



September 2022

From Extractivism to Adjacency. A Research Manifesto

Margarita Palacios

Birkbeck, University of London, m.palacios@bbk.ac.uk

Anette Baldauf

Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, A.Baldauf@akbild.ac.at

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/emancipations>



Part of the Art Practice Commons, Other Arts and Humanities Commons, Other Sociology Commons, Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons, and the Theory, Knowledge and Science Commons

Recommended Citation

Palacios, Margarita and Baldauf, Anette (2022) "From Extractivism to Adjacency. A Research Manifesto," *Emancipations: A Journal of Critical Social Analysis*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/emancipations/vol2/iss1/9>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Junction. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Emancipations: A Journal of Critical Social Analysis* by an authorized editor of Scholars Junction. For more information, please contact scholcomm@msstate.libanswers.com.

Prelude

This is you and beyond you. After and with the consequences of fracking past peak oil. After and with the defunding of the humanities. After and with the removal of people of color from the cities they built.

-- Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *The M. Archive. After the End of the World* (2018)

This research manifesto was inspired by the recognition that the multiple crises that now surround us meet in an epistemology of extractivism. We observe the continuous crisis of higher education, particularly in relation to its need to decolonize the academic institution and to close the racialized attainment gap experienced by students and faculty. Although relevant initiatives have been put in place, most predominantly in the so called “diversification of the curriculum”, these initiatives still remain within the confines of what Gloria Wekker poignantly calls “white innocence.” Wekker understands the term “white innocence” as an intervention; it names an unnamed status that itself is the effect of domination. Whiteness, thereby, is not understood as a biological fact but instead a political and cultural ontology birthed by hundreds of years of imperial rule. It describes a particular “being in the world” that relies on “not-knowing, but also not wanting to know” the violence of colonialism and its pervasive effect on everyday life (Wekker 2016, 17).

For us, the lack of any substantive transformational agenda and what could be perceived as a profound complicity of academia with a “racialized status quo” is not just a result of conservative ideological commitments. Instead, it also derives from deeply sedimented research cultures and practices that, even if liberal and progressive in their aims, fail to address what lies at the heart of colonial epistemic legacies. The fact is, in the majority of academic settings the matrix of accumulated knowledge, affect and aesthetics that inform racialized epistemic dualisms separating subject and object, nature and culture, human and nonhuman, life and nonlife, white and brown/black, etc. remains largely unchallenged and at the centre of the multiple global crisis, including environmental degradation. Confronting white innocence and these epistemic dualisms has only become more urgent in the last few years as it has become simply impossible to ignore the ecological, social and

political predicament that this epistemology (and its disavowal) produces and perpetuates.

The term “white innocence” accurately describes and critiques this pernicious dynamic of glossing over and disavowing of the reproduction of racism within liberal initiatives. It helps us to understand what Wekker calls the paradoxes of race and colonialism, including that of climate colonialism (Chakrabarty 2012, Liboiron 2021, Sharpe 2016, Vergès 2017, Yusoff 2018). In the context of average (liberal) research environments, this means that neither whiteness nor knowledge production are destabilized or transformed. In our view the decolonial effort within academic settings should be redirected to the very heart of these racialized research practices and cultures that seamlessly and simultaneously reproduce whiteness and its epistemic dualism.

The heart of the problem lies in the very practice and epistemology of extractivism as it accurately expresses the racialized logic underpinning the colonial matrix of power that academic institutions have been (particularly in the context of the expansive Black Lives Matter movements) asked to confront and change. We (a white European and a brown South American woman) trained in a leading institution of critical theory in New York and now working at Western European universities, cannot but situate our research in a zone of “discomfort”. We see our own personal and academic investments and even participation in various forms of extractivism in teaching and research. However, we can also recognize the failure of what we describe as white innocent attempts to produce meaningful changes with regards to the racialized status quo, the continuous objectification of our non-human environment and the prolongation of climate colonialism. We write from this place of multiple interstices and attachments, aware that any change in the production of knowledge requires an undoing of those (racialized) attachments. This essay attempts to contribute to the production of transformational frameworks, where we don’t only “do” things otherwise, but also become others-to-ourselves while doing them.

Engaging with the most challenging critics of extractivism and scrutinizing different research settings, we put forward a productive umbrella concept: the concept of adjacency. One can ask pertinently, if we need another word in a what seems to be saturated vocabulary within critical theories. Our answer is yes,

because the concept of adjacency and its emphasis on materiality forces us to interweave what we recognize as fragmented specialisms of area studies. More concretely, the emphasis on materiality demands a confrontation with one of the most striking shortcomings of critical theory, mainly its failure to properly dwell in the interconnectedness of epistemology, practice and affect. For us, the concept of adjacency prepares the grounds for a (transformational) departure point for any decolonial intervention into colonial capitalism and the imminent climate crisis. We see the tradition of Marxism heralding the critique of extractivism; in our view this critique becomes fruitful only in conversation with materialism, feminism and decolonality. Although what follows is mostly centered around a reflection about academic and to some degree artistic practices, we believe that rethinking our being in the world, or literally the possibility of survival, requires a radical shift away from extractivism and an acceptance of the mutual dependency and entanglement of all beings. In other words, a move towards adjacency.

What follows is organized in three parts. In the first one, we engage with critics of extractivism and white innocence. Second, we elaborate on the relationship between extractivism and methodology, and third, we reflect on the conditions of an aesthetics of adjacency. What we have learnt in our conversations with academics and artists is that although we live within an extractivist framework, we also always dwell in the logics that exceed it. It is from learning with what we will call the 'excess of proximity' that we can explore alternative non-extractivist horizons and logics of knowledge production.

White Innocence and Epistemic Dualism

Let's start with the end of the world, why don't we?

-- N.K. Jemesin, *The Firth Season* (2015)

Extractivism was, and continues to be, one of the main concerns within Marxist and postMarxist writing in its critique of capitalism, colonialism and the climate crisis. Attending to the issues laid out above, we are embracing Marx's recognition of the violence inscribed in extractivism in general and primitive accumulation in particular (Marx 1992). However, extractivism encompasses a

complex set of epistemological conceptions, practices and affects that cross and inform our entangled being in the world, and therefore a fresh engagement with different critical traditions becomes of utmost importance to rethink class struggle, solidarity and even intersectionality. As the Latin word “extrahere”, meaning “to pull out”, conveys, a relation of extraction is based on a dichotomic epistemology that grants agency and accumulation to the subject which extracts, and passivity and dispossession to the object, which is extracted. The epistemology and power relations, which produce accumulation and property on the side of granted agency and dispossession and fungibility on the side of expected passivity, has been widely critiqued in recent years from different perspectives. To us, it is this same (capitalist) extractive logic that informs research and knowledge production more broadly. Accordingly, we engage with critical approaches that focus on the power exercised over (racialized) subjects, bodies, research objects and landscapes as well as those that stress the way power is always contested or embedded in wider frameworks of disobedience, refusal and fugitivity. It is precisely in this space of excess that we locate transformative potential.

Critiques of extractivism range from the perspective of classic political economy analysis and its emphasis on primitive accumulation, enclosure and accumulation through dispossession as well as financial flows of the capitalist economy (Harvey 2003, Sassen 2014, Mazzadro and Nielson 2013). Gender sensitive analyses bring to light how extraction has always also involved the appropriation of feminized and sexualized bodies and their reproductive labor (Federici 2004, Baldauf 2010, Gomez-Barris 2017); and various black studies accounts have investigated the racial knowledges that underpin the process of extractivism (Chakravarty and Ferreira da Silva 2012, Ferreira da Silva 2017 and 2022). Indigenous approaches have focused on the theft of resources, land/control grabbing and forced removal from indigenous and afro-descent territories, while at the same time also trying to preserve and theorize alternative cosmologies (Moreton-Robinson 2015, Coulthard 2014, Tuck 2008 and 2012, Simpson 2014, Taiaiake 2005, Todd 2016, Whyte 2018, Liboiron 2021). Furthermore, these accounts are complemented by onto-epistemic and psychosocial reflections that focus on the ambivalent and tenuous processes of subjection that constitute subjectivity in the context of dispossession and violence (Athanasίου and Butler 2013, Bhandar and

Bhandar 2016, Palacios 2014 and 2016).

A vast amount of literature in the fields of queer and feminist new-materialism has extended these debates by emphasizing the agency of non-human things while asserting the need for a new ethics (Braidotti 2006, Barad 2007 and 2012, Benso 2000, Bennett 2010, Palacios 2019, Sundberg 2008 and 2015). Approaches that attend to wider ecological concerns about the climate crisis, the extinction of species and interspecies co-existence are the key companions in this project (Haraway 2008 and 2016, Yusoff 2018, Bellacasa 2017, Kimmerer 2013, TallBear 2017, Povinelli 2015, Baldy 2014). These interventions allow us to deconstruct the triangle “humanity, animality and object” that is at the core of any decolonial endeavor. This allows us to see the racialized configuration, as it is the very distinction white/black that already embodies this dualistic epistemology: whiteness (the privileged site of agency, intentionality and humanity) is born out of the colonial encounter with brown and black bodies in their lack of those “human” attributes (Mbembe, 2017, Moten 2003, Musser 2019, Weheliye 2014, Warren 2017, Gumbs 2020). In this way, some refer to the notion of “possessive subjectivity” to describe the enlightenment ideal, where freedom and possession (or being and having) are deemed as mutually constitutive and always already dependent on the dispossessed and extractable matter (Bhandar and Bhandar 2016, Hartman 1997, Patterson 2008, Chakravartty and Ferreira da Silva 2012, Moreton-Robinson 2015).

The work of Gloria Wekker allows us to look at yet another aspect of the extractivist logic of white innocence: it is not just a reservoir of accumulated knowledge but also “a binding structure of affect” (Wekker 2016, 2). Wekker tracks how in the context of the Netherlands’ colonial history, “persistently, an innocent, fragile, emancipated white Dutch self is constructed versus a guilty, uncivilized, barbaric other.” (Wekker 2004, 493). This affective dimension that accompanies (racialized) knowledge and racism has been at the core of postcolonial theory. Notions such as the fetish, anxiety, melancholia, brown jouissance, desire and pornotroping have described different affective moods that characterize the racial (mis)encounter (DuBois 1986, Fanon 1963, Bhabha 1994, Khanna 2003, Musser 2019, Ahmed 2000, Palacios 2013, 2020). With regards to this affective dimension, black theorists have mobilized relational notions such as refusal and desire to offer figures of existence of black bodies outside of systems of racialization, and black

feminists have stressed the relevance of experiences such as care, jouissance or the erotics to focus on the materiality of bodies and the enjoyment that exceeds the objectifying operation of racism (Musser 2019, Sharpe 2017, Lewis 2017, Lorde 1984). Somewhere at the intersection of ecofeminism, sexuality studies and performance art, Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephans celebrate the ecosexual position of the Earth as Lover, a playful critique of the identification of Earth as Mother (Sprinkle and Stephans 2021).

These conceptualizations of alternative epistemological frameworks, practices and affects hint towards the experience of excess and proximity, or what lies beyond the extractive encounter. This beyond is what we call adjacency.

Extractivism and Research Practices

The opposite of dispossession is not possession. It is not accumulation, it is not forgetting. It is mattering.

-- Angie Morrill, Eve Tuck, Super Futures Haunt Collective (2016)

The complicity of the history of Western academia with the project of empire has been well documented by problematizing notions of the human and rationality (Bhambra 2007, 2021; Spivak 1990, Mbembe, 2017). However, it has always also hosted what Harney and Moten called “undercommons” that arise in resistance to unjust policy (Harney and Moten 2013, 109). In this sense, we agree with Harney and Moten when they point out that the war on subsistence waged on indigenous communities and their ownership of land and resources is also waged on academic communities and their means to make sense of the world (Harney and Moten 2013). It is crucial to reaffirm that we are not referring here solely to the “content” of accumulated racist/colonial legacies of othering, or to use Said’s word, of “orientalizing” (Said 1994). We are specifically referring to the dualistic logic that lies at the core of the distinction between the “subject” (researcher, active, being, extractor, having, male, white) and the “object” (research object, passive, non-being, extracted, not having, feminized, brown and black) that inevitably reproduces and thrives off the dynamics that we have described above.

Influential twentieth century philosophical traditions have certainly questioned dualisms (or in the language of philosophy “metaphysics”), and there is a long and important tradition of what can be called “critical epistemologies” (from pragmatism and post-structuralism to deconstruction; from Marxism, post-Marxism to phenomenology and existential phenomenology, among others). Now, interestingly, if black, postcolonial, feminist, queer and decolonial studies in their poignant critical approaches have succeeded in their various interventions to create a decolonizing agenda, it has been only recently that social research methodology has been recognized in need of similar destabilization. For example, in 2005, Norman K. Denzin and Yovanna S. Lincoln criticized the legacy of positivism reproduced in sociology’s main account on methodology; they argued that “(t)he logical positivists have steered the social sciences on a rigorous course of self-destruction” (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 13). According to their account, a “double faced ghost” was haunting the field: the premise of a researcher, who can, with objectivity, clarity and precision, report on his/her own observation in the social world and that of a subject, or individual, who is present in the world and able to report on his or her experiences in the world (Denzin and Lincoln 2018, 53). George Steinmetz calls the consolidation of methodological positivism the “epistemological unconscious” of America’s postwar sociology because it is generally recognized, but not necessarily appreciated, by the actors of the field as the rule of the game (Steinmetz 2005). We want to radicalize Steinmetz’s diagnosis and, following the critical and interdisciplinary framework laid out above, extend it into the legacy of extractivism in order to move past white innocence.

The persisting disjuncture between critical theories and epistemic practices is related to a suspicious and very well protected division of labor still organizing research. A quick survey of the syllabi of methodology classes currently offered at some of the leading sociology departments, for example, suggests that independently of how ‘theoretically and critically driven’ these departments are, methodology is still largely taught in terms of methods, that is, techniques on how to access, count, document, survey, interview, map, observe and archive data in the so-called field. At the same time, there seems to be a disdain of the so-called ‘theorists’ to engage with questions of methodology (or to put it differently, as if the writing of theory could happen outside the concerns of methodology). This division of

labor, as it is reflected in current manifestation of syllabi, reproduces the dualism of what is considered theoretical and what is considered empirical. Furthermore, it leaves questions about knowledge production and in consequence, extractivism and racialization, largely untouched. The disavowal of this space in-between allows for the racialized matrix to reproduce itself without intervention. To us, this condition is an apparent symptom of white innocence as Wekker defines it.

The radical consequences of this disjuncture were most prominently expressed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who recalled that “(t)he word itself, ‘research’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary,” reminding scholars of how deeply implicated social sciences have been in their collaboration with racist epistemologies and methodologies (Smith 1999, 1.) Indeed, to account for the epistemic violence of dualisms that currently guides research, indigenous scholars put forth a call to “refuse research.” As Audra Simpson pointed out, this refusal is not an act of saying “no” so much as an investigation into “what you need to know and what I refuse to write in” (Simpson 2007, 72).

Learning from these accounts, we understand methodology as a search for “new ethical practices of thinking”, that is, a reflection on how we frame our engagement in the world and how we become subjects who imagine and enact new futures (Gibson-Graham 2006, xxviii). Putting the finger on the disavowed space of innocence and its implications on the way we relate to others, including non-human agents, we hope to destabilize the sedimented equilibrium of the status quo, and unsettle research positionalities and practices.

The Aesthetics of Adjacency

All that you Touch You Change. All that you Change, Changes You. The Only Lasting Truth is Change. God is Change.

-- Octavia Butler, *The Parable of the Sower* (1993)

The most interesting accounts of extractivism are those that engage with matter as they situate knowledge production as an embodied and embedded (we would say, ‘aesthetic’) practice. Engaging with matter allows us to delineate that field of experience that exists inside and also outside of extraction. In this context, the

other of racialized extraction has been named as fugitivity, extractive zones, as well as particular types of affective experiences that give account of “being with” in ways which exceed the violence of dualism (Moten and Harney 2013, Gomez-Barris 2017, Navaro 2017, Ettinger 2006). It is in this area of “excess” that fertile grounds for change are located. These accounts have taught us that when thinking with “vibrant matter” (Bennet, 2010), we move away from dualistic and metaphysical ideas of representation and the limits of discursive accounts of performativity and open up the multiple and generative field of material and affective diffraction (Barad 2007 and 2012, Haraway 2000). The concept of diffraction, inspired by Karen Barad and Donna Haraway, is particularly helpful here because it provides a means for and an effect of the encounter with difference that enables potential transformation (Barad 2012, Haraway 2000). Whereas a method/ology of reflection tends to displace the same elsewhere in a more or less distorted way, diffraction, as Haraway puts it, “can be a metaphor for another kind of critical consciousness” (Haraway 2000, 101). In her words, “Diffraction does not produce the same displaced, as reflection and refraction do. Diffraction is a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection or reproduction. A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the *effects* of differences appear” (Haraway 1992, 304).

Whereas Haraway looks at the realm of SF – science fiction, speculative futures, science fantasy, speculative fiction – to find something other than the same, we, in contrast, suggest to reevaluate the familiar: What is the communality of the affective and material approaches laid out above? For us it is a type of proximity, a touching and being touched – we call it adjacency. In many ways, our understanding of adjacency is inspired by the work of Tina Campt (2017, 2019). Campt connects relational ontology with postcolonial theory in an attempt to produce the aesthetic means of fostering the affective labor of proximity in the face of racial violence. Being in proximity to others, Campt argues, means being generally in a place of discomfort and, for some, potential complicity with black precarity; it is “the work required to cultivate, maintain, or articulate our relationship to black precarity” (Campt 2019, 26).

The project of adjacency highlights how matter, humans and non-humans are embedded in affective flows that express logics different from those that characterize the antagonistic relation that informs extraction. Here we consider three elements particularly important in our endeavor to frame adjacency. First, we cherish the

notion of contamination: such an account unsettles the sovereignty of the “I” of the researcher, the “it” of the research object, and “them” as the research audience. It situates all agents in a web of radical incompleteness composed of entangled, vulnerable, unstable “we’s”. One exemplary achievement of a transformation of the positionality of the researcher is Anna Tsing’s beautiful study on the worlds created around the Mazutaki mushroom in the United States, Japan, Canada, China, and Finland. In her book, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, she transforms the academic endeavor of sorting, dissecting and abstracting into an active engagement with “open-ended assemblages of entangled ways of life” (Tsing 2015, viii). Within a process of mutual contamination, Tsing argues, unpredictable and indeterminate encounters transform all agents within multiple entanglements. Second, we understand adjacency as related to the condition of vulnerability. Here we have in mind the main character in Octavia Butler’s book *Parable of the Sower* (Butler 1993): Laura suffers from hyperempathy, an inability to delimit and divert other people’s feelings. This radical empathy makes her a so-called sharer, feeling the pain of others, including the pain she inflicts on them. Like this sensitivity that connects Laura intimately to the pleasures and pains of others, we theorize adjacency to thrive on both the transformational processes of being always already open, and as such, affecting and being affected by others. Third, we are interested in the practice of making connections: Here we take inspiration from Alexis Pauline Gumbs’s inciting book, *Undrowned. Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals* (2020), where she approaches marine mammals not as an object of study but instead engages in a poetic and rigorous endeavor to reconnect with dissociated kin. Tracing the subjection to captivity, colonization, extinction and exhibition and at the same time practicing breathing and talking with mammals, the book, perceived as a manual, sets out means to challenge “the chokehold of racial gendered ableist capitalism” (Gumbs 2020, 4).

In search for inspiration and further experiences of these features of adjacency, we turn to the field of artistic practices. In the arts, we believe, we are able to learn from the unique interplay of material, affective and epistemic forces as they are played out in aesthetic language, often outside the confines of discourse or representation. In this sense, we get to know proximity as “excessive proximity”, as an affective quality that spills over. Octavia Butler beautifully captured this in the

famous quote: “All that you Touch You Change. All that you Change, Changes You. The Only Lasting Truth is Change. God is Change.” (Butler 1993, 28).

Building on the potential to affect and touch, artistic projects are far from “innocent” with regard to extractivism. It is not a coincidence that, for example, in recent years some artistic interventions that aimed at allyship to black precarity have provoked heated controversies about voyeurism, spectacle and the white gaze. These discussions have addressed the ideological, affective and libidinal dimensions that support what could be called aesthetic extractivism or, as Greg Tate puts it, “everything but the burden” (Tate 2003). One particularly instructive case of this was the debate and activism around Dana Schutz’s painting of Emmett Till entitled “Open Casket,” which was presented at the Whitney Biennale in 2017. The debate revolved around the different dimensions of whites’ spectacularization of black suffering and raised questions about the relationship between violence, intimacy and what Christina Sharpe called “being in the wake” (Sharpe quoted in Mitter 2017, Baldauf 2019; Palacios & Sheehi 2020). In our view, Schutz’s painting provided an instructive example of how a project that might have been intended as a statement of adjacency ends up reproducing extractivism based on an inability to displace innocence in favor of entanglement.

At the vicinities of this debate, we might place the genre identified by Nicolas Bourriaud in the 1990s as relational aesthetics. In opposition to an object-bound understanding of the arts, relational aesthetics aimed at producing temporary environments or events, in which participants could experience new and different kinds of encounters and what Bourriaud called “microtopias” (Bourriaud 2002, 13). As critics have pointed out, despite the progressive rhetoric of the emerging art genre, the majority of these accounts eventually were unable to challenge the extractivist relationship between the subject and the object and the assigned activity and passivity (Bishop 2012, Lepecky 2013). Failing to allow for the event’s choreographer to become fully embedded and emplaced within the web of entanglement, its “evangelist aesthetics” reaffirmed, rather than unsettled the divide between the reformer and the object-to-be-transformed or “converted” (Kester 1995). It was an engagement, we argue, in regulated and “contained” proximity.

In contrast, Tina Camp’s account of adjacency, developed in close dialogue with the video artist and cinematographer Arthur Jafa, allows for a different type of

experience: Jafa's two films, *Love is the Message, the Message is Death* (2016) and *White Album* (2019) have both been extensively discussed at the intersection of art and black studies. The two films both rely on a powerful montage of original and appropriated footage, photographs, sequences of video and music. Within this montage, *Love is the Message, the Message is Death* (2016) looks at black life in the context of anti-black violence, musically framed by Kanye West's grand, operatic anthem "Ultralight Beam." As Jafa puts it following John Akomfrah, "black methodology" is a methodology, where one "take(s) things and put(s) them in some sort of affective proximity to one another." (Jafa quoted in Malavassi 2020) Particularly in the case of the second film, *White Album* (2019), the disturbing space of visual proximity produced by this reassembling has the potential to disrupt the white gaze and its aspired empathy with the black subject. Jafa's proposed aesthetics of adjacency challenges the extractivist condition of innocence; it demands a non-extractivist (omnipotent and voyeuristic) affective positioning in relation to anti-black violence.

Whereas Arthur Jafa explores affective proximity and destabilizing the relationship with the audience by means of reassemblage, the work of the artist and photographer Zanele Muholi exemplifies the potentiality of abstraction: For example, "Phila I" (2016) is a digitally manipulated photograph, within which black and white contrasts are exaggerated, and the subject, surrounded and nearly absorbed by inflated, black gloves, looks directly at the camera and hence the viewer. In contrast to Jafa, Muholi's negotiation of proximity and distance follows a process of abstraction as disorientation. Muholi's account on the aesthetics of adjacency is one that requires the viewer to relate to the defamiliarized and refused, to somebody, who is "becoming other, while staying almost the same", as Renate Lorenz puts it (Lorenz 2019). Again, it is the task of the audiences to redefine their relationship to the other and the same.

The work of both Jafa and Muholi demonstrate that an aesthetics of adjacency refuses to manifest, represent and transpire a particular ideological message. Instead, we consider adjacency a kind of diffractive aesthetic relationality between bodies, objects and environments, that, because of its deep investment in affect, works far from the linear, consistent and even "truthful." We are thinking here of the powerful work of Otobong Nkanga, which has long explored the relationship

between humans and non-humans, matter and affect. Her installation “Tsumeb Fragments” (2015) combines six modular metallic structures, including found objects, images, photographs, videos and sound all of which work with different dimensions of the extraction of copper mines in Namibia, and the dramatic changes of the landscape under German colonization. In the video, Nkanga addresses the mountain as an agent; she calls out, conveys with a strong and vibrating voice, the indigenous names of the mountain’s elements, that is its minerals, before Namibia was called German South Africa, and the colonial regime started to engage in industrial mining. Nkanga’s politics of address, speaking to and with the human and non-human, provides a profound experimentation with the aesthetics of adjacency.

Many artists have explored precarious relationality within the tensions of form and abstraction, depth and surface, passivity and activity, legibility and opacity, cooperation and refusal, calling and haunting, high and low frequency, touch and retreat, sound and silence. Their relationship to the addressee is not one of conversion and fitting (to the same or the Other), but rather one that attempts to develop creative forms of relating within an actual encounter, taking into account the affective dimensions of conflict, care and contamination. In search for new modalities of being with, they blur the line between a dead and a living tiger (Ismailova 2017), conjure a mountain’s revenge on miners (Al Maria 2017) and give a testimony to the opossum’s playful resilience (Rincón Gallardo 2019); they suggest the use of creative pedagogical tools to imagine worlds blossoming from the ruins of dispossession (Ashagrie, Baldauf et al. 2021). To us, all of these endeavors provide inspiring constellations of how to further explore and confront the disavowed space between (critical) theory and epistemic practices, emphasizing the mobilization of the affective and aesthetic dimension of knowledge production.

Engaging with and learning from these accounts and from the experience of adjacency we continue to ask ourselves how a diffractive/affective/aesthetic understanding of being-with outside of extractivism can inform and unsettle our practices of knowledge production, the writing of the theory we love, and our commitment to various research ‘sites’. More specifically, how could adjacency and the power of proximity inform the blind-spot of white innocence? At this point, our manifesto is simply an attempt to formulate such questions as we imagine multiple, heterogeneous and challenging ways of answering them. Going back to the

beginning of this essay and the agenda of the decolonizing of the academic institution, we see this framework as laying out the conditions for a rich and urgent research agenda. Having said that, we find it pertinent to introduce our last theoretical caveat: although the relation of excessive proximity unsettles the dualism of the yes/no and the forced distancing between subject and object, it in no way implies the closing of the gap needed for meaning making and the flow of affect. That is, different from a unitary whole, or a space of coincidence of meaning and time, this is a space of multiplicity and heterogeneity with all the openings and struggles that such a space contains.

Bibliography

Literature

- Ashagrie, B., Baldauf A. et al. (2021) *Despite Dispossession. An Activity Book*. K. Verlag: Berlin.
- Ahmed, S. (2000), *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London Routledge.
- Baldauf, A. (2010), Betting the House, In: *Rethinking Marxism*, 22:2, 219-230, DOI: [10.1080/08935691003625323](https://doi.org/10.1080/08935691003625323)
- Baldauf, A. (2019), Doing Homework. Art Research and Ethics. In: Franz Thalmair (Ed.). *Kunstraum Lakeside — Recherche / Research*. Verlag für moderne Kunst: Vienna.
- Baldy, Cutcha Risling (2014), Coyote is Not a Metaphor: On decolonizing, (re)claiming and (re)naming 'Coyote'. In: *Decolonization, Indigeneity and Society* Vol. 4(1): <http://decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/view/22155>
- Bhabha, H. (1994), *The Location of Culture*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Bhabra, G. (2007), *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*. Palgrave MacMillan: Basingstoke, 2007.
- Bhabra, G. (2021) *Colonialism and Modern Social Theory*. Polity Press.
- Barad, K. (2007), *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Barad, K. (2012). Nature's Queer Performativity. In: *Kvinder, Køn og forskning*, No. 1-2, 25-53: https://www.academia.edu/1857572/Natures_Queer_Performativity_the_authorized_version_
- Bellacasa, M.P. (2017), *Matters of Care. Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis.
- Benso.(2000). *The Face of Things: A Different Side of Ethics*. Nueva York: Suny Press
- Bennett, J. (2010), *Vibrant Matter*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bhandar, B. & Bhandar D. (2016), Cultures of Dispossession: Rights, Status and Identities. In: *Reflections on Dispossession: Critical Feminism* Vol. 14, 1-16.
- Bishop, C. (2012), *Artificial Hells Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso.
- Bourriaud, N. (2002), *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Les Presses du réel.
- Braidotti, R. (2006) "Affirming the Affirmative: On Nomadic Affectivity", *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies and Emerging Knowledges*. Issue 11/12.
- Athanasidou, A. and Butler, J. (2013), *Dispossession. The Performative in the Political*. Malden, MA: Polity.
- Butler, O. (1993), *The Parable of the Sower*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows.
- Campt, T. (2017), *Listening to Images*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Campt, T. (2019), The Visual Frequency of Black Life: Love, Labor, and the Practice of Refusal. In: *Social Text* Vol. 37 (3), 25–46.
- Chakravarty, P., & Ferreira da Silva, D. (2012), Accumulation, Dispossession and Debt: The Racial Logic of Global Capitalism. In: *American Quarterly* 63, 361-385.
- Chakrabarty P. (2012), Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change. In: *New Literary History*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 1-18.
- Coulthard, G. S. (2014), *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Denzin, N.K., and Lincoln Y. S. (2005), Introduction. In: *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research 3*. London: Sage Publications Inc., 1–32.
- Denzin, N.K. (2008), IRBs and the turn to indigenous research ethics. In: *Advances in Program Evaluation* 12, 97-123.

- Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln Y. (2018), Introduction, *The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research*. In: *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research 5*. London: Sage Publications Inc., 29 – 70.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1986 /1903). *The Souls of Black Folk*. Penguin: New York.
- Ettinger, B. (2006) *The Matrixial Borderspace*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press
- Fanon, F. (1963), *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Federici, S. (2004), *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia.
- Ferreira da Silva D. (2017). "Unpayable Debt." In: *The Documenta 14 Reader*, ed. by Latimer Q. and Szymczyk A. (Eds), Munich and New York: Prestel Verlag.
- Ferreira da Silva D., (2022), *Unpayable Debt*. Sternberg. New York.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2006). *A Postcapitalist Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gomez-Barris M. (2017), *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives*. Duke University Press: Durham.
- Gumbs, A. P. (2018), *M.Archive: After the End of the World*. Duke University Press: Durham.
- Gumbs, A. P. (2020), *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals*. Oakland: AK Press.
- Haraway, D.J. (1992). The Promises of monsters: a regenerative politics for inappropriate/d others. In: Grossberg, L., Nelson, C., and Treicher, P.A., eds. *Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 295–337.
- Haraway, D. (2000), *Interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve, How Like a Leaf*. New York: Routledge.
- Haraway, D. (2008), *When Species Meet*. Univ. of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis.
- Haraway, D. (2016), *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Harney, S. and Moten, F. (2013). *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*. Wivenhoe; New York / Port Watson: Minor Compositions.
- Hartman, S. (1997), *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, D. (2003), *New Imperialism*. Oxford Press: New York.

- Jemisin, K. N. (2015), *The Fifth Season*. NY: Little, Brown Book Group.
- Khanna, R. (2003), *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*. Durham: Duke University Press
- Kester, G. (1995). Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Art. In: *Afterimage* 22 (6), 5–11.
- Kimmerer, R.W. (2013). *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis: Milkweed.
- Lepecki, A. (2013). From Partaking to Initiating. Leading following as Dance's (a-personal) Political Singularity. In: Hölscher S. and Siegmund G. (Eds.), *Dance, Politics and Co-immunity*. Zurich: Diaphanes, 21–38.
- Lewis, G. 2017, "Questions of Presence", *Feminist Review*, Issue 117.
- Liboiron Max (2021), *Pollution is Colonialism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Lorde, A. (1984), The Uses of the Erotic. The Erotic as Power. In: Lorde, A., *Sister Outsider*. The Crossing Press: Berkeley.
- Lorenz R. (2019), Transing Abstraction - from object to object*. Talk at the University Zurich.
- Marx, K. (1992), The Secret of Primitive Accumulation. In: *Capital, Vol. 1: A Critique of Political Economy* (translated by Ben Fowkes). Penguin Books.
- Malavassi P. (2020), Arthur Jafa. Face It: The "Affective Proximity" of Imagery. In: *Flashart* # 329 (Feb. – March 2020) @ <https://flash---art.com/article/arthur-jafa-face-it-the-affective-proximity-of-imagery/>
- Mbembe, A. (2017), *Critique of Black Reason*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Mezzadra, S. and Neilson, B. (2013), *Border as Method, or, The Multiplication of Labor*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.
- Mitter S. (2017), „What Does It Mean to Be Black and Look at This?' A Scholar Reflects on the Dana Schutz Controversy". In: *Hyperallergic*, 24. März 2017: <https://hyperallergic.com/368012/what-does-it-mean-to-be-black-and-look-at-this-a-scholar-reflects-on-the-dana-schutz-controversy>.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2015), *The White Possessive. Property, Power and Indigenous Sovereignty*. Minnesota. University of Minnesota Press.
- Morrill, A., Tuck, E., Super Futures Haunt Collective. (2016), Before Dispossession, Or Surviving It. In: *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies* Vol. 12 (1).

- Moten, F. (2003), *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis.
- Muñoz, J.-E. (2009), *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurit*. New York: New York University Press.
- Musser, A.J. (2019), *Sensual Excess: Queer Femininity and Brown Jouissance*. New York: New York University Press.
- Navaro, Y. (2017), Diversifying Affect. In: *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 32 (2), 209-214.
- Palacios, M. (2013), *Radical Sociality: On Disobedience, Violence and Belonging*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Palacios, M. (2014), Between Fantasy and Melancholia: Lack, Otherness and Violence. In: *Nationalism and the Body Politic*, ed. by L. Auestad. London: Karnac Books.
- Palacios, M. (2016), Decolonizing trauma and the ethics of anxious witnessing. In: *Shared Traumas: Silent Loss, Public and Private Mourning*, ed. by L. Auestad. London: Karnac Books.
- Palacios, M. (2019), The Aesthetics of Memory: Ruins, Visibility and Witnessing. In: *The Sociological Review* Vol. 67 (3), 602–620.
- Palacios, M. (2020), Becoming the People: A Critique of Populist Aesthetics of Homogeneity. In: *Theory & Event*, Vol. 23 (3), 787-809.
- Palacios, Margarita and Sheehi, S.(2020) Vaporizing white innocence: confronting the affective-aesthetic matrix of desiring witnessing. *Subjectivity* 13 , pp. 281-297. ISSN [1755-6341](https://doi.org/10.1080/17556341.2020.1811111)
- Patterson, O. (2008), Freedom, Slavery, and the Modern Construction of Rights. In: Joas, H., Wiegandt, K., *The Cultural Values of Europe*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 115 - 151.
- Povinelli, E. (2015), The Fossil and the Bones. In: *Geontologies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 57-91.
- Said, E. W. (1994), *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Sassen, S. (2014), *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Sharpe, Ch. (2017), *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Mitter, S. (2017), „What Does It Mean to Be Black and Look at This?’ A Scholar Reflects on the Dana Schutz Controversy“. In: *Hyperallergic*, März 24, 2017, <https://hyperallergic.com/368012/what-does-it-mean-to-be-black-and-look-at-this-a-scholar-reflects-on-the-dana-schutz-controversy>.
- Simpson, A. (2007), On ethnographic refusal: Indigeneity, “voice,” and colonial citizenship. In: *Junctures* 9, 67–80.
- Simpson, L. (2014), Land as pedagogy: Nishnaabeg intelligence and rebellious transformation. Decolonization. In: *Indigeneity, Education and Society* 3 (3), 1-25.
- Smith, L. T. (1999), *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York: University of Otago Press.
- Spivak, G., *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, Routledge: New York 1990.
- Sprinkle, A. and Stephens, B. with Klein, J. (2021), *Assuming the Ecosexual Position: The Earth as Lover*. University of Minnesota Press. Reprinted by permission.
- Steinmetz G. (2005), Positivism and its others in the social sciences. In: Steinmetz, G. (Ed.), *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences: Positivism and Its Epistemological Others*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1–56.
- Sundberg, J. (2008), Placing Race in Environmental Justice Research in Latin America. In: *Society and Natural Resources* Vol. 21, 569-582.
- Sundberg, J. (2015), Ethics, Entanglement, and Political Ecology. In: Perreault Tom et al. (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*. New York: Routledge, 117-127.
- Taiaiake, A. G. (2005), *Wasáse. Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press.
- TallBear, K. (2017). Beyond the life/not-life binary: A feminist-Indigenous reading of cryopreservation, interspecies thinking, and the new materialisms. In: Joanna Radin and Emma Kowal (Eds.), *Cryopolitics: Frozen Life in a Melting Word*. Cambridge: MIT Press
- Tate, G. (2003), *Everything but the Burden: What White People are Taking from Black Culture*. Broadway Books: New York.

- Todd, Z. (2016) "An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just Another Word For Colonialism." *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 29 (1), 4–22. *Wiley Online Library*, doi:10.1111/johs.12124
- Tsing, A. (2015), *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton: University Press.
- Tuck, E. (2008), Theorizing back: An approach to participatory policy analysis. In: J. Anyon, M. Dumas, D. Linville, K. Nolan, M. Perez, E. Tuck, & J. Weiss (Eds.), *Theory and Educational Research: Toward a Critical Social Explanation*. New York: Routledge, 111–130.
- Tuck, E., Yang, W. (2012), Decolonization is Not a Metaphor. In: *Decolonization. Indigeneity, Education & Society* Vol. 1 (1), 1-40.
- Vergès, F. (2017), Racial Capitalocene. In: Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (eds.), *Futures of Black Radicalism*. London: Verso.
- Weheliye, A. (2014), *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham: Duke University Press
- Warren, C. (2017), Black Care. In: *Liquid Blackness* Vol. 3 (6), 36–47.
- Wekker, G. (2004), Still Crazy After all those Years. In: *European Journal of Women's Studies* (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), Vol. 11 (4), 487–500;
DOI: 10.1177/1350506804046822
- Wekker, G. (2016), *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Whyte, K (2018), Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice. In: *Environment & Society* 9 (1), 125-144.
- Yusoff, K. (2018), *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2018.

Art works

- Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens, *Water Makes You Wet* (2014).
- Dana Schutz, *Open Casket* (2017).
- Jafa Arthur, *Love is the Message, The Message is Death* (2017).
- Jafa Arthur, *White Album*
- Otobong Nkanga, *Tsumeb Fragments* (2015).

Rincón Gallardo Naomi, *Opossum Resilience* (2019).

Saodat Ismailova, *The Haunted* (2017).

Sophia Al Maria, *The Magical State* (2017).

Zanele Muholi, *Phila I* (2016).