capabilities,” meaning, first of all, digital storage. And to confront this, Falb proposes a concept of curating storage as a critical practice of reworking cultural and civilizational infrastructure. Although truly inspiring, Falb's idea is too limited.

This is why I propose to reshape it into curating resources, where curating means advancing deep adaptation through art. And resources need to be considered conceptual, starting from the very concepts of environment, ecology, art, curating. They embrace an infrastructure of all kinds. But also relations, especially emotional, relevant material and immaterial goods, conscious and unconscious labor. Finally, resources are art and creativity as well as pleasure and enjoyment. Inasmuch as they become tools to form libidinal ecology.

This is libidinal ecology that allows us to overcome a crucial limit of Bendell’s thought. While looking for reasons for action, he is limited almost exclusively to moral terror and bad conscience. This is why we need to expand his thinking to reorganize drive dynamics, object selection, the intensity of desire, energy circulation, and pleasure distribution. Only within the framework of libidinal ecology, we may deeply adapt to the collapse that is probable to happen.

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PERSPECTIVE 2

JOANNA SOKOŁOWSKA

Independent curator, Poland

Biography — Joanna Sokołowska, is a freelance curator. In 2009–2021 she worked at Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź as a curator in the Modern Art Department. Through her exhibitions and publications, she has explored artistic practices engaged in the transformation of the ecological and economic imagination. Her curatorial projects have largely developed in relation to her research in the intersection of gender, care work, and the production of (semi) peripheries within the international division of labor. Recently, she has focused on learning holistic, systemic views of life and creativity. Consequently, she started studies in Process Oriented Psychology. Selected exhibitions include: *Pangea United*, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, 2019; *For Beyond that Horizon Lies Another Horizon*, Edith-Russ-Haus für Medienkunst, Oldenburg, 2017; *Exercises in Autonomy: Tamás Kaszás Featuring Anikó Loránt (Ex-artists' Collective)*, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, 2016; *All Men Become Sisters*, Muzeum Sztuki, 2015/16; *Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin. Facts, Incidents, Accidents, Circumstances, Situations* (co-curated with Magdalena Ziólkowska), Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, 2013; *Workers Leaving the Workplace*, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, 2011; *Another City, Another Life* (co-curated with Benjamin Cope), Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, Warsaw, 2008. One of her major publications is *All Men Become Sisters*, co-published with Sternberg Press, focusing on feminist perspectives on work and social reproduction in art since the 1970s until today.

ECOLOGICAL IMAGINATION ON THE EDGE

Confronting the limits

It is a painful challenge for me to (self-)reflect on the agency of museums and curating in the face of the overarching topic of this year's edition of CIMAM's annual meeting: xenophobia and climate emergency. Recent socio-political developments in Poland, where I live and used to work as a curator in Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, provide brutal feedback to questions posed by the conference program: "How can artists be agents of change, and museums be places to test proposals for the communities of the future? Can museums guide processes of political and/or technological solutions?" At best, I consider these ambitious questions as an opportunity to recognize honestly my own and professionally shared limits to affect social change. Perhaps, this moment of truth could become

a starting point to search for different ways for a personal and professional growth?

Fascist social contract

Let us be reminded briefly about the recent social contract in Poland. Art institutions try to survive here amidst a society and authorities affected by fascism. The fascist transformation of the country entails an increasing violence against the racialized other, refugees, women, children, LGBT+. The current direction of the society promoted and enforced by the ruling party PiS (Law and Justice) is founded on fear a cynical disregard for social and environmental justice. As this way has no future, the political guides and their followers, try to suppress any ideas and solutions for confronting interdependent climate, social, and public-health emergencies. In fact, the majority of life-sustaining, essential, and social services such as healthcare, environmental protection, housing, and education are being threatened; so is culture. The already fragile and precarious artistic ecosystem is engulfed by censorship, dramatic underfunding, and a progressive takeover of public

institutions by a new far-right and/or an opportunist leadership.

When CĪMAM's annual conference took place in Łódź and in Gdańsk, I felt unable to respond to any questions as I was devastated by the humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border. How can you speak of any agency, giving solutions, claiming leadership when you realize that majority of the society in which you live supports crimes against humanity perpetrated by the authorities? I don't feel an agent, nor a guide. I am a broken witness mourning the increasing number of the victims of the state. In the best case I humbly support and follow activist movements as a citizen, not as a curator.

Hope and imagination

The tools I have learned as a curator are obviously not designed to confront effectively the societal and environmental disruption I have been witnessing. My work stems from the question of how art and its institutions can offer hope and animate a collective imagination rather than offering answers and solutions. My understanding of hope is untimely; transcending the current moment. At the core of my practice as well as that of the team of Muzeum Sztuki has been the exhibition as a medium of exercising imagination, animating sensitivity, empathy and openness to alterity. The unachieved horizon has been empowerment of human capacities to envision and practice inhabiting the unknown and hopefully more just and life-affirming futures.

The common stake of a number of future-oriented projects (*Exercises in Autonomy. Tamás Kaszás featuring Anikó Loránt [ex-artists' collective], Prototypes O3: Carolina Caycedo & Zofia Rydet. Care report, Urban Ecologies, All Men Become Sisters, Pangea United, Apple. An Introduction [Over and over and once again]...*, *For beyond that horizon lies another horizon, Prototypes O4: Agata Siniarska [Land] Slip...*) was an acknowledgement of the societal and climate disruption and collapse as a feedback from the Earth, a call for a radical change. Exercises in imagination, incited by the exhibitions, were definitely not about producing illusion or false hope. They were rather geared toward the process of recognizing the truth of the collapse to imagine transformation of the dominant collective dream. Can we move on and abandon the hallucination of endless consumption, growth, and extractivism?



Joanna Sokotowska

At the edge

However, as different psychological studies prove, the necessity to change and confront the unknown can evoke fear, paralysis, denial, or even aggression. It is the experience, which could be compared to the notion of being at the edge. Process-oriented psychology describes this state as being afraid, unable to think and act to follow the inner process. One of the most creative techniques of working with the edge is to imagine, narrate, demonstrate, and feel as if we already made the change. In this way, we stimulate the sensory experience and emotions of transcending our limitations, identities, habits, and fears. There is then a chance to move on and open new paths for growth. Following freely the creative lesson of confronting edges in exhibition making, one has to give mental space to beholders to encounter artworks and the curatorial proposition.

The model of the exhibition I advocate is a constellation of artworks conceived in dialogue with artists and possibly with art mediators to support the

inner, creative processes of beholders. No matter if exhibitions deal with topical socio-political questions such as gender-based exploitation or ecological emergency, the curating needs to trust in the capacities of beholders/art users, their own sensitivity, creativity, and imagination. Likewise, the exhibitions appealing to imagination need to navigate between the overarching topics the singularity, complexity, or poetic force of specific artworks, which cannot be illustrations reduced to the curatorial and institutional agenda.

Contested gift

I will examine these questions drawing on two case studies *All Men Become Sisters* and *Pangea United*: two exhibitions I curated in Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź following different aspects of ecofeminist perspectives on environment-making. Both focused on care, and specifically on reevaluation of care as a life-affirming horizon for future communities.

But first, why did I feel entitled to pose such universal questions? Who are the “we” and “us” I was metaphorically referring to in my paper?

The background for questions about a future life in common is a legacy or—as I think today—rather a myth of the a.r. group, (artyści rewolucyjni; awangarda rzeczywista). Between 1929 and 1932, this group of avant-garde artists (Katarzyna Kobro, Władysław Strzemiński Julian Przyboś, Henryk Stażewski) created—mostly through donations—the a.r. International Collection of Modern Art and gave it to the Municipal Museum of History and Art in Łódź, which was transformed later to Muzeum Sztuki. Their gift was aimed at enhancing transformation of society with the help of art; the horizon was social progress and modernization. The utopian and forward-thinking heritage of the a.r. group was animated and revised over the recent years by the team of Muzeum Sztuki in a number of projects (*Prototypes*, *Eyes Looking for a Head to Inhabit* to name just two) as a laboratory, a pool of practices to be activated under contemporary social conditions. A common concept of, or an intuition behind, diverse projects connected (even if in a loose manner) with the avant-garde heritage of Muzeum Sztuki was art as a blueprint for social relations.

Another, albeit often indirect and contested, herstorical point of reference in the program of Muzeum Sztuki is the location of the museum in Łódź. This former textile hub has undergone dramatic socio-economic transformation connected with the collapse of industry in the wake of the 1990s capitalist reform in Poland. The ensuing unemployment of a great number of female workers and the downfall

of the city proved one of the most traumatic post-communist developments in the country. Capitalism, transformation of work, as well as the semi-peripheral context of the museum have been vital issues addressed in the program of the institution (*Labour in a Single Shot*, *Workers Leaving the Workplace*, *All Men Become Sisters*, *Work, Work, Work (Work)*. Céline Condorelli and Wendelien van Oldenborgh). Along with the educational program, they are threads connecting the museum spaceship—a container with the universalizing claims and ideologies of avant-garde, modern and contemporary global art—with local herstory.

Pangean sistershood

The metaphor of sisterhood animated in the exhibition *All Men Become Sisters* was grounded in art resonating with feminist perspectives on work, production, and social reproduction art from the late 1960s until today. However, the exhibition did not aim to rewrite the history of feminism in art until now. The narrative of sisterhood aimed at appropriating the seminal concept of brotherhood to imagine nonpatriarchal herstories of solidarity of workers and to expand the apprehension of work and economy involving invisible, gendered work and the realm of social reproduction. Sisterhood perceives the struggle against the patriarchy as a battle that is waged by molding the living environment into one that is more bearable to many subjects. I identified in radical feminist art an overarching, complex idea that combined the rejection of the exploitation of women with the rejection of exploitation in its other forms. The goal was to distill the power of these acts of resistance and to imagine their possible hitherto unrealized consequences. The exhibition had a structure based on the resonating configuration of artworks, encounters between different, intergenerational, and at times geopolitically distant artistic and theoretical practices. My goal was to produce and amplify different non-patriarchal, nonlinear herstories, which could move our visitors today rather than to serve art history. The exhibition revolved around questions of the invisible, unpaid care work and the economy of the household (issues addressed by Elżbieta Jabłońska, Krystyna Gryczelowska, Hackney Flashers, Daniel Rumiancew), while pointing to the feminization of low-income, precarious jobs in services (Alicja Rogalska, Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz, Berwick Street Film Collective, Margaret Harrison). These threads were put in conversation with artists working on the decolonization of the image of the female body from the objectifying, patriarchal

gaze (Şükran Moral, Agnieszka Brzeżańska, Jo Spence, Agnès Varda, Birgit Jürgenssen). The essential legacy of second-wave feminism resonating with contemporary eco-feminist approaches was the estrangement of women's role service and care worker, a passive commodity and a natural resource. Exploited, feminized work appeared in the configuration of works by R.E.P., Ines Doujak and John Barker, Daniel Rumanicew, R.E.P., Mona Vatamanu and Florin Tudor, and Köken Ergun as one of "cheap natures," a metaphor I borrowed from Jason W. Moore's book *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*. In Moore's view, capital accumulation demands a constant search for and production of cheap natures, putting human and extra-human natures to unpaid or low-paid work. Cheap natures are domains seized from the web of life. Set aside as extra-social and extra-economic, readily available, worthless, "natural," and invisible they are subject to appropriation as inputs to production. The major "Four Cheaps" are labor power, food, energy, and raw materials. In the context of the exhibition, the long herstory of treating women as nature, was a thread taken up to broaden the spectrum of sisterhood to involve other subjects engulfed by the matrix of exploitation. However, following eco-feminist currents, and intuitive insights mediated by invited artists, the exhibition was not limited to mapping the complex and intersectional structure of abuse. The life-affirming perspective emerging through multiple artistic voices (Teresa Murak, Agnieszka Brzeżańska, Marcin Polak, Alicja Rogalska) was grounded in care. What if it could be released from patriarchy? What if caregiving were liberated from patriarchy and the economy of "cheap natures"? Could it be done collectively for human and non-human communities in an expanded, decolonized household? The (desired) trajectory of the care-based transformation of social values in the ecological and spiritual dimension led me further to work on *Pangea United*.

The geological metaphor indicated in the title served as an invitation to viewers to exercise ecological imagination, to imagine the Earth community as one household.

Expanding the concept of sisterhood, the exhibition comprised artists who work on images and affects for a community beyond the economy of cheap nature, beyond values other than usefulness in production and consumption, or state borders. The basis of a search for the community was awareness of the vulnerability and malleability of life and bodies in its diverse forms. It is a concept of life that needs support and care in order to survive and that can be easily exposed to

pain and suffering. The artworks presented in this exhibition formed a kind of essay, a meditation on the question of human attentiveness and the interdependence of life in all its forms.

The curatorial narrative did not propose anything unthinkable, progressive, or new. Future predictions articulated by artists were developed from the current possibilities and resources. Instead of resorting to utopia, they modestly recycled and reevaluated practices that have already existed but are unprofitable or uncomfortable for the current, hegemonic rationale and thus remain marginal or barely survive under threat of destruction. It could be for instance folk science and survival strategies practiced during hardship by peasant societies in Central Eastern Europe, which are the source of inspiration for Tamás Kaszás, or indigenous environmental resistance connected to the Magdalena river, Colombia's main waterway, as mediated by Carolina Caycedo. In multiple works inhabiting the emergent Earth household, the future appeared to be devoid of the concept of the economic growth (Anetta Mona Chişa & Lucia Tkáčová), progress (Jerzy Rosołowicz), recognizing hitherto neglected cycles and costs of production (Diana Lelonek) and abandoning the prevailing value of money, property, and ideas of wealth (Alan Butler, Agnes Denes). While searching for new paths for the growth of communal life, many artists insist on repairing broken relationships. This applies in particular to the mass violence people inflict on the vulnerable bodies of other animals. Consequently, they imagine a radical dislocation of the current, hierarchical divisions between body, flesh and cadaver, the muzzle and the face, bios and zoe (as suggested by Artavazd Peleshian, Monika Zawadzki, or Czekalska & Golec). In order to face the complexity and the alterity of possible futures, *Pangea United* gave much space to artists who do not provide any solutions, who, in other words, do not cross the edge, but contemplate the unknown, engage with chaos (Agnieszka Brzeżańska, Agnieszka Kalinowska) and celebrate porosity and the leakiness of these borders and zones designed by human societies. Ultimately, the exhibition was conceived as a kind of aid in deep adaptation to unfamiliar and threatening developments.

Learning from

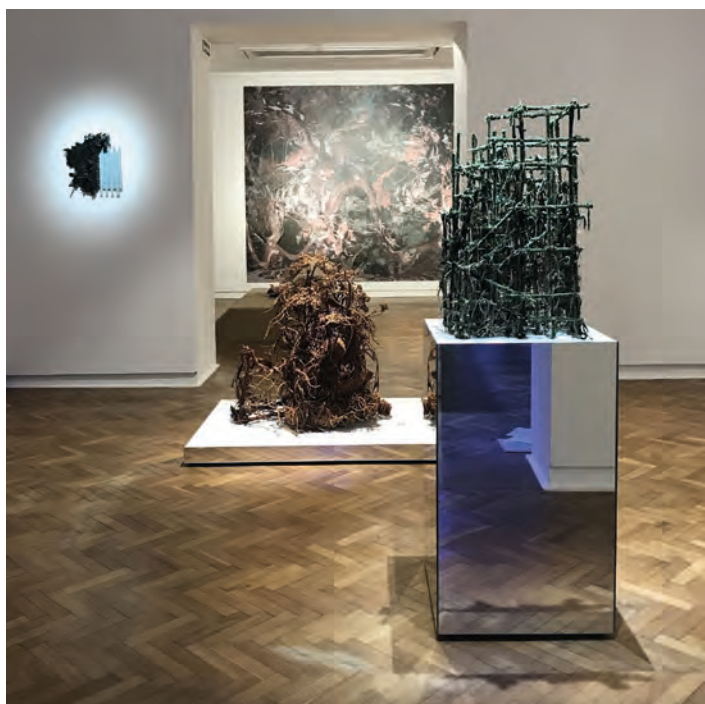
As I have shown, working with the ecological imagination does not involve merely appealing to human concerns for the environment. It is a creative process of reinventing relations between different areas of knowledge, legacies, disciplines, herstories, artworks,



All Men Become Sisters, exhibition view with works by Köken Ergun, R.E.P. and Jadwiga Sawicka. All images courtesy of Archive of Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, photo: Piotr Tomczyk



Pangea United, exhibition view with works by Monika Zawadzki. All images courtesy of Archive of Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, photo: Piotr Tomczyk



Pangea United, exhibition view with works by Agnieszka Kalinowska and Carolina Caycedo. All images courtesy of Archive of Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, photo: Piotr Tomczyk



Pangea United, exhibition view with works by Teresa Murak and Jerzty Rosołowicz. All images courtesy of Archive of Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, photo: Piotr Tomczyk



Tamás Kaszás. *Lost Wisdom (Sci-Fi Agit-Prop)*, 2016-2019, exhibition: *Pangea United*. All images courtesy of Archive of Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, photo: Piotr Tomczyk

ideas to animate the experience of inhabiting together the unknown.

However, I believe the major challenge museums are facing today is not the realm of visions, but the ecological reinvention of museum practices and building credibility as partners for societal transformation. What needs to be urgently changed is not the rhetoric, exhibition, and public programs, but daily practices in terms of production, administration, infrastructure, labor, economy. The processes of creating and experimenting with a more ecological, fair, inclusive, and creative society are already underway and they are tested in the socially committed civic society, third sector, and activism. Today, museums could learn humbly from their engagement and search for allies. I don't see their role as guides to technological or societal transformation, definitely not in Poland, where they are being taken over and destroyed by incompetent, conservative leaders and/or are limited by bureaucracy and their own institutional survival policies.

PERSPECTIVE 3

ALEX BACZYŃSKI-JENKINS

Artist and choreographer, Berlin/Warsaw

Biography — Alex Baczyński-Jenkins is an artist and choreographer engaging with queer affect, embodiment, and relationality. Through gesture, collectivity, touch, and sensuality, his practice unfolds structures and the politics of desire. Previous and solo exhibitions include: Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland (2019); Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw (2018); and Chisenhale Gallery, London (2017). Baczyński-Jenkins has also presented work at: the 58th International Art Exhibition (La Biennale di Venezia), Venice (2019); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2019); Migros Museum of Contemporary Art, Zurich (2018); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2017); Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw (2017). He is co-founder of Kem, a Warsaw based queer feminist collective focused on choreography, performance, and sound as community building practices.



Alex Baczyński-Jenkins

Hi! Firstly, thank you so much to the organizers and the hosts and to Malgorzata Ludwisiak for the invitation. It's really a pleasure to be here. I'd like to speak a little bit about this word connecting, connectedness, that came up at the end of Dipesh's talk, and which has resonances with my practice both as a choreographer and as a cultural worker and member of the collective Kem. I'll speak a little bit about some of my pieces, as well as some of the work we do together with the collective.

The first work that I'd like to speak about is a piece called *Federico*, and it is a choreography for touch. It's the smallest choreography that I've made— it's an eight-minute piece for two performers touching hands, from 2015. It was performed in various situations, there is a certain score, and then there is an encounter with the performers that I made for this specific iteration. This one was in Amman. The reason I wanted to start with this was, through the experiences of the recent times, the politics and the urgency of touch and ways of being together have become far more apparent. I guess what we realized with the pandemic in recent times is the relationship between the intimate and the planetary, and how from the micro-gesture or from the micro-situation we think to the macro, and from the micro-gesture to the infrastructure. This is something that I feel has also appeared in the previous talks.

I wanted to include this photo from a performance that I did at the museum here in 2016 called *Portal Proxy*. I developed this work here at the invitation of Katarzyna Sloboda and Mateusz Szymanowka for the *Frames of Reference* exhibition. This was one of the first museums to present my work. In the description of this event there was a question posed of how museums can engage in rehearsing, proposals for communities of the future. For me, that is a crucial aspect of my interest and my practice, once again, both as a choreographer developing performances and as a cultural worker engaging in collective work.

I include this image after the previous one because it's also taken in 2016, and the two things that I'd like to speak about concern the relationship between the micro and the macro, or the relationship between gesture and infrastructure. And in 2016, I had just moved back to Poland, and it was then that Marta Ziolk and I set up a space called Kem, which later became Kem Collective. This was a factory on Ulica Podskarbińska in the Praga District of Warsaw. It was an old ammunition factory and it has since been torn down as part of the redevelopments of the city. It was initially a kind of studio—a shared studio for hosting both art practices with Marta and hosting

other artists, and eventually this transformed into a collective. We gave space for people to develop work, to present work, to experiment, and we threw parties.

Since that time, Kem has moved on to become a collective without a specific physical space, and the most recent project that we developed is Kem school, a six-week educational project, and I'll speak about that a bit more later. But just to say that it was developed and initiated with Ola Knychalska, who is a curator, activist, and producer working at the intersection of art, activism, and advocacy. And we initiated that project, and there were many more people involved. But I'll get back to that.

Before moving on, I just wanted to speak a little bit of what it is to make a space that strengthens the feeling of belonging, and to strengthen, through various kinds of formats, a community. At the same time as the collective was developing, I was also working on a project called *The tremble, the symptom, the swell and the hole together* (2017). This is a work that I developed for the Chisenhale Gallery in London. It wasn't the first time that I was working in an exhibition format of eight weeks—a performance in an exhibition format. I was thinking of the experience of Kem, and what it is to have a space that people want



Alex Baczyński-Jenkins, *Untitled (Holding Horizon)*, 2018. Performance view, Frieze Artist Award, London, 2018. Courtesy: the artist. Photograph: Spyros Rennt



Alex Baczyński-Jenkins, *The tremble part of The tremble, the symptom, the swell and the hole together*, 2017. Produced and commissioned by Chisenhale Gallery, London. Courtesy of the artist.

to return to, that builds a certain community around the work. And so, the work unfolded through four episodes, and speaking about infrastructure, performances often have a precarious infrastructure within the visual arts context, so that was something that was being developed. The way that I approached that was that this eight-week exhibition would be a rehearsal space to develop the iterations and to have the iterations unfold as the exhibition was happening. So, I think there is something kind of shifting back to a perspective of what we're here to speak about... I think the alteration of the perception of time is crucial to the task at hand. I mean, here there is again, on a macro-scale of thinking, what a work is that unfolds over eight weeks. I think one of the tasks at hand is start thinking how change happens over long durations and how we're sensitive to perceiving change over longer durations.

These are images from various episodes. Coming back to Kem, after I returned from London with *The tremble, the symptom, the swell and the hole together* we were asked to leave the space of Podskarbinska. And so, this is also a moment when we received invitations from institutions. We were invited by Natalia Sielewicz at the Museum of Modern

Art in Warsaw to develop a two-month programme. We called this Kem Care, a program that took place in 2018 and was focused on interdependence practices of care and relationality. Joanna Zielińska at The Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle invited us for a one-year residency. And once again, thinking about these long durations of process, I think it's really significant and a very unique invitation from an institution to offer a collective a space for a year.

As I'm now going to speak more about the collective, just to say that at this point the collective was made up of Ola Knychalska, Krzysztof Bagiński and Ania Miczko, and we developed the program Kem Care together as well as the one-year project at the Ujazdowski Castle called *Three Springs*. One of the first things that we did at the Ujazdowski Castle was that we decided to take out the bars of one of the windows and to install this architectural intervention, which was a staircase; another entrance to the institution. And on one level it's architecture, but maybe this is also another example of how we think otherwise, or move sideways. This staircase was installed so that we could organise various things, including throwing parties. And we threw a series of parties called

Dragana Bar, and I think that the importance of parties and celebration at a time of mourning is essential. I think that the relationship between throwing parties now and mourning is very crucial, one of the ways we celebrate and come together, despite the losses that we're dealing with. So, this is one image from the Dragana Bar, and at the same time I'm moving between the work of the collective and my own practice. That same summer, I was nominated for the Frieze Artist Award and I was developing a work called *Untitled (Holding Horizon)*. I was developing and rehearsing for this performance in the same space as the parties were happening.

Here is an image of Kim Lee, who passed away due to Covid. And this party was called *If you're OK, I'm OK*. It was a fundraiser for a friend of ours who had cancer, and there was a performance by Kim Lee for the opening, so I guess the party's space was also considered a kind of a space for debuting drag queens, for established drag queens to try out different things, with experimental music, what would be queer and feminist sound.

For *Untitled (Holding Horizon)*, that was precisely one of the things that was being considered by me in this work and rehearsing it in the same space that we were throwing these parties, and later organizing the *Queer Ecologies Reading Circle*. It was this thing of mourning and dance and moving through darkness together, and working with limit as material, so this is a box step that gets repeated by the performers. It's a kind of... quite a formally strict step that gets repeated, and at the same time there are these sensual gestures, that are of and adjacent to the club space, so the step is mediating these gestures and orientations and it's a kind of exercise in other worlding, disorientation and being with each other in another way.

Here is an image from the *Queer Ecologies Reading Circle* that was led by Ania Miczko and Lisa Suh, who we invited to co-lead it. And although this isn't at the Ujazdowski Castle, it was a format that we developed there, which was sitting in a circle and reading critical theory texts together.



Alex Baczyński-Jenkins, *Federico*, 2015. Performance view, *Acts of Translation*, MMAG Foundation, Amman, Jordan, 2018. Courtesy: the artist. Photograph: Yanone.

I guess the experiences of the one year at the Ujazdowski Castle and the six-week program at the Museum of Modern Art with Kem kind of led us to develop the Kem School... In 2019, we received an invitation from Krytyka Polityczna to jointly apply to the City of Warsaw to develop a program, and we decided that we were going to develop a four-week study program, something that felt quite pertinent. The program is called *How to touch movement? Social choreographies, performance and queer feminisms as world-making*. There were a lot of people who came together to make this program happen from August to September. The initial phase was for research and dialogue preparation with Katarzyna Sloboda (Kasia Sloboda) and Julia Morandeira, who has experience in running the Escuelita at the Centro Dos de Mayo in Madrid, as well as with Ola Knychalska, so the four of us had this research base and preparation. And then there were various people like Tosia Leniarska, who stepped in as the project coordinator; Kasia Wlasczyk who also helped develop the program and Julia Celejewska. Eventually, it took place at the end of August, with 11 participants taking part over the six weeks, and there were various formats. But I think something that could also be interesting within this context is that there is the question of how to facilitate co-learning.

Part of the structure of the program was that we had these check-in and check-outs at the beginning and the end of the week. And that's a format that's borrowed from activist practices. Returning to what's been said about coming back to finding emotion and living with emotions, I think this format of opening a week with everyone having to check-in with where they're at, and then closing the week with a check-out, in working with that as a feedback loop for the following week. This thing of feedbacking the community and the infrastructure as a perpetual kind of re-adjustment was a crucial part of the experience that had various invited artists. For example, Karol Radziszewski, who is here as well, gave a workshop on the Queer Archives Institute. You are very welcome to go on the website, it's kemwarsaw.com, where you can find out more about the programme and the various people that we invited.

And I think that's where I'll finish. The program is going to continue next year with a slightly adjusted format. Speaking about the politics of growth, I thought it was interesting, to go from the beginning of Kem as a project space and a studio space to becoming a collective to becoming this educational platform. Thank you.

**DAY 2, SATURDAY
NOVEMBER 6**

**MUSEUMS AS SPACES
FOR RECOGNIZING
DIFFERENCES**

KEYNOTE 2

T.J. DEMOS

Patricia and Rowland Rebele Endowed Chair in Art History and Visual Culture and Director of the Center for Creative Ecologies, UC Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, USA

Biography — T.J. Demos is an award-winning writer on contemporary art and global politics. He is a professor in the Department of the History of Art and Visual Culture at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and a founding director of its Center for Creative Ecologies. He researches the intersection of visual culture, radical politics, and political ecology, and is the author of numerous books, including *Beyond the World's End: Arts of Living at the Crossing* (Duke, 2020); *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and Political Ecology* (Sternberg, 2016); and *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today*, (Sternberg, 2017). He recently co-edited *The Routledge Companion on Contemporary Art, Visual Culture, and Climate Change* (2021), was a Getty Research Institute Fellow (Spring 2020), and directed the Mellon-funded Sawyer Seminar research project *Beyond the End of the World* (2019–2021). Demos is also Chair and Chief Curator of the Climate Collective, providing public programming related to the 2021 *Climate Emergency > Emergence* program at the Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology (Maat) in Lisbon. He is currently working on a new book on radical futurisms.

MUSEUMS IN THE AGE OF CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND XENOPHOBIA: NEOLIBERAL RECOGNITION, ILLIBERAL INSTITUTIONS, THE DEI COMPLEX, AND REPARATIVE FUTURES

Museums as zones of conflict

In recent years, many museums in liberal countries of the West have become hotspots for popular venom. Indigenous activists and those formerly colonized, have targeted cultural institutions of the colonial present for continuing to inadequately consult stakeholder communities, failing to return objects of cultural heritage appropriated at earlier stages of history, and for problematically representing minoritized views, cultural practices, and knowledge systems. In the US and the UK, Afro-diasporic peoples have challenged museums for cultural appropriation, including superficial liberal declarations of sympathy with the racial justice politics of Black Lives Matter, which, according to critics, all too often tokenize with empty gestures.¹ Critics have attacked exhibitions that opportunistically exploit spectacles of Black death for insensitive cultural gain. In South Africa, students and activists have risen up against post-apartheid white supremacy, targeting colonial-era monuments that still adorn cultural and educational institutions, understood to perpetuate racial inequality and exclusion, with

¹ See several exemplary museum statements here: https://www.musesphere.com/black_lives_matter.html.

activists seeking to decolonize such spaces beginning with tearing down these monuments, and proposing, in their place, institutional and economic restructuring that is inclusive and diverse (e.g., #FeesMustFall). And climate justice organizations have demanded that all manner of museums divest from fossil-fuel funding and refuse partnerships with petrocapi-talist corporations like BP, Shell, and Total, in addition to recognizing the current state of climate emergency.

All these demands are, at least in part, demands for recognition, *but not just*; for, more expansively, they attempt to reckon with, and advance, decolonial political transformation, challenging the continuation of institutional racism, xenophobia directed at minoritized groups, and growing socio-economic and political inequality.

Competing demands, coming from populist and reactionary sources of dissent, attack museums perceived as being all-too-liberal—for instance in Hungary and Poland—where demands for recognition express antipathy toward feminist and pro-LGBTQI²+ cultural values and attack support for so-called “gender ideology.” These proponents of intolerance target migrants and Islamic community members, decrying museum narratives perceived to be sympathetic to them and their supposed civilization-corrupting threats (threats understood, generally, from a conservative, white, Western, heteronormative, and Christian basis). But this is not simply a war of values. In these cases, intolerance “attracts, condenses, and electrifies a diverse set of social and economic anxieties produced by increasing economic precarity under neoliberal regimes, intensifying social inequality, and pandemic shutdown,” as Judith Butler has recently argued.²

We can add that these campaigns of intolerance and misinformation are amplified by social media’s unmoderated algorithms, stoking “fears of infrastructural collapse, anti-migrant anger and, in Europe, the fear of losing the sanctity of the heteronormative family, national identity and white supremacy,” as Butler notes. These fears inspire, and are answered by, authoritarianism, even emergent fascism, with political formations seeking to restore conventional social systems—i.e., white, Christian, patriarchal heteronormativity—and intensify divisions in their course by occluding the very growing economic and political inequality these systems of authoritarianism



T.J. Demos

thrive within. It’s a familiar situation in the US too, as reactionary authoritarianism—most recently associated with Trumpism—supports economic liberalization that enriches the ruling class, doing so while selling its agenda on the basis of ethnonationalist identification with white supremacy, which, we know, hides deepening class antagonisms between the rich and poor, and hinders multiracial solidarity from challenging its rule, according to long-established divide-and-conquer techniques of social control.³

Add to the mix climate-change driven migration, expected to grow by many orders of magnitude in the next few decades, and we confront a perfect storm of xenophobic social conflict, often focused on cultural institutions. Yet this is no “natural disaster,” but rather one with roots in the long history of racialized colonial violence, transatlantic slavery, military invasions, War on Terror brutality, extractivism, neoliberal trade agreements, and the destruction of

2 Judith Butler, “Why is the idea of ‘gender’ provoking backlash the world over?” *The Guardian*, Oct 23, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/commentisfree/2021/oct/23/judith-butler-gender-ideology-backlash>.

3 For more on this, see Asad Haider, *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump*. London: Verso, 2018.

democratic institutions. All of which has led to what Wendy Brown terms “apocalyptic populism,” according to which some people simply feel fed up with the broken promises of multinational-corrupted “democratic” politics, and desire to bomb problems away, or cast a protest vote, or not vote at all, or support the latest populist demagogue and their scapegoating tactics.⁴

Brexit, border security, Frontex, hostile migration policies, biometric surveillance, militarized policing, weaponizing of environments against asylum-seekers, “LGBT-free” zones—all of this creates an impossible context for progressive cultural institutions. The idea that, somehow, they can mitigate the damage on the level of representation, symbolism, or recognition alone, and reconstruct a civility that is otherwise trashed within the online culture wars being fought by troll armies, bots, and recommendation engines on a 24/7 basis, is improbable at best. While there’s no easy answers to this explosive situation—except for doing the revolutionary work of building a multiracial working-class politics of emancipation to escape the world-ending domination of global capitalism⁵—I’d like to discuss some of its further challenges, particularly in relation to the liberal cultural politics of recognition.

The Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Complex

One increasingly common approach within liberal institutions addressing the demands placed on them for decolonization, repatriation (or rematriation), economic restructuring, and so on, begins with the commitment to “recognize difference.” In recent years, we have seen all manner of institutions—from museums to corporations to universities—attempt to address these concerns through a range of practices, including: expanding consultative processes; diversifying their labor force by hiring members of historically disenfranchised and minoritized groups; visibilizing diversity through spokesperson representation; mandating sensitivity training and providing workshops with consultants to address racial and sexual bias; enacting aspirational publicity and social media campaigns to control messaging internally and manage outward public perceptions; revising events and exhibition programming so as to appear more

inclusive; outsourcing social justice to artistic practices, and so on. Some of this is motivated, to be sure, by well-intentioned efforts at challenging institutional inertia and their familiar conventionally homogeneous and hierarchical social relations.

All of these practices, generally, fall under what is quickly emerging as the “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Complex,” as an increasingly pervasive and global corporate strategy,⁶ in addition to a cultural institutional and educational one, which refers to the following, according to my working definition: An industry of interlocking agencies, consultants, directors, and associated infrastructure dedicated to combatting perceptions of inequality, bias, and intolerance through educational, symbolic, and juridical procedures, in order to burnish institutional brands, project images of inclusive and diverse environments, and preempt social justice-driven complaints and grievances, including by staff as much as by community stakeholders and organizations.

Yet despite these goals, the DEI complex, arguably, and depending on the circumstances, all too often offers little movement in structurally and substantially transforming the power relations within those same institutions. Considering it cynically, the DEI complex offers a way to manage the *perception* of diversity and inclusion, but absent any commitment to actually mitigating inequality, anti-democracy, and hierarchy. In fact, that may be the point, as the institutionalization of racial, gender, and sexual equality via the DEI complex is already a billion-dollar industry populated by professional consultants and corporate HR reps, but is an industry, according to critical analysts, largely without shared standards, accountability, or credentials. As the DEI complex gets increasingly commodified and institutionalized, it becomes further integrated within the very *inequality*-producing capitalist system it is attempting to restructure in the name of social equality and inclusivity. It also gets standardized according to an increasingly familiar corporate playbook, as one commentator observes: “it goes something like [this]: A terrible thing happens to a marginalized community; then we put out a statement of outrage; then we do a listening session; and then we drop it until the next terrible thing.”⁷

This cycle—in the worst-case scenario—

4 Wendy Brown, “Apocalyptic Populism,” *Eurozine*, August 30, 2017, <https://www.eurozine.com/apocalyptic-populism>.

5 For more on this proposal, see T.J. Demos, *Beyond the World's End: Arts of Living at the Crossing*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.

6 World Economic Forum, “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion 4.0: a toolkit for leaders to accelerate social progress in the future of work,” June 23, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/reports/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-4-0-a-toolkit-for-leaders-to-accelerate-social-progress-in-the-future-of-work>.

7 Bridget Read, “Doing the Work at Work What are companies desperate for diversity consultants actually buying?” *The Cut*, May 26, 2021, <https://www.thecut.com/article/diversity-equity-inclusion-industrial-companies.html>.

produces a goldrush for consultants, who are structurally incentivized to reproduce the very inequality they also are hired to tackle (if not, they'd be out of a job). It also creates new markets of diversity (including in relation to artworks) for institutional acquisition. But the central problem remains: with the DEI complex, there's generally no challenging of the institutional ruling order. Even if social environments become more diverse, class divisions and relations of power remain undisturbed, as institutional decision-making remains ever-hierarchical, even while speaking the language of DEI at all scales, enforcing vertical integration, but without substantial transformation. According to a growing critique, "diversity, equity, and inclusion functions with the world as it is, and not the world as we want it to be."⁸

The challenge remains of how to *meaningfully* enact diversity, equity and inclusion, transcending its superficial semblance and structural limitations, in order to cultivate a culture of real equality, democracy, and transparency. If that challenge is not overcome, then DEI risks intensifying a cultural cynicism, inadvertently aligning with those that reject the rhetoric of DEI from a reactionary standpoint, just as some have come to—legitimately—reject the false language of greenwashing by corporations that claim to support green sustainability, doing so only at the level of marketing publicity so as to gain a social license to pollute, which also may parallel a climate-denying politics of doing nothing at all. In other words, without structural changes, institutional DEI may very well breed cynicism, derision, and invite reactionary backlash, thereby producing more of the intolerance that it opposes. By doing so, DEI paradoxically propels the very cycle of inequality that economically benefits the DEI complex in the first place, functioning, again, "with the world as it is and not the world as we want it to be."

Illiberal institutions

Of course, this is not to say that contemporary cultural institutions are not *already* compromised by the dominant illiberal political economy at all scales of their operations. They surely are, as pointed out in the

current exhibition, *Illiberal Arts*, at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, the description of which reads:

The liberal capitalist world order that prevailed after 1989 is today in a stage of advanced disintegration. The collapse of this order exposes the illiberal core of its freedoms and forms of ownership shaped by the market: the violent unfreedoms of the dispossessed as well as the willingness of the propertied to use violence. Art, too, reveals itself as the venue of these forces and their exclusions: Through the downfall of liberality, the modern institution of... "institutionalized art" [according to Arnold Hauser] and its social legitimacy are also increasingly called into question.⁹

The challenge is how to reverse this course, which is admittedly so ambitious, a question that, one might very well say that institutional change cannot possibly be rethought without confronting the larger challenge of radically transforming the global political economy. That's precisely the very challenge of meaningful and just climate action today—and it's an urgent one—if we are to save ourselves from near-future socio-environmental collapse.¹⁰

Strike MoMA

Decolonize This Place, the arts and activist collective based in New York, recently coined the phrase "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Complex" in the context of their activist mobilization against the city's Museum of Modern Art during the past year, which includes a demand for recognition, *but not only*. The project offers an important case study, even if its museum context is distinct as a wealthy private flagship institution in the US, different from public institutions elsewhere. As the project of a coalitional movement including many different stakeholder community organizations,¹¹ *Strike MoMA* makes a demand that the DEI complex could never deliver. By reimagining the museum as a place to live, collectively in an emancipated future, it opposes the very existence of a wealthy private museum run by

8 *ibid.*

9 HKW, "illiberal Arts," 2021, https://hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2021/illiberal_arts/start.php.

10 On the necessity of the anti-capitalist and systemic basis of socio-environmental transformation, see Hadas Thier, *A People's Guide to Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2018), esp. pp. 140–146; Nancy Fraser, "Climates of Capitalism," *New Left Review* 127 (Jan Feb 2021), pp. 94–127; and The Red Nation, *The Red Deal: Indigenous Action to Save Our Earth* (New York: Common Notions, 2021).

11 StrikeMOMA Working Group collaborates with dozens of other groups and individuals, including but not limited to: Artists for a Post-MoMA Future; Comité Boricua En La Diáspora; Curators and Educators for Decolonization; Decolonize This Place; Direct Action Front for Palestine; Forensic Architecture; Former Employees of MoMA; Global Ultra Luxury Faction; Insurgent Poets Society; MoMA Divest; Take Back the Bronx; Wardance Collective; and We Will Not Be Silent.

billionaires, whose trustees have extensive complicity with current global military neoliberalism and extractive capital.

The charges waged against MoMA begin with its Board of Trustees, with its octopus directorate composed of corporate CEOs with major ties to political and economic power supporting global fossil capital, including the armaments and weapons industry, private prisons and policing, border enforcement, vulture capital, real-estate gentrification and displacement of the poor, and extractivism and environmental violence. It's fair to say that MoMA's Board represents much of the corporate causality behind global climate catastrophe, even as the museum houses some of the most radical experiments in 19th and 20th century avant-garde practice dedicated to creating the formal vocabulary and experimental practices of emancipation from capitalism and its oppressive forms of life. The Board includes Leon Black of the New York-based investment firm Apollo Global Management, CEO Larry Fink of Blackrock, the Wall Street firm with massive stakes in fossil fuels and agribusiness industries, as well as private prisons, mercenary contractors, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement. It includes Steven Tananbaum of Golden Tree Assets, a vulture hedge fund that extracts wealth from such countries around the world as debt-stricken Puerto Rico.¹² There's also Patricia Phelps Cisneros of Grupo Cisneros, the Latin-American media-industrial empire; Honorary Chair Ronald Lauder, the cosmetics billionaire, pro-Israel lobbyist, and major Trump donor; and Paula Crown and James Crown of the General Dynamics armaments fortune.¹³ There are still more.

As the Strike MoMA Working Group, otherwise known as the International Imagination of Anti-National Anti-Imperialist Feelings (iIAAF), explains, "[B]eyond any one board member, MoMA itself is the problem": it's the institutional situation and political makeup of MoMA's "death-dealing oligarchs using art as an instrument of accumulation and shield for their violence."¹⁴ Strike MoMA's demands, accompanying their "10 weeks of Conversation, Art, and Action," comprise a "Convening for a Just Transition to a Post-MoMA Future," and should be seen as non-reformist, reaching toward an expansive horizon beyond any single act of institutional betterment.

As they write, "[A]ny demand that seeks to reform MoMA without calling into question its continued existence is part of the problem...Conversations, dialogues, and forums about the 'future of the museum' that loop back upon themselves to infinity" are, for them, bound to fail to transform, ultimately supporting the continuity of the institution more than any change. What Strike MoMA demands is a "spokescouncil of stakeholders" independent of MoMA's authority:

...entrusted with documenting the harmful history of MoMA and its ongoing legacies, and making recommendations about the ways and means of disassembling the museum in light of that history. These could include but are not limited to: the collecting and sharing of testimonies, archival investigation and forensic accounting; determining the mechanics of divestment and transfer of assets, the redistribution of properties and the repurposing of infrastructure; establishing funds for reparations, rematriations, and Indigenous land restoration; sustained support for just transition of workers to cooperative self-management.¹⁵

The ultimate goal is not museum recognition, according to the DEi complex, but rather the formation of a public platform for the deliberation and collective consideration of a future beyond the museum as it currently exists within the coordinates of racial and colonial capitalism.¹⁶ Most importantly, the iIAAF demands that this spokescouncil of stakeholders be empowered to realize that future. That no such allowance is forthcoming means that the Strike MoMA struggle will continue into the indefinite future.

Future forecasts

Struggles like Strike MoMA's confront the entanglement of cultural institutions and histories of colonial genocide and transatlantic slavery going back 500 years, where environmental violence (the destruction of ecosystems, land grabs, forced agricultural transformations, deforestation, and the spread of toxicity) have accompanied social and political violence (military intervention, forced labor, the imposition of heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity, oppressive

12 See <https://www.strikemoma.org/>.

13 See <https://www.strikemoma.org/>.

14 iIAAF, *Strike MoMA: Framework and Terms for Struggle*, <https://www.strikemoma.org/>.

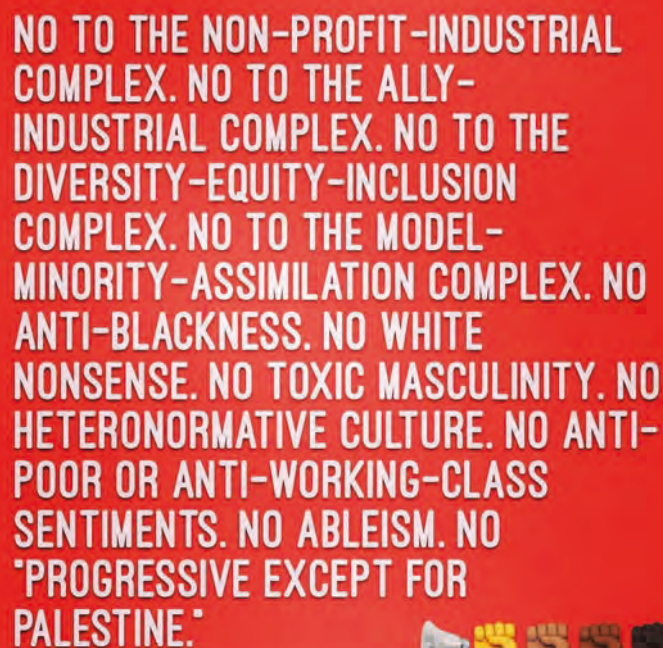
15 iIAAF, *Strike MoMA: Framework and Terms for Struggle*, March 11, 2021.

16 See, for instance, the multi-authored *Strike MoMA Reader*, 2021, <https://www.strikemoma.org/reader>.

trade agreements, structural adjustments, austerity and indebtedness, endless war, and so on).¹⁷ But they also confront a dark future. With the continuation of climate breakdown comes expanding social conflict and more anticipated climate migration. 2015 witnessed a massive crisis of demographic shift, with approximately one million migrants making their way to Europe, many others dying on the way, a situation that unfolded within a context of growing neoliberal inequality, the breakdown of agricultural systems and sustainable economies, worsening social divisions, and racist xenophobia amplified by social media algorithms, populist politicians, and reactionary media.

But that recent history pales in comparison to the shifts predicted for coming decades. The UN forecasts as many as one billion climate migrants worldwide by 2050, owing to environmental transformation's worsening impacts on food systems, with more extreme weather events, habitat-destroying rising seas, and global heating, all driving consequent geopolitical destabilization.¹⁸ In confronting the present climate emergency outlook, it's imperative to address this interlocking existential threat of climate and socio-environmental breakdown, including by asking how cultural institutions can play a productive role in the structural transformation of our economies and political systems, beginning with the imagining of sustainable life beyond fossil capital. For many, this epistemic shift can only be enacted by transcending capital's laws of motion, which prioritize economic growth above all else, leading to precisely the kind of authoritarian security state and extractive apparatus that Strike MoMA condemns. Climate emergency, including its accompanying reactionary politics, is not only a local threat, but an urgent global concern, as we know from the situations in Brazil, the Philippines, Hungary, Israel/Palestine, India, and indeed the US. As so many Indigenous peoples argue, along with social- and economic-justice based social movements such as Black Lives Matter, the challenge for those opposed to fossil capital self-destruction is to reinvent the very conditions of existence, living together in diversity and sustainably with our more-than-human world, before it's too late. To reach that goal, we must overcome the liberal politics of recognition.

NO TO THE NON-PROFIT-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. NO TO THE ALLY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. NO TO THE DIVERSITY-EQUITY-INCLUSION COMPLEX. NO TO THE MODEL-MINORITY-ASSIMILATION COMPLEX. NO ANTI-BLACKNESS. NO WHITE NONSENSE. NO TOXIC MASCULINITY. NO HETERONORMATIVE CULTURE. NO ANTI-POOR OR ANTI-WORKING-CLASS SENTIMENTS. NO ABLEISM. NO "PROGRESSIVE EXCEPT FOR PALESTINE."



Decolonize This Place, Strike MoMA Instagram post, 2021

STRIKE MoMA WORKING GROUP of IIAAF PRESENTS

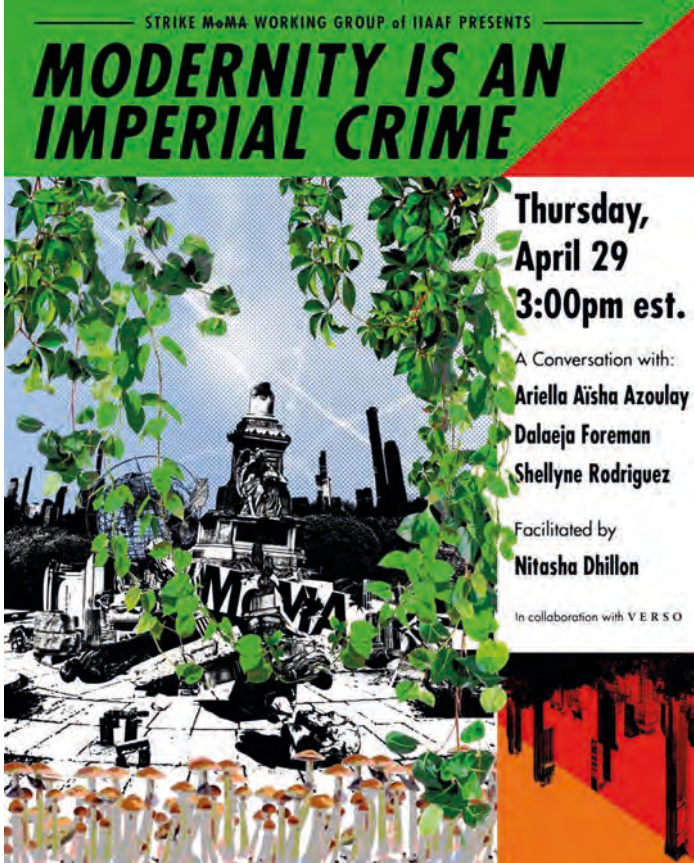
MODERNITY IS AN IMPERIAL CRIME

Thursday, April 29
3:00pm est.

A Conversation with:
Ariella Aisha Azoulay
Dalaeja Foreman
Shellyne Rodriguez

Facilitated by
Nitasha Dhillon

In collaboration with V E R S O



Poster of *The Modernity is an Imperial Crime*: Research Working Group. Week 3, Strike MoMA.

17 This is something I've taken up with the MAAT Climate Collective, convened during 2021 to address just this intersection in relation to the arts, and attempting to advance a politics of emancipatory emergency beyond climate emergency. See <https://ext.maat.pt/bulletin/climate-emergency-emergence>.

18 Francesco Bassetti, "Environmental Migrants: Up to 1 Billion by 2050," *Foresight*, May 22, 2019, <https://www.climateforesight.eu/migrations-inequalities/environmental-migrants-up-to-1-billion-by-2050/>.

The limits of liberal recognition

When it comes to climate emergency, we must ask, whose emergency is it? Are we facing a near-future catastrophe of atmospheric pollution, as the IPCC and environmentalists warn, according to which it's vital to decarbonize our economies in the next ten years, even transition away from capitalism as the dominant system of economic organization, as ecosocialists recommend? Or is it really a longstanding emergency of 500 years of colonial dispossession, environmental destruction, genocide and ecocide, that we must confront, as many Indigenous peoples argue? Or is it a related emergency of racial capitalism beginning hundreds of years ago with the enslavement of African and Afrodiasporic peoples, which continues in the afterlives of slavery when it comes to racist police brutality and the prison industrial complex (particularly in the US)? Surely it is some combination of all of these, the challenge being to connect these different emergencies, thinking them together, where environmental action and new technologies must necessarily combine with struggles for social justice, material equity, and pluralist democracy for all.

In relation to these questions, one key question is: who can speak and for whom, whose voice matters and gets recognized, whose history is suppressed, and whose remembered?

Considering the settler-colonial history and present of Canada, and particularly past struggles for Indigenous recognition, the Indigenous writer Glen Coulthard, in his book *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014), argues that "the politics of recognition in its contemporary liberal form promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples' demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend."¹⁹ It's a claim that resonates with the terms of *Strike MoMA* and their critique of the DEI complex. Recognition, in other words, may be part of the very structure of late liberal domination, reproducing the settler-colonial relationship, which Coulthard defines as follows: "[a] settler-colonial relationship is one characterized by a particular form of *domination*; that is, it is a relationship where power—in this case, interrelated

discursive and nondiscursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power—has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the *dispossession* of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority."²⁰

Can that relationship of domination be transposed onto the museum—whether anthropological, natural history, or arts and cultural—within the history of modernity? For the historian Ariella Aïsha Azoulay it can, once we begin with the analysis that modernity itself is an "imperial crime," as she argues, premised on all sorts of collusion with the theft of people and cultural property, the occupation of unceded Indigenous lands, the hierarchical logics of visibility and decontextualization, the domination of historical narration, and the social relations of capitalist inequality.²¹ It's a complex logic that extends in differentiated manner to all institutions, including art museums, during modernity's unfolding.

While it's important to resist the potentially reductive act of situating all museums—including nonprofits, public, private, vernacular, regional, big and small—within this overarching ideological function—and indeed some institutions are actively attempting to reverse colonial operations—the lesson of Coulthard is that, within the dominant political arrangements of late liberal capitalism, the institutional practice of cultural recognition inevitably ends up reproducing inequality.²² What's required, instead, is what Coulthard calls "a *resurgent politics of recognition* premised on self-actualization, direct action, and the resurgence of cultural practices that are attentive to the subjective and structural composition of settler-colonial power."²³

There's an important lesson here for museums in the age of late liberal capital and its hierarchical relations, according to which recourse to the DEI complex risks reproducing the very inequality it seeks to address in the first place. In this regard, DEI continues the liberal politics of multiculturalism, set in place during the 1990s, which has been roundly criticized for its "culturalization of politics"—when political differences and economic inequality are transformed into, and denuded as, cultural differences and ways of life.²⁴ Indeed, multiculturalism has

19 Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014, p. 3.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

21 See Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, "Modernity is an Imperial Crime," *Strike MoMA* program, April 23, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYZloRVKlv4>.

22 As the philosopher Nancy Fraser argues similarly, "recognition struggles are serving less to supplement, complicate and enrich redistribution struggles than to marginalize, eclipse and displace them." Cited in Coulthard, p. 19.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

24 Slavoj Žižek, "Tolerance as an Ideological Category," *Critical Inquiry* 34/4 (2008), p. 660.

offered patronizing liberal tolerance in the place of structural change, according to Wendy Brown, resulting in “diversity work” that Sara Ahmed criticizes as superficial image politics and marketing’s management of diversity that deflate the claims of material equity.²⁵ The result, according to Slavoj Žižek’s 1997 analysis, is that “multiculturalism is a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a ‘racism with a distance’—it ‘respects’ the Other’s identity” but “leave[s] the basic homogeneity of the capitalist world-system intact.”²⁶ DEI offers much the same thing: a further institutionalization of multiculturalism that continues its liberal deficiency—to leave structures of power in place.

It’s therefore not surprising that for growing numbers of protesters and worker movements, the shortcomings of DEI are increasingly under attack. Turning to the South African context, it isn’t enough, according to student activists, to tear down the Apartheid-era monuments that reproduce the cultural symbolism of racial hierarchy, and it’s inadequate for institutions to simply recognize social diversity. Rather, for decolonization to be worthy of the name, student movements demand the connecting of “Rhodes Must Fall” to “Fees Must Fall.” Symbolic recognition is meaningless, in other words, without real material redistribution and the actual empowerment of the historically disenfranchised.²⁷ No doubt this demand is also abetted by recent worker organization and labor militancy, and it’s also not surprising that the last few years have seen a surge in unionization, particularly in the US, including in the museum sector, where workers have fought for better pay and working conditions, heading off the threat of layoffs, and obtaining better COVID safety protocol.²⁸ Without these efforts at structural change, we face the continuation of diversity’s “respectability politics” founded upon “a disciplinary culture based upon the often-troubling rhetorics, procedures, and representational regimes of tolerance,” according to critic Derek Conrad Murray.²⁹

Epistemic Deference

A further risk to the politics of recognition, as it plays out in the decision-making rooms of liberal institutions, is the practice of what philosopher Olúfemi Táíwò calls “epistemic deference.” This refers to the tendency within prevailing cultural norms of foregrounding the practice of “listening to the most affected” or “centering the most marginalized.”³⁰ It happens in board rooms, consulting offices, activist and museum spaces, university seminars, and educational forums, all trying to make meaningful progress toward diversity and inclusion, but getting hung up on process, especially when centering the most disenfranchised and historically excluded. For Táíwò, it emerges, whether formally or inadvertently, from what’s called “standpoint epistemology,” a methodology of discussion dedicated to the principles that: (1) knowledge is socially situated; (2) marginalized people possess analytical advantage owing to experiential disadvantage; and (3) research programs and programming ought to reflect these facts.

Yet even while often well-meaning in intent, the outcome of this approach may lead to problems of reproducing inequality, specifically when practices of epistemic deference actually work *against* the interests of marginalized groups, and they do so in two ways, according to Táíwò. The first is “elite capture,” or “being-in-the-room privilege,” when privileged representatives of disenfranchised groups are granted exceptional visibility and voice, but often within the terms of institutional management, which establish “control over political agendas and resources [aided] by a group’s most advantaged people.”³¹ That may lead, further, to the breakdown of collective solidarity owing to the institutional support of tokenized elites. The corresponding second risk is “deference epistemology,” when those in the room coming from historically privileged backgrounds willingly grant unconditional legitimacy to the historically excluded, potentially leading to their own

25 Wendy Brown, “Tolerance as a Discourse of Power,” in *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 29; and Sara Ahmed, “Institutional Life,” in *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), p. 34. For further discussion of these references in relation to US discussions of Blackness, see Derek Conrad Murray, “The Blackest Blackness: Slavery and the Satire of Kara Walker,” in *Slavery and the Post-Black Imagination*, ed. Bertram D. Ashe and Ilka Saal (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), pp. 21-42.

26 Slavoj Žižek, “Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 225 (September/October 1997), pp. 44 and 46.

27 Nicholas Mirzoeff, “All the Monuments Must Fall #Charlottesville,” *The Funambulist*, August 31, 2021: “When statues fall, it opens the way to rethinking the material infrastructures of racial hierarchy, as we saw in South Africa. Rhodes Must Fall became Fees Must Fall became Decolonize.”

28 Tyler Walicek, “A Unionization Wave Is Reshaping Museums and Cultural Institutions Across the US,” *Truthout*, November 27, 2021, <https://truthout.org/articles/a-unionization-wave-is-reshaping-museums-and-cultural-institutions-across-the-us/>.

29 Murray, “The Blackest Blackness,” p. 40.

30 Olúfemi O. Táíwò, “Being-in-the-Room Privilege: Elite Capture and Epistemic Deference,” *The Philosopher*, vol. 108, no. 4, <https://www.thedigradio.com/podcast/identity-power-and-speech-with-olufemi-taiwo/>.

31 *Ibid.*

“abdication of responsibility” in stepping back from discussion, inviting what Táíwò terms a form of “moral cowardice” that is ultimately acritical, falsely neutral, and apolitical. Often this occurs with identity politics, which reproduces modes of essentialism in appearance, and displaces the possibility of meaningful multiracial coalitional politics, of sharing real stakes across social divisions, and of recognizing divisiveness as an instrument of domination.³²

To overcome these forms of practice requires a solidarity that can’t be defined by, or found in, identity, as it’s clear that liberal identity politics reinforces ruling class interests in dividing us on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and so on. Liberal identity politics drives essentialism and separatism, just as white supremacy produces a false semblance of racial belonging that obscures class antagonisms, ultimately supporting elite interests, and rendering coalitional and multiracial work impossible.

In place of the deference epistemology of liberal institutional recognition politics, Táíwò recommends a “constructive approach.” Rather than celebrating oppression or recognizing suffering as an end in itself, he asks: how can we participate in building new institutions *together* that share resources, responsibility, and work toward a collective democratic, emancipatory, and decolonial goals?

Reparative Futures

We can try to address this question further by considering current demands for reparation. In order to make amends with historical injustice and oppression, there’s a growing reparations movement, which depends on, and begins with, a politics of recognition the aims of which move beyond its liberal limits. Reparations entails, first of all, recognizing historical violence, making it visible in the public realm, and moving toward modes of compensation or reparation in response, which operates across a spectrum of grievances.

For instance, within the museum sphere, if collections have historically been formed through colonial theft, justified by imperial hierarchies of value, capitalist property claims, and their associated narratives of recognition as practiced in archiving and exhibition—all premised on the denial of sovereignty

and self-determination to the colonized and dispossessed—then recognition must make those histories visible. It must connect them to reparations as a mode of return, of deaccessioning and material redistribution, of the cultural repatriation or rematriation of historically stolen objects.

Similarly, there’s the reparative politics of recognition in relation to the historically enslaved and those whose ancestors suffered genocide and dispossession more broadly. In this case, recognition must be trans-generational, offering monetary recompense, in the form of a debt owed to the victimized and oppressed, even if that debt is ultimately unpayable, because of the injustice’s magnitude, unmeasurable, and trans-temporal character. Still others speak of climate reparations, where a debt of repair is owed to communities that have suffered or will suffer the worse impacts of environmental breakdown, despite their being among the historically least responsible for causing climate change in the first place. Recognizing the validity and ethical imperative of climate debt is a first step toward enacting climate reparations.

In all these cases, even where recognition is joined to reparation, the risk remains of simply offering financial recompense to the claimants of injustice without addressing causes that are still ongoing. That too, as we’ve seen, is the danger of the neoliberal politics of recognition, situated within the terms of continuing racial and colonial capital: *to recognize, even compensate, but do nothing more*, keeping the institutions and conventions of inequality intact. Reparative futurity begins with an altogether different modality, where the politics of recognition is dedicated to distributive justice, ending the causes of oppression and inequality, and building new worlds together.

Pursuing that goal, according to Táíwò, means surpassing “harm-based repair,” where “the welfare of affected parties is typically treated as the broken thing to be fixed by successfully petitioning for reparations”; and it means going beyond “relationship repair,” where “the relationship between parties [is] the primary locus of importance.”³³ Both are inadequate, as Táíwò notes, because they quantify harm and monetize repair, raising problems of calculation based on the absence of counterfactuals—how to assess,

32 c.f.: As Nick Estes explains relatedly in terms of what he calls “trauma politics,” which cede space and visibility to those on the basis of traumatic experience: “The cunning of trauma politics is that it turns actual people and struggles, whether racial or Indigenous citizenship and belonging, into matters of injury. It defines an entire people mostly on their trauma and not by their aspirations or sheer humanity.” Cited in Táíwò, *op. cit.* For further critique of how the focus on “privilege,” as a “decoy radicalism” of liberal identity politics, tends to occlude class conflict at the heart of capitalist social relations, see Christian Parenti, “The First Privilege Walk,” *Nonsite.org*, November 18, 2021, https://nonsite.org/the-first-privilege-walk/#foot_src_5-14960.

33 Olufémi O. Táíwò, “Reconsidering Reparations: The Movement for Black Lives and Self-Determination,” p. 3 (manuscript).

in financial terms, what was lost, when no such reality *without* loss exists to which it could be compared? More, harm-based repair potentially perpetuates the oppressed as oppressed, insofar as recognition reifies their identities as such; and relationship-based repair often ends up as mere communicative strategy, a matter of symbolic rhetoric, that fails to commit to real redistributive justice.

The problem may be *chronopolitical* as well. Instead of only looking backwards and attempting to compensate for past harms, a third option is akin to Táíwò's constructive view, meaning looking ahead and asking what kind of world we want to live in, how can we construct that future, and inaugurate a future of justice based on real material equity, democracy and inclusion (building that "we" through the inclusive discussion of these questions and the work toward answering them together)?³⁴

Move beyond "illusory equality" and "empty gestures"³⁵ that hinder recognition policies, what kind of alternate practices, programming, and events can put into motion meaningful and long-term collaborations, equitable inclusion, and real diverse collectivizations with transformative power? If intolerance "attracts, condenses, and electrifies a diverse set of social and economic anxieties produced by increasing economic precarity under neoliberal regimes, intensifying social inequality, and pandemic shutdown," as Judith Butler reminds us, we must ask in turn: how can museums become platforms that recognize these conditions and their historical roots, and work to transform them?

When it comes to illiberal environments, how might a politics of recognition, practiced in relation to museum organization, bring greater visibility to the historical *causes* of de-democratization, economic inequality, and authoritarian populism, not just *recognize* their victims? And how to do so in ways that can join forces with social movements beyond institutional walls, in order to collectively build a future of social justice? These questions identify the urgency in considering how museums—as sites of publicness, cultural heritage, class hierarchies, public-private antagonisms, and social difference—can participate in social transformation. There is obviously no simple or easy answers, still less any proposals that could apply to diverse contexts. But at the very least we can avoid some of the obvious dangers before we continue the conversation.

34 See Olufémi O. Táíwò, "On Climate Colonialism and Reparations," *For the Wild* podcast, January 2021, <https://forthewild.world/listen/olufemi-o-taiwo-on-climate-colonialism-and-reparations-216>.

35 Grete Swensen & Torgrim Sneve Guttormsen, "Illusionary equality? Museum politics, practice and immigrant heritage," *Museum Management and Curatorship*, v. 35, issue 1, July 17, 2019, pp. 15–35; and Laurajane Smith, "Empty Gestures? Heritage and the Politics of Recognition," in *Cultural Heritage and Human Rights*, H. Silverman and D.F. Ruggles (eds.). Springer, 2007, pp. 159–171.

PERSPECTIVE 4

HILKE WAGNER

Director of Albertinum, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Dresden, Germany

Biography — From November 2014, Director of the Albertinum, Museum of Art from Romanticism to the Present, State Art Collections Dresden. Exhibitions: Rosa Barba, Taryn Simon, Nevin Aladag, Tino Sehgal; Slavs & Tatars; Kandinsky, Lissitzky, Mondrian, and the abstract constructive avant-garde in Dresden 1919 to 1932; Demonstrationsräume. Artistic exploration of space and display in the Albertinum, Celine Condorelli, Kapwani Kiwanga, Judy Radul, Heimo Zobernig; *The Medea Insurrection. Radical woman artists behind the Iron Curtain*; A.R. Penck. *Ich aber komme aus Dresden. (check it out man, check it out) Ernst Barlach. A retrospective; 1 Million Roses for Angela Davis i.a. 2007–2014* Director of the Kunstverein Braunschweig e.V. Curated exhibitions: Javier Téllez, Clemens von Wedemeyer, Rosa Barba, Maria Loboda, Marcel Dzama, Eva Kotátkova, Peter Piller, Pamela Rosenkranz, Natalie Czech, Simon Fujiwara, David Zink Yi, Matti Braun, Susanne Kriemann, Sofia Hultén, Dirk Bell, Cheyney Thompson, Marine Hugonnier, and others. 2006–2007 Head of Situation Kunst (for Max Imdahl), part of the art collections of the Ruhr Universität Bochum. 2003–2006 Curator of the Kestner Gesellschaft, Hanover Curated exhibitions: Thomas Hirschhorn, Sarah Morris, Santiago Sierra, Chris Ofili, Peter Doig and others.

THE DRESDEN “BILDERSTREIT.” A (SUBJECTIVE) CASE STUDY FROM (EAST) GERMANY

It was at the end of 2017 when, with unexpected emotional force, the decades-long “Bilderstreit” (art controversy) erupted once again in Dresden. The debate was about much more than the presence of art from the GDR in Dresden’s Albertinum. Almost 30 years after the fall of the Wall—which had not simply “fallen down”²—the pent-up experience of disillusionment and humiliation, or of a simple lack

of interest in the East, explosively vented itself. The local AfD (the party calling itself the “Alternative for Germany”) quickly sought to exploit and twist the issue for its own populist agenda.³

I arrived in Dresden, Saxony, Germany in November 2014 to run the Albertinum museum, a prestigious collection of Romantic to Contemporary Art, and part of the Dresden State Art Collections. A month before my arrival, an anti-Islam protest movement, *Pegida* (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident), appeared on Dresden’s streets, “rapidly swelling in size and extremism, morphing from a crowd of beige-coated frustrated pensioners into a mass of young, black-clad Identitarians, as at the same time the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party lurched from opposing the euro towards a flagrant ethno-religious nationalism,” as Eliza Apperly described the situation in *The Guardian*.⁴ Now, some years later, with around 25% the AfD is

1 “iconoclastic controversy” or “art controversy.”

2 On this subject, see: Thomas Oberender, “Die Mauer ist nicht gefallen,” *DIE ZEIT*, No. 40/2017, September 27, 2017.

3 This was analyzed in an article by Eliza Apperly in *The Guardian*: Eliza, Apperly, “How to fight the far right. Invite them in. The German Museum taking on hate,” *The Guardian*, January 7, 2020 and in the online version of the newspaper <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/jan/07/how-to-fight-the-far-right-invite-them-in-the-german-museum-taking-on-hate>. In 2019 the topic was included in the AfD’s manifesto for the local elections under the heading “Culture and Identity”: <https://afd-dd.de/kommunalwahlprogramm-dresden-2019/>

4 Eliza Apperly (2020), *loc. cit.*



Hilke Wagner

the strongest party in most parts of Eastern Germany.⁵

On my appointment, I set out to energize Dresden's contemporary arts scene and to insist on the pluralist learnings of the Albertinum's collections. I wanted to make it clear that our own culture is the result of a cultural mix. "But outside the Albertinum's sandstone walls, the ascendant far right had very different ideas. Keenly focused on the arts and their effect on society, the AfD railed against any multicultural programming in favor of a predominant German culture," as Eliza Apperly continues in her above cited article. "In Dresden in particular, the party committed



The Albertinum (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden)

itself to the preservation of classical German art, objecting to 'marginal, minority-oriented' projects."

In September 2017, the culture war turned personal. The trigger was an opinion piece in the regional newspaper, criticizing me, who grew up in West Germany, for my treatment of East German art. The author stated that the "unloved art from the GDR era" had been "disposed of in the storerooms" of the Albertinum "with a colonial gesture."⁶ It is—of course—important to stress, that the article raised important and overdue questions: "Over three decades after Germany's reunification, more than 90% of the country's leadership positions are held by individuals who grew up in the former West Germany."⁷ I was nevertheless startled how swiftly and viciously the far right used the discussion. Only two days after the article was published, the local AfD quickly sought to exploit the issue for its own populist agenda. A local AfD politician in the Saxon *Landtag* filed a parliamentary request demanding information surrounding my appointment and my intentions to expand the museum's contemporary program as well as a list of the East and West German paintings

5 The AfD (Alternative for Germany) is monitored by the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution due to signs of strong right-wing convictions, especially their biological-racist or ethnic-cultural definition of "the German people." Certain radical wings of the party are mainly comprised of former neo-nationalists. A major strategy of the party consists in casting its supporters as martyrs fighting for Germans who feel confused and left behind in this increasingly multicultural society.

6 c.f. Paul Kaiser, "Wende an den Wänden," *Sächsische Zeitung*, 9.18.2017. This was a shortened and updated version of an essay the author had written a few years earlier and was not a new argument, as this controversy continued to get rekindled over the last decades, mostly on the occasion of overview exhibitions of "German art," which are accused of failing to equally present art from the GDR. "In crucial contrast to these past controversies, the current debate takes place in a completely changed political landscape. Today, there is an official and outspoken right-wing political party, which forms the majority-opposition in the German parliament. (...) For them, a debate like the one around the lack of art from the GDR in the Albertinum—which is perceived by a general audience ultimately as an argument about the value of cultural production from the GDR and thus an East-German identification with this culture—can perfectly be used to strengthen the party's argumentation of victimhood in the current political system, and can serve their presentation of themselves as the only possibility to protest, revolt, and reclaim a cultural heritage. The ongoing "Bilderstreit" in this new political climate is thus central to an understanding of past and present-day Germany, because it is an attempt to publicly renegotiate all of the uneasiness and the continuing rupture caused by the reunification. It is employed as a substitute discourse through art, where the artworks representing GDR history, culture, and identification function as symbols for how a complete declassification and re-evaluation of actual lives lived took place from the outside and from above after the peaceful revolution." See Reinhardt, Kathleen (2019), *op. cit.*

7 Eliza Apperly (2020), *loc. cit.*

currently on display in the Albertinum. The count revealed that at that time a total of 77 works produced in East Germany between 1949 and 1989 were on display in the Albertinum. (By comparison: there were 24 items of “West German art” from the same period, including Dresden artists who had migrated to West Germany, such as A.R. Penck, Gerhard Richter, etc., and 46 works dating from after 1989).

“At that time the Albertinum showed an extended version of the Goethe-Institute exhibition *Genial Dilletantes. Subculture in East and West Germany in the 1980s*, highlighting the East German alternative music and art scene. (Extension cur. by Christoph Tannert and Mathias Wagner). In 2017, the Albertinum also presented Dresden concrete art master Karl-Heinz Adler, whose geometric work didn’t fit the official GDR art doctrine of figurative work, and who consequently worked in architecture. The aim was to make visible a vivid art scene in the GDR that developed parallel to an official one, thereby contributing to an art history of synchronicities and entanglements.”⁸

Nevertheless, people were understandably incensed by these assertions, which triggered old resentments and rekindled negative experiences, so that this perceived “truth” quickly proliferated—and there was nothing to be done against it. This was followed by a flood of hate mail and phone calls, at best demanding my immediate dismissal, and a back-and-forth in the local and national *feuilletons*, creating a climate of hardened fronts. People started recognizing and confronting me in the streets. One evening deeply hurt by the tone of the most recent letter I received, out of anger I picked up the phone and called one of the senders whose phone number I had managed to track down. But then—surprise—it turned out to be a really positive conversation! We listened to each other, and while we did not always reach a point of agreement, the indignation on both sides gradually subsided. Encouraged—indeed elated—by this experience, I continued: One after the other (incidentally, they were all male and over 60, some of them not having been in our museum for decades), I called up each individual who had



First Podium Discussion “Wir müssen reden. Bilderstreit mit Blickkontakt,” at the Albertinum, November 6, 2017 with 600 participants. © SKD, Photo: David Pinzer

targeted me with hate mail and that I had managed to track down, and had (almost) exclusively good experiences. People were surprised that I had got in touch. They talked, and listened. I understood some of the grievances better. (Of course, I do not believe that all those who contacted me were far right sympathizers. But I have to recognize the uneasy proximity between the assertion of local cultural heritage and the AfD agenda. Clearly, the AfD grabbed this as a populist theme, trying to deepen the divide between East and West Germans, to destabilize society and to keep institutions intimidated and busy with permanent “parliamentary requests.”)

If mutual listening, direct dialogue on a small scale, i.e., one-to-one, was capable of breaking a spiral of hurt and anger that could only lead to increased polarization, then the same should also be possible on a larger scale. Hence, the challenge was now to see the situation as an opportunity and to explore the matter in more depth.

So, in November 2017, we organized a first public discussion under the title “We Need to Talk” (“*Wir müssen reden. Bilderstreit mit Blickkontakt*”⁹) in the Albertinum. The title was intended to express a sense of urgency—and it did indeed feel like a relationship crisis between East and West, museum and local public. More than 600 guests took up the

8 See Reinhardt, Kathleen (2019), *op. cit.*: “But alternative underground art and abstraction was decidedly not the art from the GDR that the local museum audience sought for comfort and consolidation. This tapped back into the core of this ongoing art historical back-and-forth, where the issues of official and dissident art, of figuration and abstraction, and what is considered conformist and not is a grey zone, with the artists themselves rightly denying categorization.” The postwar collection presentation of the museum, which consists mainly of European art from 1800 to the present, occupies a very limited space. The museum works with art made in the GDR inclusively, by not marking these works as artworks made during the time of the GDR, but—in line with the aestheticized presentation principle of the museum—rather looking for aesthetic and formal points of connection to artworks with a West German or international background.

9 “We need to talk. Iconclastic Controversy with Eye Contact.”



First Podium Discussion “Wir müssen reden. Bilderstreit mit Blickkontakt,” at the Albertinum, November 6, 2017 with 600 participants. © SKD, Photo: David Pinzer



Caption: First Podium Discussion “Wir müssen reden. Bilderstreit mit Blickkontakt,” at the Albertinum, November 6, 2017 with 600 participants. © SKD, Photo: David Pinzer

invitation and participated in a discussion with representatives from all kind of fields of culture and politics.¹⁰

Beforehand, however, it was necessary to devise a suitable format, as it would not be appropriate to conduct these discussions only among a panel of experts, over the heads of the audience. But how might it be possible to facilitate dialogue on an equal footing, with the emphasis being on listening to each other? Assistance with finding a suitable format was provided by the GDR civil rights activist and former director of the Saxon State Agency for Civic Education (*Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung*), Frank Richter, and the artistic director of the Berlin Festspiele, Thomas Oberender. In the end, it was decided to have the guests, who came from a wide variety of fields and of course included the author of the mentioned article, seated on a long panel at ground level in the atrium, with the audience seated in a circle around them. The topics were submitted by the audience alone. The event, for which it was decided not to set a time limit (it ended up lasting more than three hours) was moderated by a radio journalist. He laid down clear rules of etiquette at the beginning and engaged with the audience in a spirit of empathy and humor, thus helping ensure that the event proceeded in a constructive way—even though it was palpably clear that this first event could initially

be little more than an outlet for pent-up anger and could only touch on issues that would subsequently have to be taken up and discussed in more detail in what ended up as 24 follow-up events.¹¹ These follow-up events were initially turbulent: We had shouting, door slamming, a lot of arguments and accusations. Our curator for Contemporary Art, Kathleen Reinhardt aptly described the atmosphere in *Mezosfera*: “Notably, during the public events, former officials of the powerful Artists’ Guild of the GDR, members of the extensive unofficial informant network of the GDR’s secret service (the “Stasi”), and artists who were persecuted and incarcerated shared the same room. For these unofficial artists, this gave rise to extremely emotional moments, especially because the whole debate, its tone and argument—mainly driven by these conservative voices—was (again) solely interested in the inclusion of a certain official art of the GDR into the museum’s canon.”¹²

But it did develop in a positive direction. We had participants from across the social and political spectrum, with a range of attitudes. And we learned a lot from each other.

As already became clear in this first even, it was ultimately a dispute between East and West, in which repressed, unresolved traumas and frustrations experienced during the post-reunification period were

10 Among the guests were: Susanne Altmann (art historian, freelance curator and writer, Dresden), Matthias Flügge (Rector, Hochschule für Bildende Künste Dresden), Else Gabriel (artist, Berlin), Paul Kaiser (cultural studies and art scholar, Dresden Institute of Cultural Studies), Thomas Oberender (artistic director of the Berlin Festspiele), Dr. Gisbert Porstmann (Director of the Dresden City Museums), Prof. Dr. Karl-Siegbert Rehberg (sociologist, TU Dresden), Dr. Eva-Maria Stange (State Minister for Science and the Arts), and Christine Schlegel (artist, Dresden).

11 The documentation of this event and all talks and programming that followed can be watched online at <https://albertinum.skd.museum/en/programm/wir-muessen-reden/archiv-wir-muessen-reden/>. Parallel to the exhibition *Focus Albertinum: Ostdeutsche Malerei und Skulptur 1949–1990*, the Albertinum organized a dense program of artists talks and scholarly presentations on various topics of GDR art, and continued the public discussions about different topics of art made in the GDR, its visual culture, and the society these works existed in. Experts from East and West were invited to present on a wide range of topics—from art education in East and West Germany, to a general introduction to Socialist Realism, to female performance art, and Mail Art in the GDR.

12 Reinhardt, Kathleen (2019), *op.cit.* “When the secret police archives of the GDR were opened in the 1990s and people could gain access to their files, which contained detailed descriptions of their lives and contacts, the identities of their informants were also revealed to them. This was often highly traumatizing.”

articulated¹³; it was a dispute between the generations, even between the sexes, yet ultimately it was also a dispute about conceptions of art and the expectation of “respect,” even “humility” in the face of an established canon that was perceived as untouchable.

After this initial event, the museum staged an exhibition of its collection of art from the GDR. This cross-section through the holdings of East German painting and sculpture provided an insight not only into the collections but also into the various changes in acquisitions policy during and after the GDR period.¹⁴ The scheme selected for this exhibition, with the works being presented chronologically according to the year of purchase, reflected not only the changes in acquisitions policy during GDR times but also invites critical scrutiny of the power of museums to establish a canon, from the time when museums were first founded down to the present day. It made clear that a canon is always formed as a result of purchasing decisions and must be regarded as a reflection of its time and hence as temporary. And so at the end of the exhibition there are a number of proposed acquisitions, for the aim is still to close gaps in the collection of “Art in the GDR.” What the exhibition also aimed to show was the gaps that remained in the collection due to the official collecting policy and the failure in the 1990s and early 2000s to look at alternative art from the GDR to complement its collection. “As an official museum of the GDR, the Albertinum’s collection is devoid of art that functioned outside of the official artworld of the GDR, art that created its own structures. This is the type of art that the museum’s special exhibition program of the past years has focused on, with a view toward expanding the understanding of art made in the GDR and introducing largely unknown practices to a wider audience. This



Walter Womacka, *At the Beach*, 1962. Oil on canvas, 94 x 113 cm. Loan from the Federal Republic of Germany in the Albertinum | Galerie Neue Meister © Photo: Albertinum | GNM, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Elke Estel © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

art was not widely known, as it could not be officially exhibited, and was produced and existed in underground networks, where many of the artists were spied on and suffered repression and prison sentences, resulting in the ultimate flight of many from the GDR.”¹⁵

But the messages we received made clear that the writers were seeking old and familiar art from the GDR in the permanent exhibition and were indeed looking for an affirmation of the values of their lives in the GDR in an increasingly confusing world. What is interesting about the result of a visitor survey carried out in 2018 is that places 1 and 2 in the list of works people miss seeing in the permanent exhibition were occupied by popular pictures that were

13 “In his 2017 Reunification Day article in the German weekly *Die Zeit* (40/2017), Berliner Festspiele director Thomas Oberender, himself one of the few East Germans in a position of significant nationwide cultural leadership, described the shortcomings of German reunification and its continuing effects on the East German mindset. “The economic side of these shortcomings is especially visible, leaving a lot of East Germans with ongoing traumas of unemployment, (...) and often multiply interrupted work histories, which today plays out in significantly lower pensions for East Germans, and no inheritances for a younger generation. This fuels feelings of betrayal and injustice. (...) The unfamiliarity with the workings of a capitalist system and the resulting ‘missed chances’ to reorient and profit from the reunification play out today in deep frustration and anger towards West-German capital in the East, and a pervasive East-German fear of further economic downfall. The continuous trend of younger generations leaving the East to seek opportunities in the West has also left many smaller cities ghost towns. Sociologically and psychologically, this has taken a major toll on East Germans, for whom everything changed in 1990, while for West Germans, nothing changed.” See Reinhardt, Kathleen (2019), *op. cit.* where she speaks of “a symbolic debate, standing in for the political shift in Germany over the past two years, which is indeed only the culmination of a radicalization rooted in the silent rage of the past three decades. This shift was articulated most visibly when the AfD party was elected into German parliament in 2017, and voting statistics projected an all too familiar image onto TV and computer screens: the contours of the two Germanys. The AfD had the highest results to the right of a thin line whose importance has often been diminished in the past 30 years—the old threshold between East and West (...)”

14 “In the immediate post-war period works were acquired which took an allegorical approach to dealing with the impact of the war. Soon after the foundation of the GDR, these stylistic tendencies were rejected as ‘formalistic,’ and artists were subsequently obliged to produce works of Socialist Realism. Some of the paintings (...) that entered the collections in the 1960s were created in connection with the ‘Bitterfeld Way,’ a project initiated in 1959 in order to introduce workers to art and eliminate the division between art and daily life. Programmatic images entered the Albertinum when it was decided to establish a department of ‘Socialist Contemporary Art’—the works of art exhibited there were intended to illustrate the concept of Socialist Realism and its role in shaping an ideal society based on Marxist-Leninist principles. From the 1970s onwards, the acquisitions encompassed a broader range of pictorial motifs and painting styles. Landscapes and portraits were one focal point, and scenes of private everyday life were also to be found. Finally, the purchases made in the 1980s illustrate the diversity of styles and standpoints of a young generation of artists whose works ranged from abstraction to vibrantly coloured Neo-Expressionist painting.” *ibid.*

15 Reinhardt, Kathleen (2019), *op. cit.*

reproduced millions of times in the GDR in the form of posters, art prints, postcards, or in school textbooks. The paintings most frequently requested to be shown again were two paintings which played a major part in the visual culture of the GDR and thus tap into a collective memory and (n)ostalgia, as positive and simple everyday images that many people growing up in the GDR associate with their home and childhood: Walter Womacka's *Am Strand*, (1962) (At the Beach) and Harald Hakenbeck's *Peter im Tierpark*, (1960) (Peter in the Zoo).

Through the visitor survey it also became clear that our public wanted to see more paintings depicting the wartime destruction of Dresden. This presented a dilemma: both genres have been leveraged by the AfD to goad a sense of civic victimhood. Our solution was not to deny our visitors' wishes, but to challenge any simplistic victim narrative with additional nuance and context. Paintings depicting Dresden's destruction are now presented alongside international anti-war works by Maria Lassnig and Marlene Dumas. An installation by Wolfgang Tillmans shows the destruction of Dresden alongside that of its twin-town Coventry.

Like many places prone to far-right extremism, Dresden's identity is punctured by experiences of erasure, as Eliza Apperly points out: "Capital of the state of Saxony, the city was once a major economic centre, flush with trade and baroque architecture. In February 1945, 90% of the city centre was destroyed by allied air raids, killing up to 25,000 residents. Then, after a period of architectural and industrial revival under the East German government, reunification saw Dresden lose much of its employment, ownership and young people to the west."¹⁶

Our most important exhibition following (and response to the debate) was a show curated by Susanne Altmann entitled *The Medea Insurrection. Radical Women Artists Behind the Iron Curtain*, which impressively conveyed the resilience, courage, and inventiveness of Eastern European female artists before 1989 and that tried to deflect the patriarchal discourse. In the same year the Albertinum acquired Mario Pfeifer's nine-hour video work *On Fear and Education, Disappointment, and Justice, Protest and Division in Saxony, Germany*. In this 2016 work, Pfeifer shows interview material of various people without any commentary or evaluation. In this way, he confronts the complex realities of life in East Germany immediately before and after the Peaceful Revolution of 1989.



Exhibition view *The Medea Insurrection. Radical Women Artists behind the Iron Curtain* (12.8. 2018 – 3.31. 2019), Albertinum © Albertinum, SKD, Photo: Klemens Renner



Mario Pfeifer, *On Fear and Education, Disappointment, and Justice, Protest and Division in Saxony, Germany*, 2016. © Albertinum, SKD, Photo: Klemens Renner



Caption: Andreas Angelidakis, *Demos*, 2016. Foam and vinyl seating modules, dimensions variable © Photo: Albertinum | GNM, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Elke Estel/Hans-Peter Klut



Artist Talk, "LOVE WILL TEAR US APART | Boris Buden und Thomas Oberender im Gespräch," May 7, 2018 in the Lichthof at the Albertinum. © SKD, Photo: Martin Förster



Caption: Exhibition catalogue *1 Million Roses for Angela Davis*, ed. Albertinum / Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Kathleen Reinhardt and Mousse Publishing, 2020

The nine one-on-one interviews reflect a range of individual forms of political and social engagement and express the irritation and disorientation associated with the ‘Wende’ and the reunification of Germany, which are still felt to this day.¹⁷

Another central acquisition in that year was Andreas Angelidakis’ *Demos* (2016), a modular system of large-format foam blocks, which can be flexibly arranged into forums; it was originally created for Documenta 14 in Athens and references not only the founding steps and public speaking rituals of the cradle of democracy, but also the ruins of neoliberalism with its pixelated mock-concrete appearance. You can stand on the individual modules to speak, or sit on them to listen. Thus, “Demos” can be understood as a platform on which a great diversity of relationships can be negotiated: that between stage and audience, participation and performance, and ultimately democracy and freedom, so that it was the ideal basis for what followed: a long process of mutual listening and learning, with large number of events and a mutual coming together in empathy.

Then there are attempts to widen the field, to experiment with art from the GDR and their continuation, and to connect them to a global art history or other art historical narratives in new ways, as Kathleen Reinhardt did with the show *For Ruth, the Sky in Los Angeles. Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt and David Horvitz* at the Albertinum in 2018 or 2020 with *1 Million Roses for Angela Davis*.¹⁸ For 2023, she is preparing a thematic show under the title *Revolutionary Romances*, emphasizing East Germany’s inclusive ideals and exploring its allegiances with the so called “global south,” e.g., Mozambique, Cuba, or Vietnam.

What remains—today, years after this of course also painful and confusing experience—is the motivating certainty that museums are not mausoleums, but that debates about what moves our society at its core can and must be conducted here, and that breaking the spiral of hurt and anger can succeed

in the microcosm that is the museum. It is worth fighting for each and every individual to bring him or her back to the middle of society. We must acknowledge that the Cold War, our collective conditioning, and the accompanying resentments, still have an effect on us, whether we like it or not. Likewise, we have to appreciate that even after 30 years of reunification, prejudices held by each side about the other are still very much alive.

It is disheartening to realize that West Germans’ lack of interest in East German culture remains widespread—hand on heart, dear West German readers, what do you know about subcultures in the GDR, about jazz, punk, experimental film, fashion and design, composers and authors behind the Wall? It is time that we learn to see the good aspects of the otherwise failed and dictatorial state: for example, the extensive cultural education that reached all social classes in the GDR and which still means today that Dresden’s museums are home not only to an educated bourgeois elite, but that a broad population representing all strata of society and all basic convictions is still prepared to wrangle over the contents of museums.

Ultimately, however, this affair is only one example of how the AfD tries to hijack issues and exploit them for promoting themselves and their political agenda—and how this party occupies, twists, and instrumentalizes even an art discourse. Polarizing and destabilizing society wherever possible seems to be one of their goals. Museums are also becoming a plaything of competing interests, as can also be seen from another current example from Dresden. In its database, the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden have decided to give additional alternative titles to some works in the collections whose traditional titles are now seen as racist or discriminatory. This evoked great, great outrage among the local population after the AfD published a press release. What is even more frightening here, however, is not the mere fact of a

17 This piece, which documents a specific and important historical moment, was part of a presentation under the title *As far as I know—effective immediately..., without delay* on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the fall of the Wall during the Peaceful Revolution <https://albertinum.skd.museum/en/exhibitions/as-far-as-i-know-effective-immediately-without-delay/>. After a year of public programs with emphasis on active engagement and actual employment of heritage, of putting the past to work as a way to keep it alive and use it to the fullest, we were back at the beginning. The journey of extensive and serious exploration of the potential of art arrived where it had started.

18 Few East Germans over the age of fifty fail to remember the state-organized solidarity campaign calling for the release of the US philosopher, communist and Black Power activist Angela Davis. “1 Million Roses for Angela Davis” was the motto of a postcard campaign in 1970–72 in support of Davis, who at the time was being held under terrorism charges. The large-scale campaign firmly anchored the activist within the cultural memory of the GDR, which—in this critical phase of the Cold War—sought to position itself by asserting its commitment to the comrade. In the GDR, the media spun Davis as the “heroine of the other America” and after her acquittal she was welcomed as a state guest. For her part, Angela Davis had hoped for an internationalist movement promoting a socialist, feminist, and non-racist democracy—the antithesis of her experiences of violence and oppression as a Black woman in the USA. This moment of hope provided the historical starting point for the exhibition, which featured contemporary works by international artists, like Yael Bartana, Sadie Barnette, Melvin Edwards, Angela Ferreir, Bernhard Franke, Coco Fusco, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Arthur Jafa, Iris Kensmil, Hassan Khan, Kapwani Kiwanga Kiwanga, Raja Lubinetzki & Petra Schramm, Senga Nengudi, Ahmet Öğüt, Slavs and Tatars, Julia Phillips, Alex Martinis Roe, Elske Rosenfeld, Anri Sala, Willi Sitte, Strawalde, Gabriele Stötzer, Nasan Tur, Carrie Mae Williams, Christoph Wetzell, and Charles White. For more information see: <https://lipsiusbau.skd.museum/en/exhibitions/a-million-roses-for-angela-davis/>

press release issued by the AfD stirring up the people, but rather that this press release was, in some cases, taken up by the media without reflection and disseminated as perceived truth, without consulting the museum. And we see it again in the discussions around a gender sensitive language. The political center, which is otherwise reflected in cultural matters, is increasingly proving to be no longer a reliable partner: the fear of acting against a supposed mainstream is too great. In addition, the persons holding offices of political responsibility themselves appear too uncertain about content-related issues to take a stand.



Concluding discussion round with artist Mario Pfeifer and guests Petra Köpping (Minister for Integration, Saxony), Jana Hensel (author), Stefan Locke (journalist) and Albertinum director Hilke Wagner on Pfeifer's work *On Fear and Education, Disappointment, and Justice, Protest and Disunion in Saxony, Germany*, January 10, 2019. © SKD, Photo: Oliver Killig

PERSPECTIVE 5

OLEKSIY RADYNSKI

Senior Curator, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, Australia.

Biography — Oleksiy Radynski is a filmmaker and writer based in Kyiv. His films have been screened at Oberhausen International Short Film Festival, Kurzfilmtage Winterthur, the Institute of Contemporary Arts (London), DOK Leipzig, bar laika by e-flux, and the Kmytiv Museum, among other venues, and received awards at a number of film festivals. He gave talks and presentations at Berlinale Forum Expanded, Museum of Modern Art (New York), International Studio and Curatorial Program (New York), Shtab (Bishkek), Stroom Den Haag, and Architectural Association (London). His texts have been published in *Proxy Politics: Power and Subversion in a Networked Age* (Archive Books, 2017), *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and East Europe: A Critical Anthology* (MoMA, 2018), *Being Together Precedes Being* (Archive Books, 2019), and in e-flux journal. After graduating from Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, he studied at the Home Workspace Program (Ashkal Alwan, Beirut). He is a participant of the Visual Culture Research Center, an initiative for art, knowledge, and politics founded in Kyiv, 2008. He was a 2019–2020 BAK Fellow at basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht.

THE STONE IS A WEAPON OF THE PROLETARIAT

On January 19, 2014, in front of a National Art Museum in Kyiv, violent clashes broke out between the participants of the Maidan uprising and the riot police. The immediate proximity of the museum had become a literal frontline of a battlefield for weeks to come. On one side of the frontline, camping on the museum's steps, were the cordons of riot police that became the last bastion of an obscenely corrupt, fiercely kleptocratic government of Ukraine. On the other side were the crowds of dispossessed and lumpenized citizens who were using pieces of pavement as weapons in their pitched battles with the riot police. It's been hard to ignore the similarity of this ultimate act of civil disobedience to a famous sculpture *The Stone is a Weapon of a Proletariat* by Ivan Shadr (1927), which depicts a rioter excavating a piece of pavement from the ground. For almost a month, *The Stone is a Weapon of the Proletariat* had been reenacted by the crowds in front of the museum over and over again, sometimes for 24 hours in a row—until the regime finally fell.

Even though the class composition of the



Oleksiy Radynski



The Stone Is a Weapon of the Proletariat, Kyiv, 2021, photo by Oleksiy Radynski

Maidan uprising was to a large extent proletarian, its political language had been largely formulated by the right. For the right wing, it was easy to take advantage of an anti-colonial, anti-Russian dimension of this revolt against Putinist rule. As a result, the Maidan uprising didn't really question the social and economic regime of post-Soviet oligarchy. Instead, one of the most visible outcomes of the Maidan uprising took form of a so-called decommunization, that is, the removal of Socialist-era artworks from the public space, but also from the space of the museum. One of the most important artworks subjected to decommunization was, in fact, Shadr's *The Stone is a Weapon of the Proletariat*, whose bronze copy had been part of the landscape of Kyiv for several decades. The figure of a proletarian using a stone as a weapon could be of course seen at the time as a reference to those who fought and lost their lives in the Maidan uprising. Instead, it was declared a piece of hostile propaganda and removed from the public space.

It is curious to know that Ukrainian decommunization had been launched exactly quarter of a century after the demise of Soviet Union, that is, 25 years into the reality of wild and unrestrained post-Soviet capitalism. Decommunization was therefore a kind of

self-vindication of the capitalist ruling class that was trying to blame all the failures of the capitalist order on the rotting corpse of historical socialism that had been already dead for decades. At the same time, the term "decommunization" would be quite accurate, if understood literally, as de-commoning, as making private what was previously public. This process had in fact coincided with large-scale privatization and precarization of social institutions, including the museum. It had also heralded a new era of nationalist politics of culture, an era that had simultaneously—even if via a varying trajectory—arrived in Poland as well as many other places in Eastern Europe. Interestingly, this era still justifies itself first and foremost by anti-communism (with no regard for the fact that in the last 30 years, the region has been subjected to some of the most anti-socialist, neoliberal sets of policies ever implemented).

Some would say that a way out of this ultra-conservative era lies through the "return to the normal," that is, through the restoration of the centrist liberal public sphere that would exclude both "extreme" political options, as if they were somehow symmetrical. But this idea tends to overlook the fact that the alleged "normality" was actually the starting



Mykola Ostrovsky Museum, Khmelnytsky, Ukraine. Photo by Natalia Dyachenko



Mykola Ostrovsky Museum, Khmelnytsky, Ukraine. Photo by Natalia Dyachenko



Tatarbunary Museum. Photo by Natalia Dyachenko.

point for the creeping comeback of fascism into the public sphere—precisely because it presumed that the ideological deviations from the center are somehow equally evil. So, another way out of the deadlock would be through shifting and broadening the frame of antagonism itself, switching from the conflict between liberalism and fascism (which liberalism usually somehow tends to lose on a regular basis), to the conflict between socialism and capitalism. I’m speaking here not so much of historical socialism that was defeated in the Cold War by the capitalist West, I’m speaking rather of socialism as a project oriented into the future, a project that the humanity will have to revisit if it is going to get serious about its survival on this planet.¹

From here, we can look at the museum and its potential for “recognizing differences” a bit further. Within the discourse of cultural institutions, the notion of

difference is most often understood in the context of identity politics. That means the inclusion of the Others as long as they are “recognized” as such by the liberal order: the non-heteronormative other, the indigenous other, maybe even the other from the underclass. But what should we do with the Other that is not recognizable as such, the Other that belongs to the realm that apparently does not exist at all? I’m speaking here of the Otherness of socialism that had managed to produce an ontologically different model of society before its historical failure, that is, a society based on non-libidinal economy.² Some of the very few ways to experience this kind of society in real life is through the space of the museum. I don’t mean here the museum of contemporary art, quite the opposite: I mean the outdated, outmoded, non-contemporary space of a provincial post-Soviet museum, a time capsule that represents the world before the end of history.

1 Climate emergency is a result of the inability of the capitalist mode of production to adapt to the situation of coexistence of multiple forms of life on this planet, including humans, and to their needs of survival. Xenophobia, then, is a tool that helps capitalist societies remain capitalist, and it does so by redirecting the anger of the masses from the real source of their oppression, the ruling class, onto the underclass. Both xenophobia and climate change are therefore two different outcomes of extractivist capitalism that pits various groups of the oppressed against each other in order to be able to go on with its assault on the planet. It should come as no surprise that the far-right parties all over Europe actually agree about two things. One: climate change is a hoax, and two: real threat actually comes from the migrants. For more on that, see: Andreas Malm and the Zetkin Collective, *White Skin, Black Fuel: On the Danger of Fossil Fascism*. Verso, 2021.

2 See Keti Chukhrov, *Practising the Good. Desire and Boredom in Soviet Socialism*. e-flux and the University of Minnesota Press, 2021.

Removal of statues from the public space is relatively easy, but what to do if the whole museum is to be decommunized? Take, for instance, the Mykola Ostrovsky museum in the city of Khmelnytsky in Western Ukraine. As a result of Ukrainian decommunization law, the very existence of this enormous piece of post-war modernism fell into a legal limbo. The museum's building, along with its permanent exhibition, had been produced as a kind of a total installation

The only way to actually decommunize this museum would be to demolish both the exhibition and the building it was housing. Luckily, the museum and the city had found a better solution, merely renaming the place into the Museum of Propaganda and leaving it intact. One could claim that by renaming the museum and re-exposing it in public under a new identity, the officials performed a kind of modernist Duchampian gesture of appropriation. This solution would not have been possible, though, without the participation of a coalition of artists working together under the guise of Denede collective, which was convened in 2016 by an art historian Yevgeniya Molyar. Denede collective emerged as a response to an unprecedented wave of destruction of artworks such as monuments, mosaics, and frescoes as a result of an ill-conceived decommunization law. During the active phase of decommunization, the Denede collective had initiated a series of trips to virtually every region of Ukraine with the aim of documenting the socialist-era artworks and exhibitions that might soon have gone, but most importantly—to negotiate the future of those museums with their staff and with the local officials. Together, they were trying to reimagine these museums as community centers that could function without necessarily undergoing destructive decommunization. A large number of museums in question were not art museums per se, but rather museums of regional history, natural history, or the museums of local lore. Still, a number of permanent exhibitions discovered in those institutions proved to be monumental artworks in their own right, like the museum devoted to the workers' uprising of Tatarbunary in Bessarabia region.

The activities of the Denede collective sprawled into more than mere documentation and negotiation of the museum policies during the time of the threat to their existence. Among the artistic community, it had generated an interest in the small-scale, provincial, and local museum as a site of intervention, or as a space for artistic contribution. An iconic work that emerged out of this interest is *Za/Skhid* by Vova Vorotnirov. To create this work, the artist had excavated a piece of coal from the coal mining basin of Chervonograd on the western border of Ukraine.

After that, he had physically carried it to the Donbas coal mining basin in the country's east, an area consumed by war. To do that, the artist had walked over a thousand miles, which took about five weeks, until he brought this piece of coal to the local museum in the town of Lysychansk, where it became part of a permanent exhibition. In this work, the stone is reimagined as a weapon of a proletarian who is no longer militant, but rather self-reflexive about the traumatic experience of modernity. During his five-weeks walk, Vorotnirov had produced a comprehensive photo documentation of the landscapes he was passing through, and in this documentation, we see those landscapes marked by the self-perpetuating loop of poverty and the erasure of history. The seemingly absurd and Sisyphean gesture of carrying a piece of coal for over a thousand miles could also be read as a gesture of concern regarding the obsolete infrastructure of fossil fuel extraction that still dominates Ukrainian society.

The most comprehensive outcome of Denede's interest in an outmoded museum as a space of potentiality came in the form of a series of exhibitions in the Kmytiv Museum, a brutalist landmark built in the eighties in a small village some sixty miles from Kyiv by the head of a local collective farm who happened to be an art lover. Back in the day, the museum boasted an impressive collection of Socialist Realist art that had survived the nineties (a period when this kind of art was subject to market looting by the art dealers), and in the era of decommunization was seen more as a liability than an asset. An exhibition series conceived by Yevgeniya Molyar, Nikita Kadan, and Leo Trotsenko engaged the museum's collection into an interaction with a number of works by contemporary artists. The series took on the self-reflective, site-specific approach of exposing contemporary works in a space definitely at odds with the idea of contemporary art, a space that is itself a product of a different kind of modernity than the one that produced the very idea of contemporary art (the very first in a series of exhibitions concerned itself with a reciprocity of Enlightenment and paternalism). What transpired through this series of exhibitions, though, was an understanding that decommunization had also entailed a great deal of de-modernization in terms of culture and its politics (which is no big surprise, given that modernization in this part of the world had in fact been historically Communist). After the end of an exhibition series in question, and as a result of a number of scandals provoked by the local right-wing politicians, the director of the Kmytiv museum had restored the previous status quo by installing the

interior of a traditional peasant country house within an exhibition space of a Brutalist museum.

In September 2021, the artwork of Ivan Shadr had been rediscovered by Yevgeniya Molyar in the illegal possession of a petty oligarch who was exhibiting the sculpture on a private plot of land on the outskirts of Kyiv. As a result, the sculpture had been reinstalled temporarily in the public space of the city, in a Soviet-era Expo ensemble now surrounded by hyper-commercial real estate. At the time of writing, Molyar is negotiating with the National Art Museum of Ukraine that had declared its willingness to accept the sculpture into its collection and to exhibit it in front of the museum's facade. There, it would serve as an actual monument to a recent popular uprising, as a warning to those who try to manipulate the masses in order to continue their abuse of power.

**DAY 3, SUNDAY
NOVEMBER 7**

**NEW
PERSPECTIVES
ON CLIMATE AND
COMMONALITY**

PERSPECTIVE 6

PELİN TAN

Senior Researcher, Center for Arts, Design and Social Research, Boston; Professor of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Batman University, Turkey

Biography — Pelin Tan, Sociologist/Art Historian, Professor at the Fine Arts Faculty, Batman University, Turkey. Senior Researcher of the Center for Arts, Design and Social Research (Boston), Researcher at the Architecture Faculty, Thessaly University, Greece. Sixth recipient of the Keith Haring Art and Activism Award. Lead Author of the report of Cities of the International Panel of Social Progress (Cambridge, 2018). Tan pursued her postdoc at the Art, Culture and Technology program of the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at MIT, US (2011). She worked at the Art History, Istanbul Technical University (2001–2011), Architecture Faculty, Mardin Artuklu University (2013–2017), and was visiting professor in Hong Kong Polytechnic School of Design, the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Human Rights Project. Her research was supported by Hong Kong Design Trust, The Japan Foundation, CAD+SR, Graham F., and others. Tan collaborates with artist Anton Vidokle on essay films on the future society; she recently received the short film award by the Sharjah Art Foundation (AUB), 2020. She was a curator in the ECC Matera 2019, i-DEA Archive project by Matera Foundation (2018–2019), Associate Curator of the Adhocracy—1. Istanbul Design Biennial (2015). Curator of Urgent Pedagogies in design and art by IASPIS (Stockholm, since 2018), MAAT, Lisbon (2022). As an author she has contributed to: *Superhumanity* (e-flux and Minnesota Press, 2017), *Climates: Architecture and The Planetary Imaginary*, GSAPP (Lars Muller Publication, Columbia Univ., 2016), *Re-Production of Social Architecture* (Routledge, 2016), *Urgent Architectural Theories* (GSAPP Books, Columbia University, 2015), *Doing Tolerance: Democracy, Citizenship and Social Protests* (Barbara Budrich Publishing, Berlin, 2020), *Radical Pedagogies* (MIT Press, 2021).

ENTANGLEMENT

Entanglement as a discursive methodological tool may lead us into a phenomenological approach that describes the phenomena from contra-division of human and matter, or subjectivities and territories. It may invite us to understand the planetary conditions from such a non-division of human and non-human, or even more-than-human worlds. It can provide a tool of methodology in approaching the non-human element as an agency of resilient focal nodes that creates a different ontological root. In this sense, phenomena: “...do not merely mark the epistemological inseparability of ‘observer’ and ‘observed’; rather, phenomena are the ontological inseparability of intra-acting ‘agencies.’ That is, phenomena are ontological entanglements.” For Karen Barad, phenomena

are agential intra-actions of multiple apparatuses of bodily production. Furthermore, Barad notes that phenomena should not be understood in a phenomenological sense but as particular material entanglement.

The notion of resilience is a crucial issue in entanglement. Kathrin Thiele, describes entanglement as “an affirmative critical tool attending to the constructive and/as relational ontology...” Following Barad, I also understand the ethics of entanglement that “...entails the possibilities and obligations for reworking the material effects of the past and the future.” The ethical part enters the aesthetics that makes the concept of “entanglement” different from “assemblage.” The differences of the ontology between “entanglement” and “assemblage” is that entanglement is more a material engagement that has an effect on related entangled existences; whereas assemblage refers more to visual epistemology, where



Pelin Tan

fragments and layers are orchestrated. As Hodder explains: “The distinctive aspect of entanglement derives from the attention given to the term ‘depend’ in the relationships between things and between humans and things.” Hodder’s example departs from an archaeological perspective in describing the relation of dependence between humans and artefacts. However, the term “intra-action” used by Barad refers neither to inter-action nor to dependency:

The notion of intra-action is a key element of my agential realist framework. The neologism “intra-action” signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual “interaction” which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. It is important to note that the “distinct” agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as individual elements.

For her materialization is a process, a relation of production, a reconfiguration of the material-social relations of the world.

In my research, I follow the relational process in time, the social impact and its built environment. In spatial and architectural research methodologies of design are important but are not enough in understanding the process of matter, especially in extra-territorialities where the violence informed knowledge is embedded. Therefore, “entanglement,” both as a concept and method, opens a field of a relational ontology of matter. I am not claiming that matter is at

the center of everything, but I do believe that in such specific territories, situated knowledge is important in the process of knowledge production where matter becomes the anchor with its entangled process (in past and present). I will try to explain it with the aid of field research.

According to Hodder the human-things dependencies could fall apart in different temporalities:

The notion that humans dig themselves into the holes of human-thing dependencies does indeed appear very determinative. Once a hole has been dug, there are very few options left moving forward. On the other hand, we have seen that entanglements are open, far flung and contingent—things keep happening as the different temporalities of things collide and as things run out, break down and fall apart.

The question of the post-anthropogenic formation of conflict zones that simultaneously puts forward the question of the infrastructures of territorial control, as well as multiple means of extraction. A relational ontology that structures of the entanglement may enter as and may provide an aesthetic tool of responsibility. The effects of the bombing of the Mishraq sulphur plant by ISIS in Qayyarah/Iraq on October 21, 2016 went beyond the borders of Turkey as far as the town of Mardin, where I perceived the spread of acidic sulphur dioxide in the air via clouds through my large balcony a couple of days later. The acid travelled with the clouds. This case shows us that air pollution is unstoppable, fostered by warfare and colonial effect. In *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, the author Ghosh asks “what is the feeling of the unthinkable?” Here Ghosh gives an example of his lived experience of a tornado approaching: “...what had happened at that moment strangely like a species of visual contact, of beholding and being held...” Thus, he leads us to the question of the post-anthropogenic formation of territories that simultaneously brings together the infrastructures of territorial control and multiple means of extraction. Infrastructures such as water dams on the borderlines, or new housing projects (market speculation) on erased warfare towns in Southeast Turkey pose more entangled analysis of the unthinkable that we are experiencing. The unthinkable representation is about the fluid and entangled matters of formation of territories that forces us to think of artistic methodologies and narratives of decolonization. When ecological resource infrastructures are used as a means of colonization and weaponization of land, the result is

enforced migration and dispossession, damaging the landscape and its local flora. The effects of climatic transformation on territories are not only based on determinist ecological factors. Rather, the production of infrastructure in general can function as an ecological legitimization for implanting security tools in conflict zones, for example, by dispossessing communities of agricultural lands (which leads to the eviction of villages and replacement of the agrarian economy), and surreptitiously colonizing territory. There is an inter-territorial relation that can be enlarged into planetary scale that is again an example of a post-Anthropocene condition of war effect. Damaged landscapes, structural violence form the territory that affect in multiple ways the climate of clouds and wind. The formation of matters is totally entangled through a war condition.

To summarize, the entanglement could be used both as an ontological epistemological base and also as a method to understand the formation and role of matter in a wider world. I try to use empirical experiences from an extreme geography (a highly controlled territory) by framing a methodology of how matter is entangled with current other spaces and histories as an “intra-action” in Barad’s term, which is also about responsibility.

Methodology and Anthropocene

Maybe a grounding methodology that would be what Anna Tsing refers to “patchy Anthropocene” that we can transform into art, architectural, and spatial research. Patchy/patch means “sites for knowing intersectional inequalities among humans,” so in the frame of more-than-human world relations, it is vital in this research how a water irrigation system is controlled, powered by whom, and how calamities are affecting the survival. As Tsing claims:

The Anthropocene may be planetary, but our grip on collaborative survival is always situated—and thus patchy. Throughout history, humanitarian calamities and global inequalities have been enacted through nonhuman agency that reacts to human design. Patchy Anthropocene brings the legacies and tools of social justice-based analysis into Anthropocene studies.

And it is almost a spatial phenomenology that I follow; as Tsing describes for landscape structures: “A phenomenological attunement to landscape forms as well as to beings-in-landscapes allows multispecies histories to come into view.” The post-earthquake shelters, the refugee camps, the infrastructural projects such as

new housing projects or water dams that are connected to displacement/eviction and further disaster effects where the Anthropocene patches emerge. According to Elizabeth Povinelli, geo-ontologies bring together two terms: “geos” (non-life) and “being” (ontology), which “are currently in play in the late liberal governance of difference and markets.” Povinelli proposes a new definition of biopolitics with no separation between elements of “life” and “non-life”; this combined conceptual approach is based on new figures, tactics, and discourses of power. How can we approach the infrastructure of landscapes shaped by war and migration from this theoretical perspective? What is the basis for discussing such extra-territorialities through and with “Things”? Infrastructure is a term for designing the modern urban space and for producing complete spatial objects. For centuries, it has held a basic role in colonization processes through introducing infrastructure projects in order to change and colonize cultures and societies on any scale. It also functions as a justification of neoliberal urban-rural policies in expanding, expropriating, and rescaling property and lands. It is the object between form and law. As Keller Easterling defines, “Infrastructure is considered to be a hidden substrate—the binding medium or current between objects of positive consequence, shape, and law.” Furthermore, structural violence and inter-colonial memory are also deeply integrated in the southeast region of Turkey. The territory is a layered fragmentation of geontologies. The effects of war and the active renegotiation of borders to Iraq and Syria demand a transformation in the way infrastructure is approached and worked with, not just at the functional and scalar threshold of architecture, but also as mechanisms that form part of what Elizabeth Povinelli calls geontologies of landscape. According to Povinelli, both “geos” (non-life) and “being” (ontology) are “currently in play in the late liberal governance of difference and markets,” in response to which she outlines new figures, tactics, and discourses of power by proposing a definition of biopolitics with no separation between elements of Life and Non-life. How then can we approach infrastructural landscapes that have been shaped by structural violence? Within such a framework, villages and landscapes at the borderline in Southeast Turkey are shaped with geontological layers. We see the effect of the Ilisu dam on the Tigris River along Hasankeyf, where it transforms the whole region into a spatial surveillance network. There are many such examples with new housing projects that justify this necropolitical process by playing with property, class relation, and eviction. On the other

hand, militarized landscapes keep the state of exception as a permanent condition, while erasing memories of local communities in the region.

Recently, the discourses of infrastructure have revealed the role of infrastructure in more complex ways. Incomplete and failures of infrastructure often relate to the character of the infrastructural functions that prolong the process of infrastructure projects, which becomes more important than the complete infrastructure itself, with actors, such as the state, local governments, developers, and citizens, debating or negotiating, thereby leading to more profit and surplus. In short, instead of a complete object or presentation, the incomplete, the continuous failure, or the process of infrastructure becomes a vital part. It is often argued that in many cases (in Indian cities, for example) the failure of infrastructure or the interruption of the infrastructural function brings about the co-existence of alternative infrastructure in the networks of such cities. Infrastructure as an assemblage is another current discourse on infrastructure. As Stephen Graham describes, “urban infrastructures are complex assemblages that bring all manner of human, non-human, and natural agents into a multitude of continuous liaisons across geographic space.”

Around the city of Mardin, Turkey, close to the Syrian border, there are many official refugee camps, self-organized camps, and temporary dwellings of migrants as an outcome of the civil war in Syria since 2013. I see urbanized and temporary refugee camp settlements as forms of decay, a subtractive building process that is about both an anachronism and a decay of architecture itself. I see the experience of such *ad hoc* infrastructure (camps or tents) not in the total context of a state of emergency or a limited spatial form of exception. The decay of forms compels us to deal with anachronisms that do not withhold the in-humanity rooted in human history. I suggest that refugee camps as a spatial form are part of the process of building an infrastructure that de-territorialized the refugee as an arche-fossil of the posthuman era. Warfare, ecological disaster, and technological collapse deeply impact our everyday lives and designate our future spatial infrastructures. Ecological disasters are the core reasons for governments to issue policies for the further demolition of ecological landscapes and inhabitants. In the case of refugee camps, sustaining livelihood, such as dwelling, food, health, and emergency related issues, are the basic forces behind zoning a camp plan. This form of dwelling and its zoning plan are a production of space, a continuous negotiation of public space, based on several facts such as border politics and its juridical

justifications, humanitarian aid negotiations, and political agencies. Camp design programs aim to supply the dwelling needs of a community in a spatial scale of a neighborhood, a village, or a small city. Refugee communities are often taken as homogenous entities, with their kinship, tribal, and religious networks being dismissed.

A transversal method has social justice-based research, meaning and aims in engaging. I borrow the transversal from Félix Guattari, who writes, “transversal practice—neither institutional therapy, nor institutional pedagogy, but rather an analytic method that cuts across multiple fields—is often affiliated with models of knowledge and pedagogy.” Accordingly, thinking transversally allows for trans-local, borderless knowledge production that rhizomatically extends beyond the familiar terrains of architecture and design to encompass questions of citizenship, militant pedagogy, institutionalism, borders, war, being a refugee, documents and documenting, urban segregation, the commons, etc. Working in those fields may have many obstacles such as creating a generalizing narrative of conflict assuming that the whole territory has the homogenizing condition of a state of exception. Furthermore, as many conflicts and their effects on different scales happened and are happening (for example urban war in Nusaybin, refugee camps in Mardin, forced eviction due to a dam in a village, and so on), the timelines of the more-than-human world are not linear and are often interrupted. To find the differentiating paradigms in such multiple disasters and their infrastructures is difficult. Moreover, censorship, oppression and surveillance are continuous obstacles to field engagement in research. As the territories and infrastructures form very fast or may withdraw under conflict and state of exception, the temporality and fast processing lead to inventing alternative ways of archival methods. Within my research collective, Arazi Assembly, I am archiving the destruction process and after process of towns, neighborhoods, and other infrastructures. In the meanwhile, I am engaged in field research collecting narratives and analyzing the outcome of focus groups among the actors in this territory. Within collaborative research, I try to expand it to planetary scale. As Artikisler Collective members, we have collected patchy field videograms in digital archives that present a larger ongoing perspective, which is not only about archiving the erasure of memories of conflict spaces but also creating a patchy visual narrative of embedded knowledge of the critical events of surpassing disasters.

In conclusion, the field research in a conflict territory or conflict urban space deals with several issues. Firstly, the discursive space between the subject and object dualism of the field where structural violence is almost an embedded knowledge and frame makes another phenomenology necessary to approach it. From this perspective, field engagement is about understanding Barad's materialist approach to the agency and the intra-action that signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. Furthermore, conceptually, geo-power and geo-ontologies by Povinelli and Yusoff provide an understanding of the modalities of landscape-based extraction and geopolitics by state-led oppression over this territory. Infrastructures as "entangled agencies" bring the timeline and relation to disasters to the surface. Those entangled things form the patchy fields that impact the human and non-human worlds and bring the effect of more than human worlds.

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Félix Guattari, *The Guattari Reader*, G. Genosko (ed.). Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, p. 121: "It sought to make discernable a domain that was neither that of institutional therapy, nor institutional pedagogy, nor of the struggle for social emancipation, but which invoked an analytic method that could traverse these multiple fields (from which came the theme 'transversality')." "

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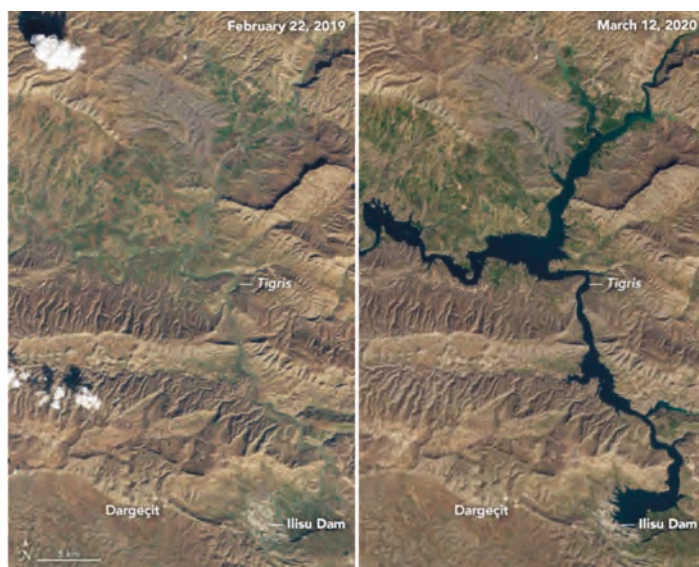
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Last day of demolition of Hasankeyf settlement due to the İlisu dam construction, 03.11.2019 (photo by Pelin Tan)



Diyarbakir Cinar Refugee Camp (temporary camp, self-organised, 2015)



Effect of landscape around and on the Tigris River and settlements due to the İlisu dam construction and eviction, and so disappearance of Hasankeyf. (Source NASA Earth <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/146439/slowly-flooding-history?utm=carousel>)



Hasankeyf, 2021—Pelin Tan

PERSPECTIVE 7

BINNA CHOI

Curator and Director, Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Biography — Binna Choi is the director at Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons in Utrecht (www.casco.art), where she engages with both its artistic program and the organizational and (de)instituting practice as her curatorial and collaborative art practice. Travelling Farm Museum of Forgotten Skills with the Outsiders, Site for Unlearning (Art Organization) with Annette Krauss and the Casco team, and Unmapping Eurasia with You Mi are some of her recent or ongoing curatorial projects, alongside the process of restructuring and rearticulating the institution itself with the Casco team, the annual Assembly for commoning art institutions (since 2018) and other infrastructural projects under development. There, earlier, she conceived a long-term trans-disciplinary project Grand Domestic Revolution (2010–2012) and the multi-faceted program Composing the Commons (2013–2016), which includes exhibitions such as *New Habits* (2014) and *We Are the Time Machines: Time and Tools for Commoning* (2016), commissions for new works and network-engagement like Arts Collaboratory and Cluster. Furthermore, Choi is a member of the Akademie der Künste der Welt, Cologne, where in 2020, in close collaboration with Christian Nyampeta, she curated *Gwangju: Lessons Over the 18 May Democratic Uprising* and took it to the Asia Culture Center as part of the *MaytoDay* project by the Gwangju Biennale Foundation. In 2016, she was a curator for the 11th Gwangju Biennale. She also serves as an advisor to the Afield network and *MARCH* journal, and is a board member for GALAS (Green Art Lab Alliance) Support. Untitled or a patchwork of thoughts and some resources to share after the conference

UNTITLED OR A PATCHWORK OF THOUGHTS AND SOME RESOURCES TO SHARE AFTER THE CONFERENCE

A.

This is the third international symposium I attended as one of the speakers during which some of the participants have burst into tears. The first was Auckland's ST PAUL St Gallery 2016 Symposium entitled in the Māori language "Ako Mai, ako atu," meaning learning in the form of speaking and listening. The next was the International Research Roundtable "Curating Critical Pedagogies," which was held in 2018 at the Peter

Wall Institute for Advanced Studies at University of British Columbia in Vancouver. Finally, taking place one year later than planned due to the pandemic, the CIMAM Annual Conference was the latest symposium where some of those in the room, including myself, were in tears.

Although I can't elaborate on this phenomenon—if you will, I would like to address it, however briefly, since it was the air that we sensed that caused such emotion. This air arose, I believe, from the release in words over human atrocity, suffering, and pain of other humans and non-humans, which we started talking about and recognizing within the colonial-capitalist regime; also sensing that it came far too late and there's a long way still to go to repair and heal, if it is ever possible. I have wondered, again, whether we, in the field of art, repeat the same colonial-capitalist habit or not? How do we unlearn it or contribute to not replicating it? In what way can we, each from our own institution with its pitfalls and possibilities, rework or un-work ourselves to compose new modes of being, art, art institution, or life? Or is it enough to

interests lie in different modes of informal knowledge. The band plays 1970s popular music songs from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, England, Bangladesh, Poland, the Netherlands, and Lebanon. The performances of the songs are alternated with associative presentations of archival material related to personal stories and appearances of neo-liberal policies. *Chicago Boys, While We Were Singing, They Were Dreaming* traces back the possible “affairs” (as Hiwa K puts it) between this first implementation of liberal economics and a number of parallel events happening at the time, such as the oil crisis and the US threat to attack Saudi Arabia. In addition, *Chicago Boys* tries to understand the weakening of the left that manifested at the turn of the 1970s into the 1980s in different parts of the globe; a political tendency one can currently witness. All these developments are reflected upon through the lens of cultural dynamics, particularly those in the popular music genre.¹

It’s a type of art project you might call a socially engaged art, immaterial art, relational aesthetics, or community art, artistic research. However it’s called, this type of project shares a commonality in creating a space-time that defies the existing capitalist, colonial, racial, and gender norm and other institutional constraints, where, instead, almost “utopic” forms of learning and being together are materialized. This kind of experience opens a different vision of a good life, shifting away from a possessive, materialistic, static, and exclusive notion. The problem is that while the desire behind this kind of project is to prolong or expand such space as much as it could be expanded, both art institutions and artists are trapped in the logic of productivity (and management) that keeps producing the new with a poor sense of interconnection, intra-action, and interdependence that enables change in relation to our need. COMMONS.ART is a platform whose development is still at the conceptual level to help projects like *Chicago Boys* be maintained, adopted, and rooted in social life through different ways of curation and funding distribution with the aid of digital technology.

I would like to use this space to provide more information about this platform, as this project should only work as a joint platform where different art

institutions, other non-art organizations, and communities, as well as artists, come together and use it. I will do this additional introduction by way of sharing an existing text for the project pitch that Aiwen and I wrote about a year ago (B) and a list of few other references (C) I mentioned and quoted during my talk.

B. (written with Yin Aiwen)

COMMONS.ART is a digital platform that facilitates art-social relationships and distributes resources for making socially-engaged arts sustainable towards the commons.² The platform proposes the idea of “maintenance, care, and the commons,” as the key logic for a post-COVID, climate-friendly economic ecosystem for art, while seeking meaningful connections between art and the broader sectors in society.

The project was inspired by a paradox: while any substantial social impacts would need long-term, collective engagements, socially-engaged art can only participate in a closed economy called “the art world,” which is powered by distinctive artist profiles and constant new productions. This situation puts socially-engaged artists into a fundamental predicament: either making economic sacrifices for an authentic practice or joining the rat race of producing the new as a means of earning a living in the art world.

Departing from this paradox, we propose a caretaking ecosystem for connecting the artist(s) with caretakers who are not only from the field of art but also from the broader social sectors. By “caretakers,” we mean individuals and organizations who make use of an art project and keep the project adapting to the ever-changing reality, which is a way of commoning the art economy. We called the using and adapting process “maintenance,” to differentiate the two established modes of productions in the art world: producing new works—often at a fast pace—and preserving historical objects. In doing so, we undo the boundaries between production and reproduction for a sustainable society. We also complicate concepts like authorship and ownership, and create a broad alliance in society for a commons-oriented economy where art is inherent.

¹ This description is quoted from <https://www.visibleproject.org/blog/project/chicago-boys-while-we-were-singing-they-were-dreaming> (accessed on January 8, 2022)

² Here we define the commons as an ongoing practice of caring and sharing common resources based on the ethos of affirmation, equality, diversity, freedom, horizontality, and non-authoritarianism, providing an open third system into the modern-colonial binary paradigm of the private-the public.

COMMONS.ART aims to provide the following instruments for the said goal:

- A platform of creators/producers, caretakers, and caretaking-ready people and organizations, within which the collaborative care relationship can be fostered;
- A repository of socially-engaged art and creative practices on offer for commoning;
- A fund distributing system that sets up “trust funds” for supporting fostered caretaking collaborations.
- A non-fungible token system creating and locating shares for the authorship and ownership of an art project among the creators/producers and the caretakers, as the caretaking process continues.

As COMMONS.ART continues to develop and to consummate its systems logic, we are seeking like-minded individuals, communities, and organizations for input, collaboration, and trials. This phase is a “pilot,” in which we can co-develop the platform with the future “co-owners/commoners” of this new art economy. COVID-19 has put the established (art) world on pause. While it brings heavy clouds to the livelihoods of all art workers, post-COVID society gives us an opportunity to imagine and move to a new (art) world. That is, a place that focuses on meaningful togetherness instead of abstraction and performative value, which lead to sustainable practices for the artists, the people, the cities and the planet.

Please note that the domain “www.commonsonline.org” will be activated in March 2022.

C.

Kerstin Stakemeier and Marina Vishmidt, *Reproducing Autonomy: Work, Money, Crisis & Contemporary Art*. Mute Publishing: 2016.

The following are quotes from the book, pp. 72–75. (N.B. for reasons of consistency, texts have been edited to standard American style)

By the “varieties of obfuscation” we signal our interest in creating a typology of the different ways in which labor gets concealed in plain sight in discourse around critical practice in art today—most often by the elision of the capitalist basis for the institutional divide between labor and art, an elision which means that labor can only reappear in art as a fetish, or as second nature, but never in its social banality and

omnipresence, lest the social distinctiveness of art, and the critical capacities thereof, get lost in the process. A concomitant tendency that has developed out of the programmatic loss of distinction between art and other kinds of activities (even if institutionally the distinction remains intact until this day) is that labor that does not identify as labor sometimes becomes artistic practice. This is something we see demonstrated in the expansion of massification of educational and professional programs in the field of art and curating. This is likewise a development that has been steadily accelerating since the 1960s, when linguistic and performative turns in art practice coincided with a purported “dematerialization” in the economy, and, as we have shown in the two introductory essays, with the rise of “contemporary” as distinct from “modern” art.

...that art “conceals” labor like other commodities in capital, but that, due to its absence of use value, it does so to an even greater extent, and thus figures as the “absolute commodity.” Now this bracketing extends to de-materialized practices, temporal processes, and infrastructures, just as much as it once did to discrete artworks:

...we can now identify art’s drive to render “absolute commodities” out of these. A counter or negative to such processes can be located in reproduction as a “hidden abode” of de-materialized absolute commodities, and in particular in the way that they are thought about and presented. Concretely, this can mean outsourcing; gender, racialized, migration-related invisibility of workers; or degraded working conditions as they stand in a determined non-relation to art-world academicism, i.e., ideal “radicality,” or criticality, without relation to its conditions of reproduction. Importantly, just as fair trade doesn’t subvert production for value, knowing who is cleaning your Kunsthalle has no bearing on their conditions. The cultivation of managerial virtue in the idiom of “criticality” is perhaps the most disheartening example of this.

This means that, whatever political identifications are generated in the field of art, they can only ever be gestural or allegorical so long as they attempt to retain the platform art lends those articulations. This is especially the case

with “social practices” where it is only the professional imprimatur of art which provides the access to the material and human resources which allow it to register as such and not as, e.g., social work, i.e., labor.

Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, “Manifesto For An Accelerationist Politics” (2013), accessed via <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2013/05/14/accelerate-manifesto-for-an-accelerationist-politics/>

Below are some quotes I made from the text.

01. INTRODUCTION: On the Conjuncture

3. In contrast to these ever-accelerating catastrophes, today’s politics is beset by an inability to generate the new ideas and modes of organization necessary to transform our societies to confront and resolve the coming annihilations. While crisis gathers force and speed, politics withers and retreats. In this paralysis of the political imaginary, the future has been cancelled.

03: MANIFEST: On the Future

1. We believe the most important division in today’s left is between those that hold to a folk politics of localism, direct action, and relentless horizontalism, and those that outline what must become called an accelerationist politics at ease with a modernity of abstraction, complexity, globality, and technology. The former remains content with establishing small and temporary spaces of non-capitalist social relations, eschewing the real problems entailed in facing foes which are intrinsically non-local, abstract, and rooted deep in our everyday infrastructure. The failure of such politics has been built-in from the very beginning. By contrast, an accelerationist politics [to techno-social acceleration] seeks to preserve the gains of late capitalism while going further than its value system, governance structures, and mass pathologies will allow.

5. Accelerationists want to unleash latent productive forces. In this project, the material platform of neoliberalism does not need to be destroyed. It needs to be repurposed towards common ends. The existing infrastructure is not a capitalist stage to be smashed, but a springboard to launch towards post-capitalism.

16. We have three medium term concrete goals. First, we need to build an intellectual infrastructure. Mimicking the Mont Pelerin Society of the neoliberal

revolution, this is to be tasked with creating a new ideology, economic, and social models, and a vision of the good to replace and surpass the emaciated ideals that rule our world today. This is an infrastructure in the sense of requiring the construction not just of ideas, but institutions and material paths to inculcate, embody, and spread them.

17. We need to construct wide-scale media reform. In spite of the seeming democratization offered by the internet and social media, traditional media outlets remain crucial in the selection and framing of narratives, along with possessing the funds to prosecute investigative journalism. Bringing these bodies as close as possible to popular control is crucial to undoing the current presentation of the state of things.

18. Finally, we need to reconstitute various forms of class power. Such a reconstitution must move beyond the notion that an organically generated global proletariat already exists. Instead, it must seek to knit together a disparate array.

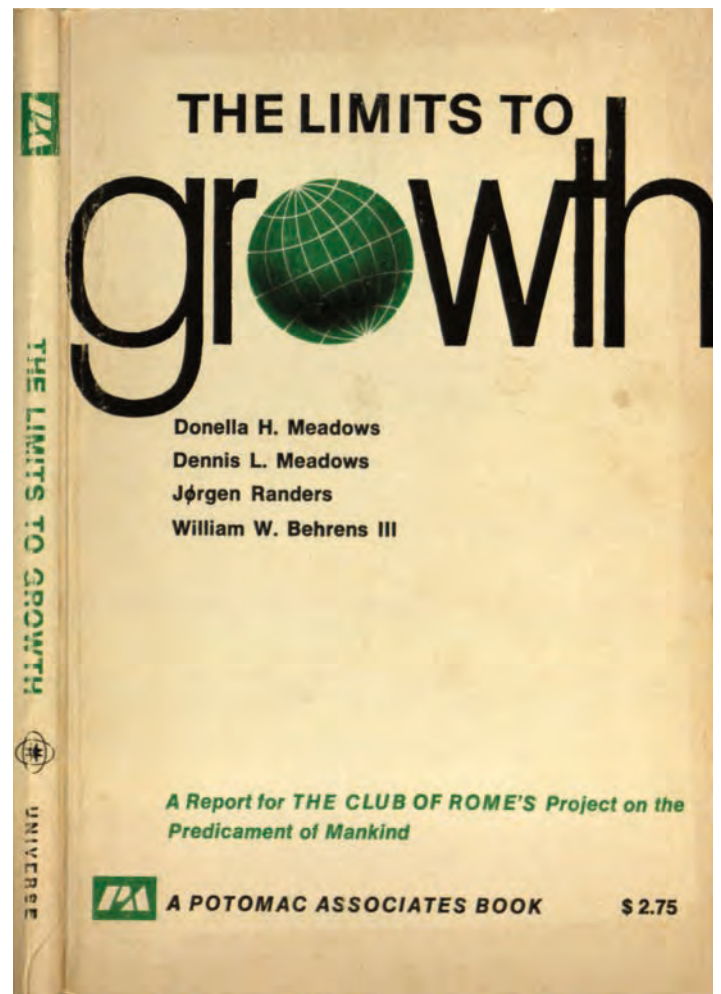
Helen Hester, Nick Srnicek, *After Work: The Fight for Free Time Hardcover*. Verso, due to be published in July 2022.

I look forward to reading and acting on this book.

Last but not least, I would like to thank you for all those who made this conference possible, especially Aneta Szyrak, Head of NOMUS New Art Museum, and who helmed Wyspa Art Institute before the Museum, for extending the invitation to me to join the conference and those who worked behind the scenes.



Poster for Chicago Boys on tour in the Netherlands. Part of *Chicago Boys: While We Were Singing, They Were Dreaming* initiated by artist Hiwa K, and hosted and developed by Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons and If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Revolution, 2011. Courtesy Casco and Chicago Boys.



Caption: Cover image of the book *The Limits to the Growth*, a 1972 report commissioned by the Club Rome. The image is from the digitally scanned copy of the report downloadable at <https://www.clubofrome.org/publication/the-limits-to-growth>.

PERSPECTIVE 8

OTOBONG NKANGA

Visual artist, Antwerp, Belgium

Biography — Otobong Nkanga (born 1974 Kano, Nigeria; lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium) began her art studies at the Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, and later continued her studies in Paris at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. She was artist-in-residence at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam (2002–2004) and she finished her Masters in the Performing Arts at DasArts, Advanced Research in Theatre and Dance Studies, Amsterdam (2005–2008). Furthermore, she was artist-in-residence at the DAAD, Berlin (2014) and at Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin (2019). Nkanga's drawings, installations, photographs, videos, sculptures, poetry, and performances examine the social and topographical relationship to our everyday environment. By exploring the notion of land as a place of non-belonging, Nkanga provides an alternative meaning to the social ideas of identity. Paradoxically, she brings to light the memories and historical impacts provoked by humans and nature. She lays out the inherent complexities of resources like soil and earth and their potential values in order to provoke narratives and stories connected to land. Nkanga has exhibited widely in exhibitions around the world, including Documenta 14 (Greece and Germany), Biennale di Venezia (Italy), and Sharjah Biennial (UAE), as well as solo presentations at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (USA) and Tate Modern (UK). Her most recent solo exhibitions took place at the Henie Onstad Kunstsenter in Høvikodden, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Tate St Ives, Gropius Bau in Berlin, and Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town. For 2021, she is preparing solo exhibitions in Villa Arson (France), Castello di Rivoli (Italy), and Kunsthau Bregenz (Austria). Otobong Nkanga is the first recipient of the Lise Wilhelmsen Art Award, (Norway, 2019), and was awarded the Peter Weiss Preis (Bochum, 2019), the Special Mention Award of the 58th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (Venice, 2019), the 2019 Sharjah Biennial Award (Sharjah, 2019), the Flemish Cultural Award for Visual Arts — Ultima (Brussels, 2019), the Belgian Art Prize (Brussels, 2017) and the 8th Yanghyun Art Prize (Seoul, 2015).

Thank you very much, I'm very happy to be here, and thank you for the invitation to be part of CIMAM. I will be mostly talking about the work *Carved to Flow*, and I chose one particular work because it manages to englobe different aspects in relation to land, in relation to crisis, in relation to care, in relation to repair. But I will start with a poem before we enter into the talking about the work. The poem goes:

Have you ever dreamt? / Yes, dreamt of
paradise / This is my paradise / Just look in
front of you / It's right here, a possible paradise
/ With trees, light, blue sky, chirping birds, and
certainly the right amount of rain annually /
This is my memory, the only space I can hold
on to, or even call my own / Yes, I have sat on
high chairs / Observing the scenes / And found

only emptiness, ruins, a mountain, a palm tree
/ The ruins just remain the same day after day,
reminding us of its glorious past / I watched for
days as the wind changes its direction / As the
clouds cover the mountain / I have felt the pain,
the palm trees and the leaves shrug from side
to one side and another / Yes, I have dreamt of
paradise / Yes, dreamt of a world where I would
or I could decide on the volumes of water to
fill the lands / I have dreamt of a world where
I could decide when the volcano ghosts out its
fury / I have dreamt of putting the remains of
the past to build high-profile glass skyscrapers
/ Or maybe just a simple home for my family or
friends / Who would not need not to go through
checkpoints / And all this / All, all will only be
faded images of other times / Yes, I have dreamt



Otobong Nkanga

of paradise / An island where I would sleep
in the woods waiting to migrate / To fly away
somewhere / Just to go anywhere no matter
what the consequences are / Dead or alive /
I would have to realize my dreams / Have you
ever dreamt?

Let's begin with the idea of an anthill. I remember the first time I went to Namibia and I saw multitudes of anthills everywhere. And while driving through the landscape I was really thinking about the anthills. They were very high—some about two meters—and I was wondering what was going on underneath the ground. And it made me realize that every place that we actually extract and take things out, we are actually making other kinds of skyscrapers, of buildings, while we are creating holes in other places. My trip to Namibia was in 2015, and I was going through the landscape, trying to understand what had made the Germans come into that landscape and what they had wanted from that landscape. I had read something about the Green Hill—this Green Hill was meant to be a hill that contained minerals, that contained a lot of copper, a lot of malachite, which is colored green. And I wanted to go and see this place from which the malachite had been excavated, and what I found was an empty landscape, a hole, a hole in the place of a hill. And also ruins, remains that were slowly decaying and slowly returning to the earth.

I was imagining that all this metal, the steel that was used to build factories, industries, is all slowly returning to the earth, even the color slowly turns to

rust, the color of soil. And so, that kind of circle that happens between something that is taken out, that is built, and then falls again, enters the soil, and we are constantly building, and are constantly degenerating. We're in a state of thinking about the constant maintenance of things that we want maintained, but at the same time, things that we do not want maintained, that we allow to decay and go back into the soil. And so, my thought at that time was to actually do a performance for the landscape as a way of appeasing it after this big hole had been made, after the scar had been made in the space. The performance was actually to call out all the minerals that had been taken out of this landscape. We have to realize that the Tsumeb mines in Namibia contained some of the most amazing crystals and minerals in the world. We have to imagine about 260 or more minerals and crystals found in just one site, which is very rare. And so, for me, I started imagining what that meant in relation to the economy of the place, in relation to extractions, in relation to how this hole has probably made another place richer, and what happened to the places the minerals were taken to in Europe, and how that has created the kinds of structures and erections that we see in these multiple places.

Between 2015–16, I started reflecting on how one can actually think of other ways of doing things that, in the sense of when we think of extractions, or when we think of places that have been emptied out, or when we think of ruins, how can we find ways that replenish at the same time as taking? How do we find support structures that would allow for certain things to exist in a different way? But before I start on the next phase, I will read a second poem.

08:08

Slow motion / REM dream / Mountain to rock
/ Rock to rubble / Rubble to ore / Ore to steel
/ Laying low particles infiltrate / Suffocating
my pipes / After a sudden blow / Breathing
[breathes deeply] / Quiet force / Old dream /
Steel to rust / Rust to debris / Debris to dust
/ Dust to earth / Laying low / Particles prop-
agating / Awakening my guts after the steady
blows / Mourning

Mourning. Mourning, a certain state of being when you are actually sad, in deep melancholy. And I think that was one of the things that I felt when going through the landscapes in Namibia, a sense of mourning, a sense of sadness within a space that you see certain kinds of potentials, and how those

potentials had been completely stifled through colonization and also through extractivism. And also, through the leaving of things without thinking about ways of remediating or repairing, so that you see ruins instead of seeing something that is growing.

I will fast forward to 2017, when I stayed in Athens. I was invited to Documenta in 2017, and I decided to do a project that would not be talking only about the relationship to land, geographies, and extractivism, but a project that can be a cycle, that not only uses materials that are within the space, but returning things within that space, even if it is in another form. How does it shift from the material into non-tangible things, into things that will be able to support other things within that landscape? And one of the images that struck me was of the caryatids. I was thinking of the idea of life and the support, and even the female body, the woman, as the main structure that supports life, that gives birth to life. And for me, it was interesting to look at this, also in relation to the African continent, or a lot of southern regions, where many women carry their produce such as tomatoes, fruits or food, and that this was actually what was supporting the family. The body becomes that kind of support structure, almost like the caryatids. For me it was interesting to connect the caryatid to the African women, the carrying of life, also in relation to people that are fleeing within a region, and how they carry their last remaining things, their life. It could be their kids, it could be their goods, it could be anything. But normally you carry that and you move away from a place of conflict or from a place of ecological degeneration, or from a place of economical strangulation. So, I was interested in thinking of it in relation to architecture.

In an early work called *Diaspore*, I was inspired by the caryatids. At that time I was in Athens, and I was interested in trying to understand from which angle I would be taking the work, and I'd often think about architecture. Architecture is one of the main structures that connects a lot of my work. And I was looking at the columns and the beams of Classical architecture as a way of thinking of the project *Carved to Flow*. But it didn't make sense, because at that time we had Brexit. I always thought of each country in Europe as a column, each holding that idea of Europe. It only takes one column to break, which was Brexit, and it creates a wobbly state within Europe itself.

That wasn't the kind of structure that I wanted to use when thinking about *Carved to Flow*. So, I started looking at the Museum architecture, which are houses that are made out of mud. You have to take care of these houses. They are in a kind of circular wood-like

form, the idea being that if one is destroyed, you can still repair it without affecting the other houses in any significant way. And you can reshape it to the form that you need the house to be when you rebuild it. And, at the same time, since it is made out of earth, out of mud, it means that there has to be constant care of the material. So, for me, this made sense in relation to thinking about *Carved to Flow* and how I would want it to work as a project. So, that became the kind of drawing or the plan of the architectural structure: the logo that went with the soap.

I made soap using seven oils and butters: babasu, olive oil, shea butter, laurel oil, sage oil, cocoa butter, coconut, and with it, carbon as charcoal and water. The idea was to be able to make a soap that would contain oils coming from different regions of the Mediterranean, North Africa, Middle East, and West Africa. And since the area around the Mediterranean has been a very contested area with people migrating, movements of goods, movements of people, also the loss of life, but at the same time, when we think of that area, the geographical space of the Middle East, North Africa... these are very agitated areas, but also areas that are nourishing the world



Image caption: Otobong Nkanga. *OB Black Stone*, 2017. A handmade, cold process, natural soap made of butters and oils from across the Mediterranean, Middle East, North and West Africa, fused together with water, lye and charcoal. Made for *Carved to Flow* Foundation (2017). www.carvedtoflow.com

with their oils, like olive oil and petroleum fossil oils. Many things that are actually feeding the world. It's a very particular geographical space, the same place that has been charred either through policies that have been made, economic crises, ecological crises, wars like in Syria, very tense regional politics that have been totally charred. I talk about "charred" because when we make charcoal, we have to burn the wood in the absence of oxygen, and so I think of these as places that are constantly stifled, in the sense that oxygen becomes less and less, and people have to escape because they can't breathe within this region.

So, the way of thinking of *Carved to Flow* was to make about 15,000 bars of soap. We made them in Athens, working with the oil from there, but also oils and butters from this whole region. And the soap was later sold in Kassel, but in Athens we had a workshop where we worked with women, where we actually produced the soap. We ran workshops, events, talks with Maya, who was the curator, and Evi Lachana, who was the soap maker, and who helped with the production. It was a scheme that made different types or prototypes of soap and, in the end, we chose to work with the black soap, which I felt made sense in relation to charred geographies, but at the same time in relation to geographies that are nourishing the world. Those two kinds of constellations, that are kind of contradictions that make sense, because we see that a lot of geographical spaces that are giving nourishment to the world are often the same spaces that are also going through extreme crises, and it could be ecological, it could be economical, it could be wars, or it could be environmental destruction. For me, it was interesting to think through that. But at the same time, one of the things I was interested in was also to understand the economy of things, so that means: If we can imagine that a landscape gives oil and gives all the things that it does, we can also imagine that it can affect the way that we see things. Without the proper soil, you don't get the tree, without the tree, you do not get the oils, without the oils, you do not get the economy, without the economy, you do not get other things. For me, it was to think of that correlation of the soil, oils, and all the different economies shifting, for it to become a new and different economy, which was what *Carved to Flow* was longing to do.

In Athens, we sold the soap. We've done different events in different parts of the world. We went to Senegal as a school, as a way of thinking through soils, oils, butters. We were in the Gropius Bau as a residency, where we did events and invited people that have similar ways of thinking, people like



Image caption: *Carved to Flow* (2017). Public program sessions. The Workstation, 2017 (collaboration with Evi Lachana and Maya Tounta). Documenta 14, Athens. Coproduced by Yanghyun Foundation, Seoul, Sindika Dokolo Foundation, Luanda and Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, Departement Cultuur, Jeugd en Media, Brussels www.carvedtoflow.com. Photo: Wim van Dongen



Image caption: Session 5: Germination, Raw Académie, Raw Material Company, Dakar, Senegal. October 29, 2018 – December 14, 2018. Visit to Île de Gorée with Luigi Coppola.

Maria Thereza Alves or Newton Harrison. There was the RAW Academy in Dakar, which we called Session 5: Germination. We also opened a space in Athens. And the space in Athens is funded by the money we got from the sales of the soap from *Carved to Flow*; also, the exhibitions that we did with Thanassis Totsikas. And in the Gropius Bau, we created a kind of place or educational platform where people could come in and learn about local soil, especially the soil in Berlin, and we made different kinds of houses for bees, so these bee houses are arrived at by thinking through soil.

And in Nigeria now, we have a foundation, and the money has allowed us to have land where we are really thinking about plants and how to work with the local fauna and flora, and also to develop ways in which we can plant things that can be economically beneficial for the local people. This year we built new spaces and tested different kinds of seeds to be able to seed local foods and plants, some of which become products for the skin and things like that. This is a very slow process, but it's a long-term process, and *Carved to Flow* has made it possible, and the money we got, the economy of that, has also enabled us to re-think local economies. I think my time is up.

KEYNOTE 8

MARISTELLA SVAMPA

Sociologist and writer, Bariloche, Argentina

Biography — Maristella Svampa is an Argentine sociologist and writer. She has an undergraduate degree in Philosophy from the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba and a PhD in Sociology from the École d'Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris. She lives in Dinahuapi, Patagonia, Argentina, and is Senior Researcher at the Conicet (National Center for Scientific and Technical Research), and Professor at the Universidad Nacional de la Plata (province of Buenos Aires). She is the coordinator of the Group of Critical and Interdisciplinary Studies on the Energy Problem and participates at the International Group of Alternative Development. She received the Guggenheim Fellowship and the Kónex Award in Sociology (Argentina) in 2006 and 2016. In 2019, she received the National Award in Sociology. Maristella Svampa has published and lectured in many countries (France, USA, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, England, Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Costa Rica, and Chile, among others). She works on socioecological crises and socioenvironmental conflicts in Latin America. Among her books are: *Maldesarrollo. La Argentina del Extractivismo y el Despojo* (Maldevelopment), (2014); *Debates Latinoamericanos. Indianismo, Desarrollo, Dependencia, Populismo* (Latin American Debates: Indianism, Development, Dependency, Populism), (2016). In English, she has published *Development in Latin America, Challenges, Resistances, Future*, Fernwood Publishing: Canada (2019) and *Neo-Extractivism Dynamics in Latin America, Socioenvironmental Conflicts, Territorial Turn, and New Political Narratives, Elements*: Cambridge University Press, USA (2019). She has published novels. Her latest book is *El Colapso Ecológico ya Llegó. Una Brújula para Salir del Maldesarrollo, 2020* (The ecological collapse is here. A compass to get out of maldevelopment).

PANDEMIC, SOCIOECOLOGICAL CRISIS, AND ALTERNATIVE PROPOSALS FROM THE SOUTH

In this presentation I would like to talk about the new scenarios that have opened up as a result of the pandemic in relation to the socioecological crisis and the ways of the eco-social transition. For this I divided my presentation into ten topics

1.

The pandemic made visible the link between social inequalities and wealth concentration, as well as the relationship between zoonosis, pandemics, and socio-ecological crisis.

First, the pandemic sets us up against political, economic, social, and ethical dilemmas. It has shown the failure of the globalization model in the last 30 years in the heat of the World Trade Organization.

On the one hand, it exposed social, economic, ethnic and regional inequalities and high levels of concentration of wealth, making them more unbearable than ever.

After several decades of neoliberalism, after the crisis in 2008, it evidenced the decline in basic services, not only in relation to health, but also to education (the digital divide), to the access to housing, and the degradation of habitat. We are increasingly aware that we live in a world of the global super rich. Pandemic further widened the gap at

several levels: social classes, geopolitical, regional, ethnical and genre gaps.

Second, the pandemic made visible the close link between socioecological crisis, models of maldevelopment, and human health. Until March 2020, the word zoonosis was not part of our common language, but now we realize that it is the key to understanding the behind the scenes of the pandemic.

Zoonotic viruses such as Covid 19 find multiple environmental causes.

One, all infectious viruses in recent decades are closely related to industrial animal husbandry. Second, deforestation. This phenomenon is documented in many countries, from Southeast Asia to Latin America.

We are witnessing major anthropogenic and sociogenic changes on a planetary scale. That is connected with the increase of the social metabolism of capital at this phase, a moment of advanced capitalism, which needs/demands for its reproduction more raw materials and more extreme energy. Metabolic profile of society is increasingly unsustainable.

In sum, the pandemic showed the extent to which talking about the Anthropocene or Capitalocene is not only a matter of climate change and global warming, but also of globalization and maldevelopment models. Thus, other aspects of the climate emergency stand out, not exclusively linked to the increase in the use of fossil fuels, but also to changes in the use of the lands, deforestation, and the expansion of intensive livestock, all of them sources of potential pandemics.

2.

The metaphors and concepts that we have been using to try to capture and analyze the pandemic must be understood in a dynamic sense.

We have gone from the metaphor of the Portal to that of Collapse, keeping the war metaphor at the center of political language.

The activation of the emergency brake generated an extraordinary crisis, not only of health, but with enormous social, economic, and political consequences.

From the beginning, the war metaphor—that is, the allusion to the war against the virus—ran through the hegemonic political language. From my perspective, its use tends to focus on the symptom and to blur and hide the structural causes, in the face of an “invisible” and “unknown” enemy.



Maristella Svampa

I cannot develop this, but it's important to emphasize the persistence of this metaphor, despite the information circulating about the causes of the pandemic.

Really, I am interested in going back to two other metaphors used: that of the portal and that of the collapse.

Indeed, the extraordinary crisis produced by Covid 19 opened up ambivalent and mutually contradictory demands.

On the one hand, demands for transformation, solidarity, and change;

On the other hand, demands for order and a return to “normality.”

On the one hand, it shouldn't be forgotten, crises can generate processes of “cognitive liberation,” which makes possible the transformation of the consciousness of those who may be affected. In other words, it makes possible to overcome fatalism or inaction and makes viable what was unimaginable until recently.

However, the demand for the “return of normality” warns us about the danger of cognitive closure, a danger of acceleration of the systemic collapse, with more authoritarianism, more xenophobia, more inequalities, more ecological devastation.

I think that the extraordinary crisis installed a portal or threshold of passage, which produced the denaturalization of what we had naturalized.

As the Indian poet Arundhati Roy emphasized in a remarkable article, we have the feeling that we are leaving a world behind, the feeling of opening ourselves to another and uncertain world.

This means that there are opportunities for transformative action in the midst of disaster. The worst that could happen is that we stay home convinced that the cards are marked and that this

leads us to inaction or paralysis. We must start from the idea that we are in an extraordinary situation, of a systemic crisis, and that the political and cultural horizon is not closed and is still in dispute.

However, the metaphor about the portal was displaced by the omnipresent figure of “collapse.”

When we talk about collapse is not only ecological or energy collapse, but also systemic and global. Collapse can involve different levels as well as different degrees and geopolitical, regional, social, and ethnic differences.

Entering the era of collapse encourages different visions: empirically, we are facing the proliferation of dystopian narratives about the future, many of them devoid of a political (or openly anti-political) language, which alludes to extinction and to chaos.

Collapse is not the end of the world, but probably is the end of the world as we know it. In France Pablo Servigny and Raphael Stevens created Collapsology as discipline, which aims to reflect the end of the world as we know it, and proposes to discuss elements and policies to implement, to go through it “as humanly as possible.”

In Argentina, with a colleague, Enrique Viale, I wrote a book whose title is *The ecological collapse is here*. However our bet was never on collapse, but on resilience, on healing, on care, which in political terms means a commitment to a just eco-social transition.

3.

The pandemic led to a questioning of world leaderships and multilateralism, by retreating to national agendas, and scarcity of cooperative and global strategies.

The pandemic accentuated nationalist competition in the context of global disorder. The example is the race to achieve an effective vaccine, but also the race to get those same vaccines. In recent months, the richest countries have sought to ensure the acquisition of the different vaccines, buying them in advance.

We talk about the return of the state, even of social state. But at the regional and national level, in the face of economic impacts, the question is obvious: how broad are the shoulders of the peripheral capitalist states to continue social recovery?

For examples, in Latin America, the states launched public health, economic, and social policies, but the evolution of the pandemic exposed the structural and short-term constraints.

The virus further accentuated existing social and territorial inequalities and exacerbated structural failures (overcrowding and lack of access to health, insufficient health care, informality, gender gap, digital

gap), giving way to a potentially explosive cocktail. Latin America with 8% of the world’s population is the region with more deaths at global level.

After 30 years of neoliberal globalization, we are likely to move towards to a deglobalization process, with more protectionist states, smaller-scale, more regional markets. It is an opportunity to reinforce or create new regional blocs, but in South America, for example, this is not viable. There is great political fragmentation and our countries continue to be marked by the old Development agenda and the export mandate, without taking into account territorial or environmental costs.

4.

Covid caused the emergency brake to be activated, but what I call the neo-extractivism didn't stop. Furthermore, for Latin American countries, the acceleration of extractivism is an essential part of the commitment to economic reactivation and the so-called “New Normality.”

Neo-extractivism is usually defined as the appropriation mode based on the over-exploitation of generally non-renewable natural resources, and the expansion of capital and its frontiers. It is characterized by large-scale enterprises, a focus on exportation, and a tendency for mono-production or monoculture.

Extractivism defines a pattern of colonial accumulation, associated with the emergence of modern capitalism. In the 21st century, however, neo-extractivism is associated with new dimensions, at different levels:

Neo-extractivism encompasses more than the activities traditionally considered extractive. In addition to open pit mega-mining, to the expansion of the petroleum and energy frontier (like fracking), and to the construction of large hydroelectric dams, it also includes the expansion of fishing and forest frontier, as well as the generalization of the agribusiness model (soy, biofuels, oil palm projects).

Neo-extractivism presents a specific territorial dynamic that tends towards the intensive occupation of the territory, which leads to the displacement of other forms of production and the displacement or expulsion of the population. These processes have an impact on life’s conditions, citizenship, and human rights.

Neo-extractivism is a privileged window for reading the multiple crises and crosses contemporary societies because it is at the center of contemporary accumulation. That is connected with the increase of the social metabolism of capital that demands for its

reproduction more raw materials and extreme energies. The consequences are more pressures on natural goods and territories.

Neo-extractivism illuminates the current socio-ecological crisis and is a privileged window for reading the hegemonic transition, in geopolitical terms: the relative decline of the United States and the rise of China as a global actor. For example, today China is the main destination for commodities from almost all Latin American countries

In Latin America, the public policies tend to deepen extractivism during Pandemic. Extractive activities (such as mining) were declared essential, clearance and deforestation advanced, and with it also the large fires.

Thus, the fire lobby unleashed its fury more than ever. For example, the Brazilian Pantanal, the largest continental wetland on the planet, was very affected. In 2020, Argentina has ranked second or third globally for the number of sources of fires, which affected wetlands and native forests, in different provinces, behind which are the soybean, mining lobbies, and even urban interests linked to the gated communities.

I synthesize this perverse equation as “The more extractivism, the less democracy.” During the pandemic, the murders of environmental activists continued, reaffirming that Latin America—particularly countries such as Colombia, Nicaragua, Brazil, and Mexico—are still the most dangerous area in the world for environmental defenders.

The most recent Global Witness report published recently reveals that three-quarters of the murders recorded against environmental activists in 2020 happened in Latin America,

5.

At a global level, the pandemic enabled discussions about the eco-social transition, tax reform, and different formulations around the Universal Basic Income.

In Latin America, the proposals for calls for the eco-social transition emerged from civil society, not from governments.

The covid crisis enabled debates about the urgency of the eco-social transition. Thus, what appeared to be reserved for a few specialists and radical activists entered the public agenda. Comprehensive proposals prepared in previous years were updated in the heat of the pandemic. Scientists and intellectuals from around the world promoted manifestos and proposals that ranged from a green agenda and a basic income to the cancellation of the

debt of the poorest countries.

It would be impossible to survey the different eco-social transition proposals that have been disseminated in the last two years. I just want to mention the Green New Deal promoted by the radical wing of the United States Democratic Party, supported by intellectuals such as Naomi Klein. And the Green New Deal, promoted by the European Union.

Both points out to the decarbonization of the economy and the creation of green jobs. For some people, Joe Biden opens a dispute scenario that allows us to anticipate that “the decade of the Green New Deal has begun.”

In Latin America we presented the Eco-social and Intercultural Pact of the South, which involves me personally. It is a proposal promoted by different activists, intellectuals, and social organizations from countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, and Chile.

The Eco-Social Pact is a collective platform that strives to build hopeful social imaginaries, agree on a shared path of transformation, and a basis for platforms of struggle in the most diverse areas of our societies. It understands that the socioecological transition implies a radical, democratic transformation. Its axes are the care paradigm, the association between social justice, and ecological justice (basic income, comprehensive tax reform, ecological debt, and suspension of external debt); a comprehensive socio-ecological transition (not only energy but also food production and consumption), and the defense of democracy and autonomy (in terms of ethnic and gender justice).

Far from being an abstract proposal, it is connected with the struggles, with the processes of re-existence and the concepts created or disseminated in recent decades in the global South and particularly in Latin America, by the socioenvironmental movements: Rights of Nature, Good Living, Common Goods, Paradigm of Care, Agroecology, Food Sovereignty, post-extractivism, post-development, autonomy, and, above all, the idea of a just, popular and integral eco-social transition.

Of course, there is a dialogue from the very beginning with those who from the North promote a radical and comprehensive agenda in terms of the Green New Deal. But the Eco-Social Pact rejects that the concept “Latin America” should continue to be used by the North, especially when it comes to eco-social transition proposals. In the several versions of the Green New deal, there is no place for the ecological debt and, on some occasions, they don't go beyond the decarbonization of societies. In other

words, they don't question the productive model linked to agribusiness, like the soybean model.

6.

If we talk about the connection between Social Justice and Environmental Justice, we need to put on the agenda the topic about ecological debt.

There are several dimensions of the ecological debt that mark the asymmetries between the North and the South.

One, the historical use of environmental space by rich countries, responsible for the pollution, and for the acceleration of metabolic exchange between capital and nature.

Second, there is an unequal distribution of environmental conflicts. The most polluting activities are transferred to the global South where there are fewer environmental controls and greater labor flexibility.

Third, there is a link between external debt and ecological debt. The foreign debt in financial terms hides underpaid exports (since prices don't include various social and environmental costs, local and global) and environmental services provided free of charge.

Finally, there is another aspect of the relations between External Debt and Ecological Debt. From the South the obligation to pay the External Debt leads to a depredation of nature and more extractivism (and therefore increases the Ecological Debt).

So, due to the constant urgency of having to renegotiate the debt with multilateral organizations, Southern Countries have little chance to think about the eco-social transition.

7.

In the South we need to build post-extractivist economies and societies. We need a radical socio-ecological transition, we need to move away progressively from dependence on oil, coal and gas, mining, deforestation and large-scale monocrops/monocultures.

We need to shift to renewable energy systems that should be a decentralized, decommodified, and democratic energy system.

We have to prioritize food sovereignty. Latin America is the region with the highest levels of land concentration in the world. The dominant agribusiness model, which requires little labor, depends on agrochemicals, and destroys native forest and produces fodder for livestock, is increasingly questioned due to its concentration, unsustainability, and its impact on health. So, the priority must be to develop policies aimed at land redistribution, access to water, and a

sweeping reform of agrarian policies, moving away from industrial agriculture for export.

Peasants, indigenous people and family farmers produce 70 percent of the world's food, despite having only 25 percent of the land. In contrast, agribusiness companies own 75 percent of the land, but only produce 25 percent of the food. So, it's not impossible. For example, agroecology is developing in almost all the countries of the region.

However, there are other obstacles. In the peripheral capitalistic countries, governments have sought to oppose the social and the economic issues with the environmental demands. Even the left continues to have a hegemonic vision of development.

There is nothing that bothers more the national political and economic elites than having to open the agenda of public discussion to socio-environmental demands. At this point, these demands are usually treated as obstacles to "development" and economic growth, or minimized in the name of political realism, of the prevailing social needs and/or the promises associated with the technological solutions.

This reveals an epistemic blindness from the economic and political elites, global and national, linked to a certain vision of development, indefinite economic growth, and progress, responsible for the current situation of socioenvironmental catastrophe.

For example, in South America, conservative, neoliberal, and left governments set out to justify neo-extractivism and environmental depredation in the name of development. Leftist governments or progressive governments pointed out on the reduction of inequalities.

But today we know that an important part of the economic growth that occurred in Latin America during the commodities boom, between 2002 and 2015, was captured by the richest sectors of society. Even today many governments oppose the social to the environmental issues, as if there were a contradiction, dismissing the fact that those who suffer the most environmental damage are the most vulnerable sectors, because they live in areas exposed to highly polluting sources, and lack the necessary economic and human means to face the consequences of neo-extractivism and the impacts of climate change (floods, droughts, storms).

Let me remind you that in the USA, the first Environmental Justice Movement was born in the poorest African American neighborhoods. They had denounced environmental racism. In Southern countries, the first environmentalisms defended their living conditions against the pollution or rather, against the naturalization of pollution. It was called popular environmentalisms.

Now, in LA we find a great diversity of socio-environmental networks and movements, which include from indigenous peoples and peasants, to collectives and assemblies against open-pit mining, against fracking, against deforestation and the impacts of agrochemicals, against mega-dams, among others. New forms of popular environmentalism that defends land and territory, water and the web of life, with other valuation languages, relational links with nature.

Let me comment that it's important to add that a large part of the social and human sciences, whether out of indifference, comfort, or denial, has been turning its back on socioenvironmental problems, which remain confined to some "niches" (political ecology, sociology of social movements, critical geography, environmental history, among others) or only reserved for specialists in the natural sciences or earth sciences.

It happens that the environmental crisis implies lifting the veil on the models of appropriation, production, consumption, and waste that we all reproduce. And there are many people who prefer not to leave their comfort zone.

8.

The pandemic put the care paradigm on the agenda, revealing that this is the keystone for building a resilient and democratic society.

We need to transform the relationship between Society and Nature, we need to overcome the dualistic and anthropocentric paradigm, to replace it with a relational paradigm that places interdependence and care at the center. One of the great contributions of ecofeminisms, southern ecoterritorial feminisms who fight against neo-extractivism together with indigenous peoples, is the recognition of other languages of valuation, other possible links between society and nature, which place the care and sustainability of life at the center.

The pandemic made visible the importance of care, in its multiple dimensions. On the one hand, we talk in terms of caring for territories, life cycles, and ecosystems. On the one hand, we talk about care as a right. We have to think about policies, through comprehensive care system, in order to reduce the gender gap.

Thus, in times of Covid we witnessed a true explosion of workshops and conversations in the Latin American region on care, led by different women leaders, activists, and organizations.

We have to understand care is one of the keys for the post-pandemic recovery.

9.

We need to define what we understand by just transition, especially today, when many people and governments on the global North talk about the energy transition. We need to have a geopolitical vision of the eco-social transition

Let me illustrate this point with the Aerocene-Pacha experience. We know that when art is made with talent and passion, it can open up a portal that allows us to glimpse into other worlds. This reveals the importance of art as a gateway to expand horizons, in these times of climate crisis and lack of political imagination. That's what happened in the Salinas Grandes, in Jujuy, in January 2020, before the pandemic.

The flight with the Aerocene Pacha Project, led by Tomás Saraceno, that involves a cosmopolitan community of young people, was able to build bridges between very different worlds, especially with the indigenous world, relying on dialogue, learning, and confidence building, in the magnificent setting of the Salinas Grandes, where so many blind spots and conflicts are expressed today.

Aerocene Pacha as an artistic and cosmological project transmitting two very powerful messages, one local and one global. The first message is that of the indigenous communities, who inhabit the salt flats and oppose the extraction of lithium, which consumes unsustainable amounts of water and thus threatens an ecosystem that is already arid. These communities are not only defined by their resistance to lithium mining; they also defend other ways of conceiving the territory, which rely on care, based on a holistic vision of the relationship between human beings and nature. The slogan "water and life are worth more than lithium," as could be seen written on the aerosolar balloon, is a world vision itself.

The second message, the global one, is a message to all humanity about the possibility of thinking of social alternatives that do not attack the very web of life. This message points to women and the ecological struggle as our great protagonists. It was a woman, pilot Leticia Marquez, who rose into the air and piloted the balloon that set a world record, without the help of fossil fuels, without lithium, without helium, only with the air of the white salt flats, heated only by the sun.

I guess many of you think that two messages are contradictory. That is not possible to say "no to the extraction of lithium," while at the same time proposing a transition to a society free of fossil fuels, based only on clean and renewable energies.

On the contrary. We need to problematize the issue. It is undeniable that lithium batteries (which are in all of our cell phones, computers, and which also serve to power electric cars), have an important role in the energy transition. But there is no single path, and the one being adopted by South America is wrong.

We cannot simply jump onto the wagon of an unsustainable transition, such as the one proposed in the Atacama salt flats, associated with transnational corporations, based on the trampling on native communities and supposedly leading to a “clean” energy model, but which reproduces the colonialist domination over nature and populations. That would be to endorse a false solution.

Faced with the scenario of dispossession and extraction it is well worth asking what kind of energy transition we are thinking about.

In fact, we are facing a kind of transition that consolidates a corporate and market energy model, and will benefit the central countries, the richest countries, at the expense of the territories and populations of the South.

On the other hand, the post-fossil transition is not an excuse for continuing to maintain consumption patterns that are openly unsustainable. It is necessary to reduce the consumption of matter and energy; and advance towards public and shared mobility models, so that they become truly sustainable.

We must change the metabolic profile of our societies, in order to set up a resilient society, not to destroy life. But in addition, the transition must be fair, both from a social and environmental and geopolitical point of view.

The socio-ecological transition is a larger horizon that should serve to ask ourselves more radical questions about what kind of Anthropocene we want to live.

10.

We live in a world of the global super-rich, on a planet that is ecologically collapsing. If we fail to articulate social justice with environmental justice, we will most likely accelerate ecological collapse and widening inequalities.

We have to recover the political imagination, the dimension of this extraordinary crisis, like a portal of transformation, in order to produce a cognitive liberation.

We should fight against the dystopic narratives, that paralyze political imagination. Art itself is often conceived as a portal to other worlds, other possible futures. Art as a portal acquires a new meaning in a context of closure of emancipatory political languages.



“Fly with Aerocene Pacha. A project by Tomàs Saraceno for Aerocene Foundation as part of CONNECT, BTS, curated by Daehyung Lee.” Photos: Studio Tomás Saraceno.

But while art in itself cannot provide answers to the socio-ecological crisis, it can promote a dialogue in terms not only of Anthropocene but also of the Eco-social Transition.

We have to create new alliances, to activate political imagination and demand these reforms, mobilize from below, to contribute to cultural and political consensus. It's not enough to support the local experiences now. We need to build bridges in order to create global and national programs of transition, but just or fair transition.

There is a wide space of climate justice in the South: indigenous peoples, socio-ecoterritorial movements, ecoterritorial feminisms. And there is a powerful narrative on ecological problems. We should add, after Greta Thunberg's global appeal in 2019, the involvement of the younger generations for climate justice. The prominence of young people at COP 26, in Glasgow, is crucial in relation to climate justice and its geopolitical consequences.

We know that there are no pure transitions, that the path will not be linear. There is no manual, with ready-made questions and answers. But there is a road map, a compass, which helps us to differentiate between corporate and market transitions, and those popular and fair transitions. The ecopolitical narratives that place life at the center fulfill this guiding role: Good Living, Rights of Nature, Paradigm of Care, Interconnection with Nature, Social and Environmental Justice, Agroecology and Food Sovereignty.



"Fly with Aerocene Pacha. A project by Tomás Saraceno for Aerocene Foundation as part of CONNECT, BTS, curated by Daehyung Lee." Photos: Studio Tomás Saraceno.

WORKSHOP CONCLUSIONS

DAY 1 by Daniel Muzyczuk, Head of Modern Art Department, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, Poland.

How can museums become spaces for recognizing diversity?

Many delegates found the case study given earlier during the sessions by Hilke Wagner from Albertinum in Dresden inspiring. She presented a perspective in which antagonisms in a polarized society can be used to invite different audiences to discuss the functioning of a museum. Art institutions would like to see themselves as social actors who are successful in the struggle against xenophobia. However, as the role of contemporary art is marginalized, they need to constantly reevaluate their agency and the methods employed in thinking diversity. Museums need to reevaluate their organizational structure. The expansion of museum activities to areas of social concern has to start from the inside, with the creation of a healthy work environment, on both physical and psychological levels. It is crucial to reformulate the structure into a more horizontal one where more decision making, agency, and responsibility is being shared. The idea of empowering the education teams was shared by many.

Moreover, the protocols, the way of taking care of the people inside the museum, as well as the museum's ecosystem, should be reshaped together with the community. The programs could become more inclusive and diverse. The language can always be more accessible. A diverse museum is also speaking multiple languages and using different vocabularies. The dialogue with local communities does not mean that the institution needs to lower the level. There are different levels of criticality that can be employed. In order to keep the museum diverse, it is also crucial to keep the admission fee as low as possible and to admit whole groups (for example underage people) for no charge at all. Some of the delegates also proposed leaving part of the building as a free admission area that could function as a public space for congregating and discussions. The role of the collection and the permanent display was

also raised. Many saw the importance of using the holdings as toolboxes that can address different problems that are currently crucial for different audiences.

DAY 2 by Malgorzata Ludwisiak, Chief Curator, Department of Modern Art, National Museum in Gdansk, Poland.

Many museum directors have started a process of inner discussion with their teams on how their institutions should relate to climate emergency issues on a practical level, such as: reducing printed documents, recycling (exhibition display elements included), reconsidering travel plans and budgets, etc. Some museums can afford commissioning audits by specialists or companies to professionalize their strategies in terms of organizational or structural changes that reduce their carbon footprint.

Only a few museums have already elaborated their internal policies, standards, and regulations in terms of climate responsible practices.

Some museums respond to climate issues on the level of programing (exhibitions, public programs, publications) or are considering doing so.

Some workshop participants were inspired by the discussions and declared that, on returning to their institutions, they would initiate debates on the issue of museums and climate responsibility.

Some colleagues, especially those coming from cultural and geographical contexts outside European, argued that there is other issue in their countries that are more relevant and present in museum debates than the climate emergency (e.g., identity, political crises, or historical and racial justice).

COLOPHON

UNDER PRESSURE.
MUSEUMS IN TIMES
OF XENOPHOBIA
AND CLIMATE EMERGENCY

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