Overcoming the State of Oblivion

Decolonial Approaches within Engaged Art Practices

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Philosophy and Art History

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October 2019

To Bolo, my mentor and source of inspiration

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Abstract

This research project focuses on tracking artistic responses to social, ecological, and economic sustainability, as well as social responses to artistic movements that go beyond turning art into a commodity in service of a neoliberal agenda. In this doctoral thesis, I provide a critical analysis of contemporary politically engaged art projects that claim to challenge dominant models of world-building and present alternative forms of living through the use of decolonial methodologies and political ecology approaches. In particular, I examine 'alter-institutional practice' in order to comprehend the role art plays in the search for social justice, political horizontality and autonomous forms of organising. This thesis draws a comparative analysis of three case studies—Campus in Camps, Institute for Human Activities and World of Matter—and interrogates if these alter-institutional initiatives can provide a platform where 'spaces of hope' can be stimulated and nurtured. Touching upon aspects of decolonial critique, I argue that alter-institutional projects use failure as a prolific tool to create 'spaces of hope' which can in turn lead to the development of autonomous forms of living and just world-building practices.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely thankful with my supervisor, Dr Michael Tymkiw for his invaluable guidance and support throughout my PhD studies. His heartening support and generosity facilitated and improved my research enormously.

I also want to extend my deepest gratitude to my friends and peers David Murrieta, Itzel Toledo, Juan Telleria, Rob Seymour and Jakub Kowalewski, for their enriching conversations, feedback and encouragement. Their invaluable friendship and enthusiasm kept me going. I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to Aleks Leimanis for her offer to meticulously revise my project. Her generosity, patience and unique sense of humour made the final stage of this journey more enjoyable.

This research would not have been possible without the support of my various sponsors: Fomento Nacional de Cultura y las Artes (FONCA), the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT), Fundación JUMEX, the Complementary Scholarship of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) and the School of Philosophy and Art History at University of Essex. I would also like to thank the Gilchrist Educational Trust for helping me to cover the expenses for my research trip to Palestine and the Al Ma'mal Foundation for hosting during my fieldwork.

I would like to thank my parents for all their encouragement, care and love throughout my life. I thank you both for believing in me and for giving me the strength and courage to follow my dreams. To my brother, my friends, and the rest of my family members, I am grateful for your heartfelt support.

Lastly, but certainly not least, I am deeply indebted to James, for his immensurable care, tolerance and love. This journey would not have been possible without you by my side.

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Introduction

Many words are walked in the world. Many worlds are made. Many worlds make us. There are words and worlds that are lies and injustices. There are words and worlds that are truthful and true. In the world of the powerful there is room only for the big and their helpers. In the world we want, everybody fits. The world we want is a world in which many worlds fit.

"Fourth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle", Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional[1]

We will lose our way, our cars, our agenda, and possible our minds, but in losing we will find another way of making meaning in which […] no one gets left behind.

Judith Halberstam[2]

In January 1996 in Chiapas, Mexico, the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) issued a call for "a world gathering against neoliberalism and for humanity."[3] In this call, they highlighted how, throughout the world, the power of money "humiliates dignities, insults honesties and assassinates hopes. Re-named as 'Neoliberalism', the historic crime in the concentration of privileges, wealth and impunities, democratizes misery

[1] The original reads: "Muchas palabras se caminan en el mundo. Muchos mundos se hacen. Muchos mundos nos hacen. Hay palabras y mundos que son mentiras e injusticias. Hay palabras y mundos que son verdades y verdaderos. Nosotros hacemos mundos verdaderos. Nosotros somos hechos por palabras verdaderas. En el mundo del poderoso no caben más que los grandes y sus servidores. En el mundo que queremos nosotros caben todos. El mundo que queremos es uno donde quepan muchos mundos." Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), "Cuarta Declaración de La Selva Lacandona," http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/1996/01/01/cuarta-declaracion-de-la-selva-lacandona/, January 1, 1996 (accessed August 7, 2019). Translation from the original obtained from Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser, eds., *A World of Many Worlds* (USA: Duke University Press, 2018), 1.

[2] Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 25.

[3] Ejercito de Liberación Nacional, "Primera Declaración de La Realidad. Contra el neoliberalismo y por la humanidad.," January 1, 1996, https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/1996/01/01/primera-declaracion-de-la-realidad-contra-el-neoliberalismo-y-por-la-humanidad/ (accessed August 7, 2019).

and hopelessness. […] A new lie is sold to us as history. The lie about the defeat of hope." Accordingly, the Zapatistas advocated resistance to the worldwide "terror" of neoliberalism, and sought to inspire an international sense of hope. In the words of the Zapatistas' spokesman Subcomandante Marcos, "Hope is that rejection of conformity and defeat. […] To all who, with no matter to colors, race or borders, make of hope a weapon and a shield."[4] The Zapatistas sought to represent the voice of the voiceless, and the face of the invisible. Their fight not only revealed the dysfunction of the state and the neoliberal capitalist system, but also highlighted the ripple effects of colonialism that still permeate the global landscape. Through their slow process of decolonisation in the Chiapas, Southern Mexico, they have created alternative forms of autonomous governance, and self-sustainable fair forms of living. Twenty-three years have passed since the Zapatista uprising, yet their struggle of resistance continues to inspire and nurture a sense of hope on a global scale.

Across the world, we are currently witnessing a proliferation of movements of resistance that have been highly influenced by the Zapatistas. Some of the most recent efforts to challenge the neoliberalisation of the everyday can be seen in the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) in Mexico, Occupy Wall Street in the United States, Indignados movement in Spain, the Movimiento Passe Livre in Brazil, and Extinction

[4] Translated from original: Ejercito de Liberación Nacional. Translation obtained at "The EZLN Calls for an Intercontinental Anti - Neoliberalism Gathering - First Declaration of La Realidad Against Neoliberalism and For Humanity," http://www.struggle.ws/mexico/ezln/ccri_1st_dec_real.html (accessed August 15, 2019).

Rebellion in the United Kingdom, to name just a few.[5] The Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa, and the Gezi Park protests in Turkey attempted to challenge autocracy and introduce political self-determination in a peaceful, horizontal and non-coercive way.[6] These non-violent leaderless

[5] Gerardo Rénique and Deborah Poole, "The Oaxaca Commune: Struggling for Autonomy and Dignity," nacla.org, May 1, 2008, https://nacla.org/article/oaxaca-commune-struggling-autonomy-and-dignity; Manuel Garza Zepeda, "The Popular Movement of Oaxaca, Ten Years Later," openDemocracy.net, December 8, 2016, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/popular-movement-of-oaxaca-ten-years-later/; Naomi Klein, "Occupy Wall Street: The Most Important Thing in the World Now | The Nation," *The Nation*, October 6, 2011, https://www.thenation.com/article/occupy-wall-street-most-important-thing-world-now/; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "The Fight for 'Real Democracy' at the Heart of Occupy Wall Street," *Foreign Affairs*, October 11, 2011, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-america/2011-10-11/fight-real-democracy-heart-occupy-wall-street; David Graeber, "Occupy Wall Street's Anarchist Roots," Al Jazeera, November 29, 2011, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/11/201111287283590450 8.html; "Movimiento15M," movimiento15m.org, July 27, 2013, http://www.movimiento15m.org/; Sandra León, "Columna | Políticos impotentes," *El País*, April 3, 2018, sec. Opinion, https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/04/03/opinion/1522763915_939400.html; "Extinction Rebellion – About," Extinction Rebellion, 2019, https://rebellion.earth/; Matthew Taylor, "The Extinction Rebellion Scorecard: What Did It Achieve?," *The Guardian*, April 25, 2019, sec. Environment, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/25/extinction-rebellion-assessing-the-impact; David Farrell, "Politics-as-Usual Can't Fix the Climate Crisis. Maybe It's Time to Try a Citizens' Assembly | David Farrell," *The Guardian*, August 28, 2019, sec. Opinion, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/28/climate-crisis-citizens-assembly-extinction-rebellion.

[6] Joseph Massad, "The 'Arab Spring' and Other American Seasons," accessed September 9, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/08/201282972539153865.html; "The Arab Spring: A Year Of Revolution," NPR.org, December 17, 2011, https://www.npr.org/2011/12/17/143897126/the-arab-spring-a-year-of-revolution; Ismaeel Naar, "Timeline: Arab Spring," Al Jazeera English, December 17, 2013, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2013/12/timeline-arab-spring-20131217114018534352.html; Simon Critchley, "Occupy and the Arab Spring Will Continue to Revitalise Political Protest," *The Guardian*, March 22, 2012, sec. Opinion, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/mar/22/occupy-arab-spring-political-protest; Amnesty International, "Turkey: Gezi Park Protests: Brutal Deniel of the Right to Peaceful Assembly in Turkey," amnesty.org, October 2, 2013, https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/document/?indexNumber=EUR44%2f022%2f2013&language=en; Constanze Letsch, "Turkey Protests Spread after Violence in Istanbul over Park Demolition," *The Guardian*, June 1, 2013, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/31/istanbul-protesters-violent-clashes-police; Amnesty International, "Turkey: Gezi Park Protests: Brutal Deniel of the Right to Peaceful Assembly in Turkey."

Generally speaking, autonomy is regarded as a form of self-determination, self-management, self-representation and self-governance located outside, or parallel to, the state and the institutionalised form of labour. Marxist sociologist and philosopher John Holloway, for instance, suggests that: "'Autonomies' can be seen as self-sufficient units, spaces to which we have escaped, spaces in which we can construct or develop a distinct identity, a

movements have developed new forms of organisation to critique neoliberal capitalism, patriarchy and coloniality, and to explore alternative social relations that are ethical and sustainable.[7] As these protests and grassroot mobilisations continue to create new spaces of political struggle demanding radical change, a parallel cultural force or a "creative dark matter", to borrow Gregory Sholette's term, has also arisen, one that contours and strengthens the relationship between contemporary art and politics.[8] This dark matter as a form of creative resistance aspires for the reformation of autonomy against and beyond neoliberal globalisation within contexts of social turmoil, and, as such, it is inextricably connected to the sense of hope that the Zapatistas invoked.

With the urgent desire to develop a better understanding of the contemporary global (still colonial) landscape, an array of artists, architects,

difference. In a world based on the negation of autonomy or self-determination, autonomy in a static sense is impossible. Self-determination does not exist: all that exists is the constant drive towards self-determination." John Holloway, "Crack and the Crisis of Abstract Labour," *Antipode* 33, no. 5 (2010): 910. In the book *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organising Hope* (2015), sociologist Ana Cecilia Dinerstein argues that notions of autonomy formulated in the 'global north' cannot be grouped with the ones generated in the 'global south'. As she explains, whilst autonomous movements in the North are usually associated with an anti-state struggle striving for social emancipation, in the South, autonomy is related to the protection of territorial spaces of indigenous peoples and the recognition by the state of their right of self-governance. Therefore, we must be careful not to generalise the idea of autonomy as the struggle against the state. With this in mind, this dissertation understands autonomy and autonomous struggles not as an anti-state practice, but rather as a set of oppositional tools resisting the hegemony of the state and the neoliberal system, reclaiming spaces of freedom, democracy and justice, and mobilizing collective agency. Ana Cecilia Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organising Hope* (London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 32. In the words of the Zapatistas, "Autonomy is not separation; it is integration of the most humble and forgotten minorities…," Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), "Tercera Declaración de la Selva Lacandona," January 1, 1995, https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/1995/01/01/tercera-declaracion-de-la-selva-lacandona/ (accessed August 7, 2019). Translation obtained at School for Chiapas website: website https://schoolsforchiapas.org/library/declaration-lacandon-jungle/ (accessed last August 7, 2019)

[7] The term 'coloniality' was first used by Anibal Quijano to identify an invisible uneven structure of power—produced through conquest and colonialism—that is the most general form of domination in the world today. See Chapter 2.

[8] Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter* (London & New York: Pluto Press, 2011).

political theorists, scientists, intellectuals and activists have become increasingly engaged in attempts to find solutions to the structural inequalities created by necropolitical agreements between the state and corporate industry.[9] They are committed to thinking outside the enforced narratives of neoliberal capitalism whilst critically engaging with contemporary political practices. Accordingly, alternative directions in aesthetic thought have emerged across multiple disciplines in efforts to move away from the world-building practices that continue to be indifferent to those worlds that do not fit into what John Law calls the "One-World World" vision.[10] Such approaches reposition art as a useful platform from which to speculate and to put in motion ideas for tackling pressing socio-political and ontological issues.

This (re)politicisation of the art system has resulted in pioneering creative configurations, in both intellectual and physical terms, constantly probing the nature of "how we create and destroy, how we connect and exclude, and what new concepts might guide the future of our very coexistence."[11] Such

[9] Achille Mbembe refers to 'necropolitics' as the political and social power that determines how to live and die. It is a mode of governance and economy of death that merges Foucault's notion of biopolitics with Agamben's idea of bare life and the state of exception. For Mbembe, politics have shifted, thereby eroding democratic values, rights and freedoms. See Achille Mbembe, "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony," in *Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes*, ed. Gilane Tawadros and Sarah Cambell (London: Iniva, 2003); Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003); Achille Mbembe, *Necropolítica* (España: Melusina, 2011).

[10] John Law understands the One-World World as that which was allegedly composed of a single World and assumes to be 'the' only world, subjecting all other worlds to its own terms, or otherwise, and considers them to be non-existent. In other words, the One-World World is a world where only one world fits. John Law, "What's Wrong with a One-World World?," *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 16, no. 1 (2015): 126–39.

[11] Mark Foster Gage considers this shift as the latest "aesthetic turn" in a long series of discursive and philosophical 'turns'. Mark Foster Gage, ed., *Aesthetics Equals Politics. New Discourses across Art, Architecture, and Philosophy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The MIT Press, 2019), 7.

artistic formations, which I call 'alter-institutional initiatives',[12] have proliferated in the last decade and include a series of "makeshift, amateur, informal, unofficial, autonomous, activist, non-institutional, self-organized" practices of cultural resistance.[13] Their aim is to find other ways of opposition where, through the production of knowledge, taking of collective action, and creation of social relations, access to resources—which has long been dominated by the privileged few—can be decentralised and democratised so that they can be accessed by many.[14] This wave of political aesthetics moves beyond previous tactics of the "singularly observed 'critical'" and instead engages with decolonial methodologies to strive for "the collectively accessed 'aesthetic'" where the decentralisation and democratisation of organisational structures might be possible.[15]

Alter-institutional practice confronts different sorts of social injustices, including unfair labour practices; racial, gender, ethnic and age discrimination; environmental devastation; economic segregation; and land eviction and dispossession. These fundamental structural disparities are the result of a systemic fragmentation that has its origins and reverberations in the Western imperial-colonial model of civilisation—also understood as the project of modernity—and such concerns have given rise

[12] Understand alter-institutional practice as the establishment of an organisation, an act which in itself is conceived as artwork and is often created by a single artist. Alter-institutional initiatives tactically use institutional resources—i.e. exhibition space, public platforms, and economic resources—to advance in their endeavour, yet they are independent entities. They have an increasing permeability in both the institutional and the social fields. For more on alter-institutional practice see Chapter 1, section 1.4.
[13] Sholette, *Dark Matter*, 1.
[14] T. J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature. Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 13; Marco Baravalle, "Art Populism and the Alter-Institutional Turn," *E-Flux Journal*, no. 89 (March 2018), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/89/182464/art-populism-and-the-alter-institutional-turn/.
[15] Foster Gage, *Aesthetics Equals Politics*, 7.

to a variety of strategies that seek to bring it down.[16] These strategies include creating writing hubs in slums as the Raqs Media Collective has done in India; researching the issues of labour rights as Chto Delat has done in Russia; examining cases of state violence and violations of human rights as Forensic Architecture has done worldwide; or investigating unwritten histories of feminism as h.arta has done in Romania. Informed by the principle that art is not independent from the economic, institutional and ideological apparatuses within which it operates, alter-institutional practice finds affinities with decolonial thinking, which aims to re-inscribe histories and perspectives that have been devalued through the constitution of the Western modern rationale. Thus, through the use of decolonial approaches, such as unlearning, listening, representing, and commoning, amongst others, alter-institutional practice advocates for an "epistemic disobedience" that has at its horizon a more just way of being in this shared world.[17]

[16] Understand the project of modernity as modes of social life or organisation that emerged in Europe and became worldwide in their influence. Some scholars (i.e. Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, Anthony Giddens) argue that modernity emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards, whereas others from the decolonial school of thought (i.e. Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo, Rolando Vázquez) argue that it started with the 'discovery' of the Americas. This thesis aligns with the latter viewpoint. For more on the origins of modernity from a decolonial perspective see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (USA: MIT Press, 1990); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1993); Enrique Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)," *Boundary 2* 20, no. 3 (1993): 6576, https://doi.org/10.2307/303341; Walter D. Mignolo, "Delinking," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (March 1, 2007): 449–514; Rolando Vázquez, "Precedence, Earth and the Anthropocene: Decolonizing Design," *Design Philosophy Papers* 15, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 77–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/14487136.2017.1303130; Santiago Castro-Gómez and Ramon Grosfoguel, eds., *El Giro Decolonial. Reflexiones Para Una Diversidad Epistémica Más Allá Del Capitalism Global* (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores, 2007).

[17] These terms will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.

This thesis concentrates on this new tendency in contemporary politically engaged art practice to become more and more engaged in the attempts to disclose ethical alternatives to structural inequalities. Using the Zapatista struggle as a jumping-off point to explore alternative forms of living where many worlds can coexist, this thesis questions the role art plays in the intersectionality of political struggles that continue to resist and confront the apparent failure of the current global governance systems. To be precise, this dissertation interrogates whether alter-institutional initiatives can provide a platform where 'spaces of hope' can be stimulated and nurtured, and lead to the development of autonomous forms of living and just world-building practices based on cooperation, multispecies justice and mutual respect. Or to put it in the form of a question: what is the role of art in relation to the search for social justice, political horizontality and autonomous forms of organising?

It could be argued that art does not have the power to provide tangible solutions to change the current state of affairs; however, it does possess the ability to bring to the surface different sensibilities that allow political movements to be born. Art is at its most powerful when it makes visible what has been invisible to the people. Much of the contemporary world is built on unseen asymmetrical power structures that dictate and control all aspects and trajectories of our lives. These invisible technologies of subjectivation sustain the exploitation and domination of peoples that results from conquest and colonialism.[18] Art has the dual power of reifying

[18] These invisible power structures are what decolonial theorists call coloniality or the colonial matrix of power. Coloniality works as a crucial structuring process, which sustains the hierarchies imposed by the Global North. The colonial matrices of power

and maintaining those unsettling narratives around these power structures, as well as challenging them and fostering conversations that nurture a more just and peaceful heterogeneous world. Aiming to comprehend the different political 'cracks' that might open through the implementation of decolonial approaches as part of the artistic endeavour, this thesis tracks alter-institutional practices that respond to social, economic and ecological sustainability issues, as well as social responses to artistic self-sustainability that go beyond turning art into a *dispositif* in service to the neoliberal agenda. In simple terms, my objective is to examine the sustainability of alter-institutional projects and grasp the perils and possibilities of this kind of artistic practice.

This thesis uses the apparent failure of current governance systems as an opportunity to look towards the root of the problem, to identify the deeper logic at work, and to strive towards a shift in paradigm. In other words, it recognises that the current upsurge in demands for governments to take more ethical responsibility is, in fact, an opening where the conditions for dialogues on the reconstruction and reconstitution of worlds could be formulated. As such, this dissertation concentrates on the idea of hope within failure. In particular, it aims to understand how failure can be used as a constructive tool to mobilise, organise and catalyse socio-political movements, which in turn can succeed in creating "spaces of hope." Here, I understand "spaces of hope" as conceptualised by David Harvey, that is to say, as small-scale utopian spaces that address socio-political

consist of four domains: economic control, authority, gender and sexuality, and subjectivity and knowledge. See Chapter 2, Section 2.1.

transformation and envision more just ways of living.[19] Furthermore, in the book *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), Judith Halberstam reminds us that failure recognises that alternatives are already embedded in the hegemony, and in the long run, the practice of failure can offer different kinds of rewards.[20] Although failure certainly is accompanied by a series of negative connotations, such as futility, sterility, loss and emptiness, under certain circumstances it can also provide a positive outcome. This dissertation echoes Halberstam and translates her ideas into the proposal of deeming failure as an opportunity to generate new forms of knowing, sensing and being in this world, which in turn can lead to the formation of spaces where a sense of hope is sparked. As such, this thesis recognises failure as a set of oppositional practices, as a weapon of resistance, and as a form of critique that refuses to comply with dominant logic of control and power.

This research project presents a comparative analysis of three case studies of alter-institutional initiatives: 1) Campus in Camps (2012), an experimental educational and artistic project that aims to provide intellectual infrastructure to move away from the narratives of victimisation, marginalisation and oppression that are embedded in the Palestinian refugee camps; 2) the Institute for Human Activities (2012), a multi-faceted project based in the Democratic Republic of Congo that aims to bring monetary resources via education and artistic training; and 3) World of Matter (2013), an international interdisciplinary research

[19] David Harvey conceptualises spaces of hope as small-scale utopian spaces that transform communities by addressing socio-political issues and enabling people to envision alternative ways of living. David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).
[20] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*.

collective that uses the realm of art as a platform to expose the complex 'ecologies' of primary materials and reconsider human interaction with the natural world. Given the vast range of socio-political issues tackled by alter-institutional initiatives, it seems only pertinent to provide accounts of a variety of topics. As such, the case studies were selected with three main concerns in mind: 1) political freedom and land dispossession (Campus in Camps); 2) labour rights and economic inequality (Institute for Human Activities); and 3) exploitation of resources and environmental crisis (World of Matter). Although different, these concerns are deeply interwoven with the systematic processes of capitalism and neoliberal exceptionalism. So, despite targeting different concerns, these case studies are representative of the approaches being used by initiatives as they attempt to rectify the imbalance in the organisational structures of today's world. My aim is to assess the extent to which alter-institutional practices represent propositional, self-sustainable, collective actions that could result in the decentralisation and democratisation of organisational structures. My goal in doing so is to gather a set of principles that can be applied more broadly to thinking about 'alter-institutional practice'.

At this point, I would like to add that this thesis moves beyond questions of aesthetic versus anti-aesthetic judgements and instead interrogates the rationale behind alter-institutional practices. It is my intention to demonstrate how these practices can give us alternative perspectives on, and insights into, the production of politically engaged art practice and discourse, and how they are becoming a vital component in the creation of spaces of hope, which can in turn lead to autonomous forms of

organising. A number of scholars have already contributed to literature on alter-institutional art practice. Whether that is by highlighting the role of the artist as art manager, curator and/or director as Ekaterina Degot has done; by regarding this practice as the next step in the evolution of institutional critique as Sven Lütticken, TJ Demos and MTL collective have individually proposed; by highlighting their capacity to build new 'art worlds' outside the neoliberal realities as Marco Baravalle has suggested; or by emphasising their potential to occupy the political without resorting to politics as Irit Rogoff has specified.[21] However, none of these accounts look at the creation of decolonial hope within this artistic practice. This dissertation is, therefore, the first critical account that analyses alter-institutional practice through a decolonial lens.

In reflecting on the perils and possibilities of alter-institutional practice, this thesis moves within the social, historical and cultural context of each case study. This approach has allowed for a more holistic appraisal. Given the explicative power of decolonial theory in addressing the contemporary structure of power that determines specific world-building practices and dictates current forms of living, this thesis uses a decolonial

[21] Ekaterina Degot, "The Artist as Director: 'Artist Organisations International' and Its Contradictions," *Afterall*, no. 40 (Autum/Winter 2015), http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.40/-The-Artist-as-Director; Sven Lütticken, "Social Media: Practices of (In)Visibility in Contemporary Art," *Afterall*, no. 40 (Autumn/Winter 2015), http://www.afterall.org/online/social-media_practices#.VqY9DlL2T6p; T.J. Demos, "Toward a New Institutional Critique: A Conversation with Renzo Martens," *Atlantica*, 2012, no pagination; T.J. Demos, "On the Institute for Human Activities. Renzo Martens in Conversation with T.J. Demos," in *Scandalous. A Reader on Art and Ethics*, ed. Nina Montmann, First Edition (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013); MTL Collective, "From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation? A Decolonial Perspective on the Crises of Contemporary Art," *October Magazine* 165 (Summer 2018): 192–227; Baravalle, "Art Populism and the Alter-Institutional Turn."

lens for the analysis and discussion of all the case studies. A decolonial perspective understands the notions of Global North and Global South not only as territorial demarcations, but also as epistemic delimitations in the production of knowledge and the structural power dynamics between colonising and colonised societies. Unlike postcolonial postures that classify and qualify subjects according to their social and global space of origin (i.e. inside/outside, barbarian/civilised), a decolonial standpoint recognises coloniality as one of the fundamental forms of distribution of power in the modern capitalist world system.[22] In this respect, it suggests an openness to non-normative and non-dominant ways of thinking and living that present other perspectives beyond the totalising and universalising thought of coloniality/modernity.

A decolonial perspective highlights the need to focus on the ongoing impacts and legacies of the colonial rule in the social, political and institutional realm.[23] It extends far beyond the field of art, its associated institutions and forms of knowledge. In fact, by adopting a decolonial lens, one acquires an intersectional perspective that recognises structural inequalities—i.e. gender, sexuality, race—as co-constituted by imperial-colonial projects. It allows a deeper understanding of how the various networks and power structures of coloniality/modernity are produced and

[22] Colonialism and coloniality are not the same thing. The term 'coloniality' was first used by Anibal Quijano to identify an invisible uneven structure of power—produced through conquest and colonialism—that is the most general form of domination in the world today. See Anibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, "Americanity as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World-System," *International Journal of Social Sciences* 134 (1992): 583–91.

[23] Olivia U. Rutazibwa, "Understanding Epistemic Diversity // Decoloniality as Research Strategy," *Olivia U. Rutazibwa* (blog), July 4, 2018, https://oliviarutazibwa.wordpress.com/2018/07/04/understanding-epistemic-diversity-decoloniality-as-research-strategy/.

reproduced. In other words, a decolonial lens brings focus to two important concerns: 1) the need for an epistemic diversification that explicitly acknowledges and confronts the issues of coloniality; and 2) the need to address the practical and institutional implications of anticolonial epistemic diversity. Along these lines, scholar and activist Olivia U. Rutazibwa explains that engaging with a decolonial perspective can help to: 1) *demythologise* ontological issues; 2) *de-silence* those epistemologies that have been silenced by the colonial matrix of power; and 3) *decolonise* by addressing both the tangible, material and the normative of knowledge production/cultivation.[24] Using a theoretical framework structured around a decolonial perspective thus enables this research project to comprehend the socio-political dynamics at play within the alter-institutional practice.

Such an approach has enabled me to critique and analyse each case individually and comparatively. I was able to gain insights into the contextual dynamics that shape each individual case study, to understand the root of the problem and not just focus on the results of the alter-institutional project. I was also able to recognise and identify the similarities and discrepancies between the critical strategies that these initiatives create as a response to the existence of colonial residues that perpetuate and reinforce structural disparities. It further allowed me to contextualise and conceptualise how each individual case study responded to current radical calls for social and environmental justice; to emphasise the interconnectivity and intersectionality between case studies, without

[24] Rutazibwa.

collapsing the specificities of each individual struggle; and to question the positionality of each alter-institutional initiative as well as my own positionality as a researcher. In using the decolonial lens as the theoretical framework of this dissertation, my aim is to demonstrate how art can contribute to the process of making decolonial paths that can lead to other possible futures.

Most decolonial literature either emerges from, or is framed within, the settler-colonial states and diasporic places, such as the Middle East and South Asia; different perspectives are offered from Latin American scholars to the fields of cultural studies, critical theory, philosophy and ethnic studies.[25] In discussing decolonial thinking and its methodologies, this dissertation mainly draws on the work of Anibal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Rolando Vázquez, Arturo Escobar, Enrique Dussel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Catherine Walsh, Wanda Nanibush, Leanne Betamosake Simpson, Dwayne Donald, Eve Tuck, and K. Wayne Yang.

My research methodology includes data collection of media coverage, reviews, writings and publications by the artists themselves and art critics and/or scholars; semi-structured interviews with artists and participants in the art projects; documentary analysis; and fieldwork research. The information obtained from primary sources was classified into three categories: 1) artists' statements, 2) scholarly assessment, and 3) participants' and public/media interpretation. This process allowed me to have a better reading of the primary literature and the general information.

[25] Gurminder K Bhambra, "Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues," *Postcolonial Studies* 17, no. 2 (April 3, 2014): 115–21.

To my surprise, the documentary analysis proved to be extremely challenging, as there are limitations and restrictions in the existing literature. Most of the information available is either produced by the artists themselves, people involved in the art projects or by a few prominent academic figures who have some sort of connection to the projects in the institutional frame. Thus, separating my own reading and understanding of the projects from the artist's account was a major challenge. For the case study Campus in Camps, the field research I conducted in Palestine was extremely beneficial, as I was able witness first-hand the implications of the art project for the broader refugee community. This thesis is aimed at a broad interdisciplinary audience, from scholars in the humanities and social sciences, through artists and activists, to journalists and intellectuals interested in politically engaged art practices.

This thesis is broken down into five main chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 1 provides an art-historical overview from the mid-1990s onwards of the different 'aesthetic turns' (the social, the ethical, and the educational turn) in contemporary art history that paved the way for yet another: the alter-institutional turn. In this chapter, I provide a general description of the main characteristics and logics of operation of alter-institutional practice. As I explain, alter-institutional practice relies heavily on the implementation of decolonial methodologies as part of the artistic process. Thus, chapter 2 presents an explanation of what decolonial thinking entails and the different strategies that are used in order to achieve decoloniality: a world made of many worlds. Of particular interest here are the different nuances that these processes, struggles and practices of re-existence and

resurgence might take within the realm of art. In this chapter, I expose how decoloniality functions as an analytic and as a praxis. The intention here is not only to tell, but also to show, how decolonial methodologies can be implemented as part of alter-institutional practice. A decolonial perspective enables a further understanding of the intersectionality between struggles, as it articulates how even though the colonial wound is experienced in different ways, it is a wound that is shared. It is only through a detailed understanding of the decolonial perspective that we can begin to comprehend both the nuances and the wider stakes of the case studies of alter-institutional practice being analysed. As such, a thorough theoretical preamble is essential to any meaningful discussion of the art projects themselves. In using the decolonial lens as the theoretical framework of this dissertation, my aim is to demonstrate how art can contribute to the process of making decolonial paths that can lead to other possible futures.

Chapter 3 focuses on the case study 'Campus in Camps'. This initiative provides infrastructure and intellectual space to facilitate speculation and debate about the potential futures of Palestinian refugee camps and their inhabitants. In this chapter, I consider the nuances of decolonial engagements that emerge through the practice of Campus in Camps. I argue that through the use of decolonial approaches—i.e. speculating, unlearning, commoning—Campus in Camps creates practical community-driven projects that foresee alternative forms of life in the camps, based on confrontation, cooperation and collective action. In reflecting on the different phases and methodologies of the project, I draw on the work of art theorist and curator Irit Rogoff to explain the operational

similarities with non-governmental organisations as they "start in the middle" rather than trying to solve the problem.[26] In this way, I show how the practice of Campus in Camps thrives on what I call 'prolific failures', and consequently, chooses to 'harness failure and work through setbacks'. I also argue that whilst Campus in Camps provides a positive platform for the use of speculative approaches and as a result activates the refugee community, the art project uses 'failure' as a constructive tool to 'work through setbacks' in order to keep (un)learning how to address the different socio-political and spatial configurations that continue to emerge in the present reality of the Palestinian refugee camps. I argue that, in doing so, the alter-institutional initiative fuels a sense of hope that alternative forms of living in the camp are in fact possible.

Chapter 4 examines the case study the 'Institute for Human Activities', a five-year project based in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) that aims to challenge the global economic power dynamics, return profits to peripheral economies, and consequently, create a "reverse gentrification effect". The project seeks to use capital accumulation as a form of artistic intervention. In this chapter, I propose reading the complex multi-faceted project in three phases: 1) as an institutional critique project in the search for alternative economies; 2) as a project of overidentification and socially engaged art practice; and 3) as a network of organisations working towards social, financial and environmental restoration. I argue that the Institute for Human Activities uses critique, and subsequently

[26] Irit Rogoff, "Starting in the Middle: NGOs and Emergent Forms for Cultural Institutions," in *Public Servants: Art and the Crisis of Common Good* (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: MIT Press, 2016), 465–79.

failure, as a constructive tool to advance in its endeavour to increase autonomy and sustainability. In doing so, this project breaks the mould of engaged art practices and has evolved from merely addressing an issue into a complex network that provides a model for problem solving.

Finally, Chapter 5 analyses the case study 'World of Matter', an international media, art and research collective that uses the realm of art to investigate the relationships between the complex global ecologies of resources, exploitation and circulation. World of Matter calls for a reconsideration, on a fundamental level, of how we as humans understand and interact with the other non-human worlds. In this chapter, I suggest that the practice of World of Matter aims to convey more equitable and ethical approaches to those 'other' worlds that remain 'invisible' in the One-World World vision. In this chapter, I present a brief exposition of the concept of the Anthropocene and the rhetorical problematics surrounding such a notion, which enables a better grasp of the theoretical framework in which World of Matter operates. In considering the different decolonial methodologies being implemented through its practice, I draw on the work of Jane Bennet and her notion of "agency of assemblages."[27] I argue that by 'demystifying' the idea that political agency is solely human agency, the practice of World of Matter offers a counter reading to the anthropocentric understanding of the environmental crisis. I also claim that by using an approach that combines social aesthetic with political ecology, World of Matter is, in fact, creating space to experiment with non-anthropocentric

[27] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, First edition (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2010).

views towards matter, so that new assemblages can be developed that might widen the solutions being considered for tackling global social and ecological problems.

Chapter 1: 'Turning' Towards Alter-Institutional Practice

Turning

It is an old concern that the realm of art has no fixed limits or boundaries, and, as such, art is always changing and forever evolving. Throughout the history of Western art, we have witnessed a variety of 'transformations' that have challenged the definition of what is understood as art. In the first half of the 20th century alone, Western art saw a series of moments that radically shifted the way art was produced, understood and disseminated. From Impressionism, the European avant-gardes and Abstract Expressionism to Readymade Art, Pop Art and the Fluxus Movement, the discipline of art saw a series of revolutionary moments that not only stretched the confinements of art itself, but also expanded the horizon so that new aesthetic paradigms could be born. These alterations are known as 'aesthetic turns'.

Understand the action of 'turning' as that of shifting away from, moving towards or around something. When talking about an aesthetic turn, then, it is the capacity for artistic practices—and in some case curatorial practices as well—to shift away from or move towards something else, to a different process, a novel perspective or a new understanding. An aesthetic turn is an active movement or a generative instant in which a new possibility in art production and discourse develops

in the process, leaving behind the practice that was its point of origin.[28] In this sense, it can be established that an aesthetic turn is that action of shifting away from past artistic strategies and moving towards other dimensions in the production of art practice, discourse and its dissemination. Since the mid-1990s the realm of art has experienced a series of major shifts that have changed our understanding of contemporary art practice and discourse. In this chapter, I provide an art-historical overview from the mid-1990s onwards of the three key aesthetic turns—the social, the ethical, and the educational—that paved the way for yet another turn: the "alter-institutional turn."[29] The aim of this chapter is to explore what is understood as alter-institutional art practice and suggest a set of principles or characteristics associated with alter-institutional practice. In what follows, brief descriptions of the social, the ethical and the educational turns are presented.

[28] Irit Rogoff, "Turning," *E-Flux Journal* 0, no. 00 (November 2008), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/00/68470/turning/.
[29] Baravalle, "Art Populism and the Alter-Institutional Turn."

1.1. The Social Turn

The question is not how to aestheticize 'living as form', in order to display the results for contemplation in a museum. The question is how to change the forms in which we are living.

Brian Holmes[30]

The highly damaging social and ecosystem consequences related to the current dominant economic structures have caused many examples of tragedies of the commons: from wars and mass migrations, to plastic pollution, accelerated species extinctions and ocean acidification.[31] The progressive privatisation of public resources favoured by neoliberal policies has triggered many to denounce and reject neoliberal models. Individuals around the world are searching for alternatives to what they consider to be the failed misanthropic planet-destroying economic model. Perhaps partly because of its creative potential, and partly because it is seen as a possible counterweight to the status quo, art has become more and more engaged in the attempts to disclose alternatives to the structural inequalities propelled by the neoliberal system. In the last few decades, artists have extended the limits of art itself to previously un-corresponding zones. They have replaced traditional art materials with socio-political

[30] Brian Holmes, "EVENTWORK | Continental Drift," in *Living as Form*, Nato Thompson (New York: Creative Time, 2012), 73–85. Obtained from: https://brianholmes.wordpress.com/2012/02/17/eventwork/.
[31] Le Mare Robin, "Goodbye Neoliberalism, Hello Common Good | Letters," *The Guardian*, August 6, 2017, sec. Politics, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/aug/06/goodbye-neoliberalism-hello-common-good.

relations so that the art becomes the situation or the process of art creation *per se.*[32] Accordingly, the notion of public art has changed radically, from performing a merely decorative function in public spaces to expressing concern about the people who use these public spaces. In *Mapping the Terrain* (1994), artist Suzanne Lacy names this as "new genre public art", which unlike what heretofore was called public art, is a "visual art that uses both traditional and nontraditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues relevant to their lives" and is based on engagement.[33] New genre public art unfolds through a process of performative interaction with particular audiences or communities.

The notion of social art is, nonetheless, nothing new. From the Surrealists who staged hands-on events in Paris, the collective actions that turned into art in the 1950s and '60s with artists like Allan Kaprow, the Art Workers Coalition and Fluxus, leading to the artworks of Miriam Schapiro, Judy Chicago and Joseph Beuys during the '70s, and the Guerrilla Girls in the '80s, to mention but a few. Art has provided a platform with a strong socio-political bent, which often aims to draw attention to social ills and conditions, and incite empowerment or change in a specific community. However, it was during the mid-1990s, when shifts in several aspects of the artistic post-studio practice developed as a consequence of the Institutional Critique.[34] One of the most important changes—if not the most important

[32] Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 4.
[33] Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle, Wash: Bay Press, 1995), 19.
[34] Lars Bang Larsen, "The Long Nineties," *Frieze*, no. 144 (2012): no pagination.

one—which altered our conception of contemporary art and its production is the so-called "social turn."[35]

The term was first mentioned by art historian Claire Bishop in her seminal article *The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents* (2006). In some measure "the social turn" is informed by Institutional Critique's formal questioning of artistic forms and its embedded support system, but it has evolved to encompass questions arounds the task and duty of art within society. This is a recognition that the artistic endeavor could no longer revolve around the construction of objects to be consumed by a passive spectator. Rather, art should be about action, about interacting with reality, and about taking steps to repair the social bond.[36] Today, art has expanded its concern beyond aesthetic specificities and visual appearances, and instead concentrates on offering a platform for dialogue between audience, artists and the public sphere. These social artistic projects unfold through a process of performative interaction with particular audiences or

Institutional Critique in the 1970s involved the politicisation of conceptual strategies in order to reveal how institutional interests defined the production, interpretation, and visual experience of the artistic object.See Hal Foster and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, 2nd ed (London: Thames & Hudson, 2011), 545–54.

35 Claire Bishop argues that the rise in visibility of these practices in the early 1990s is related to the fall of Communism, which deprived the Left of the last vestiges of the revolution that once linked political and aesthetic radicalism. See Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," *Artforum*, February 2006, 179.

36 Bishop expands further the notion of 'social turn' later on with the book *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012). According to Bishop such artistic manifestation can be contextualised—from a Western European viewpoint—by two major historical moments: the European avant-garde around 1917 and 'neo'-avant-garde that ended in 1968. Both instances were "synonymous with political upheaval and movements for social change." Yet, with the "resurgence of participatory art" in the early 1990s, Bishop provides a third moment as point for aesthetic transformation: the fall of communism in 1989. "Triangulated, these three dates form a narrative of the triumph, heroic last stand and collapse of a collectivist vision of society." See Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents"; Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso Books, 2012).

communities.[37] Its main concern is to offer a platform for *"…artistic participation as a prefiguration of a direct democratic participation,"* as art historian Yates McKee points out.[38] Occasionally, these projects involve various forms of public institutions, such as libraries, schools, laboratories, archives, etc.[39]

This new exploration of social relations in art, whereby people constitute the main artistic medium and material, has been widely criticised and accused of being more interested in creating a socially rewarding participatory experience than in exploring or creating a particular aesthetic. Bishop, for instance, describes these practices as less interested in relational aesthetics and more concerned with "…the creative rewards of collaborative activity—whether in the form of working with pre-existing communities or establishing one's own interdisciplinary networks."[40] For some scholars, however, the problem with the broadly conceived rubric of 'socially engaged art' is that "these perceived social achievements are never compared with actual (and innovative) social projects taking place *outside* the realm of art."[41] Thus, art specialists evaluate these practices by comparing the extent to which artists supply a 'good' or a 'bad' model of

[37] Maria Lind provides an alternative, yet parallel, reading of such occurrences, as she looks at the development of such artistic practices as "attempted formulations of collaborative practices," and hence, she proposes to regard this as the "collaborative turn" within contemporary art practice. See Maria Lind, "The Collaborative Turn," in *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, ed. Brian Kuan Wood (New York, N.Y: Sternberg Press, 2010), 181–204.

[38] Yates McKee, "Occupy and the End of Socially Engaged Art | E-Flux," no. 72 (2016), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/occupy-and-the-end-of-socially-engaged-art-an-historical-snapshot/#_ftnref9.

[39] I will explain the evocation of public institutions as part of the artistic practice later on in this chapter in Section 1.3.

[40] Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," 179.

[41] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 19.

collaboration, and tend to criticise them "…for any hint of potential exploitation that fails to 'fully' represent their subjects."[42] To put it differently, the rise of 'socially engaged art'—in which the social and the public are positioned as both primary material and aesthetic goal—is often pointed to as evidence of an increasing alignment between contemporary art and sectors dedicated to social justice and the common good, that is, the restoration of ethical criteria. Therefore, it is possible to argue that in a way the "social turn" also stimulated an "ethical turn" where art serves as a means for social enhancement.[43] I will expand on the ethical turn in what follows.

Over the last couple of decades these artistic projects have expanded exponentially and are currently referred to as socially engaged art, community-based art, new genre public art, relational aesthetics, experimental communities, dialogue-based, dialogical or conversational art, littoral, participatory, research-based, or collaborative art. Regardless of the name by which they are called, these projects represent today's avant-garde where artists use social situations to "produce dematerialized, antimarket, politically engaged projects that carry on the modernist call to blur art and life," in Bishop's words.[44]

[42] Bishop, 19.
[43] Bishop argues that the social turn has prompted an ethical turn in art criticism as socially engaged art practices are being assessed by their working process and criticised if there is any hint of potential exploitation or misrepresentation. See Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," 180.
[44] Bishop, 179.

Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that years later after first mentioning the "social turn", Bishop changed her position stating that the social turn should be more accurately positioned as a "*re*turn to the social as part of the ongoing history of attempts to rethink art collectively," a characteristic that manifests in the ways in which art is produced, consumed and disseminated. [45] In other words, to understand how the broadly conceived rubric of socially engaged art came to be popularised, one should take into account the fact that the production and reception of art has been reshaped within a political logic in which audience figures and marketing statistics have become essential to securing public funding. In the article *The Long Nineties* (2012), art historian and curator Lars Bang Larsen explains how the (re)turn to the social element in art during the mid-1990s went beyond the historical attempts to "rethink art collectively," and was in fact related to 'governmentality' and the social policies of the government at the time.[46] For the author, the social turn results from the parallel general activity that surrounds art—its media, infrastructure and social activity—which became "as prominent and energetic as art itself." This occurrence brought visual art back to life, so to speak, at a time when it had been declared dead. Art became animated by biennials, art fairs and blockbuster exhibitions, the art markets and modes of circulation changed,

[45] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 3.
[46] Bang Larsen uses the notion of 'governmentality' in the Foucauldian tradition, which understands it as "the economic and relations of power that shape a society as a field of possible action." Bang Larsen, "The Long Nineties."

and suddenly there was a "new state of connectivity and synchronicity, in which contemporary art experienced a major upgrade," he claims.[47]

The openness of this type of art has drawn attention from a number of commentators, giving rise to debates regarding the relationship between its aesthetic rigor and social impact. Its ambiguous nature and the blurry boundaries between the social, the political and aesthetics within its praxis have raised questions about its oscillation between socio-political integration and disintegration, and its ethical and unethical connotations. A host of scholars and art practitioners have already contributed to the literature of this broadly discursive field of artistic, curatorial and scholarly practice. Whether focusing on collaborative art (Maria Lind), collaborative and dialogue art in a global context (Grant Kester), the aesthetics of participatory art (Claire Bishop), the growth of pedagogical aesthetics (Irit Rogoff), the performative and infrastructural aesthetics (Shannon Jackson), the lives of refugees and migrants, and communities affected by the exploitation of nature of resources (T.J. Demos), or many other urgent questions, the conversations around this kind of art have continued to expand and diversify over the years.[48]

[47] Bang Larsen.
[48] Lind, "The Collaborative Turn"; Kester, *Conversation Pieces*; Grant H. Kester, "Another Turn.," *Artforum International* 44 (May 2006): 22–23; Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Claire Bishop, ed., *Participation*, Documents of Contemporary Art (London: Whitechapel, 2006); Bishop, *Artificial Hells*; Rogoff, "Turning"; Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011); T.J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (Duke University Press, 2013).

1.2. The Ethical Turn

With the social turn, ethics have become one of the key components through which such art is judged and evaluated. However, it is important to understand that the ethical turn in art does not merely refer to the evaluative criteria used to assess the efficacy of socially engaged art practices, it also questions art's actual role within society. That is to say, when art shifted its gaze to the service of the social bond, issues on ethical engagements simultaneously arose. In the article *The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics* (2006), philosopher Jacques Rancière explains that the ethical turn implies that the realms of politics and/or art are subjected to "moral judgements about the validity of their principles and the consequences of their practices."[49] Thus, with the arrival of socially-oriented art practices, an ethical inclination was built around the intersections between the artist, the public and the art institution.

Moreover, the aesthetics of ethics refers to a behaviour shaped by a flexible mindset that is sensitive to changes in its surroundings. This perspective draws on the ethical take of philosopher Alain Badiou, who describes ethics as that which "designates today a principle that governs how we relate to 'what is going on', a vague way of regulating our commentary on historical situations (the ethics of human rights), technico-scientific situations (medical ethics, bio-ethics), 'social' situations (the

[49] Jacques Rancière, "The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics," *Critical Horizons* 7, no. 1 (2006): 2.

ethics of being-together), media situations (the ethics of communication), and so on."[50] It is crucial to clarify, nonetheless, that 'ethics' is not the same as 'morals', even though these terms are commonly associated. Scholar Walead Beshty explains that whilst morals refers to the established rules or laws that advise how one should live one's life regardless of circumstances, ethics denotes "a dynamic system in which common good is maximized." This means that ethics is always considered in the context of specific situations, rather than abstract categories.[51] In this sense, a turn to ethics within the artistic practice, thus implies that the particular artistic project would exert an influence directly upon the world within which it is situated.

It is important to understand the ethical turn that is being referred to emerged from (re)politicisation of the contemporary art world during the mid-1990s. Animated by biennials, magazines and art fairs, art and its circulation had become a privileged field of politicisation and even an integral part of socio-political action.[52] To justify the spending of public money on the arts, by the beginning of the 1990s the question asked was: what can the arts do for society? The answers included increasing employability, minimising crime, fostering aspiration. As such, cultural policies were revised and the guidelines for funding applications called for

[50] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2004); Jacques Rancière and Mark Foster Gage, "Politics Equals Aesthetics: A Conversation Between Jacques Rancière and Mark Foster Gage," in *Aesthetics Equals Politics. New Discourses across Art, Architecture, and Philosophy*, ed. Mark Foster Gage (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: The MIT Press, 2019), 9–25. Here quoted from Walead Beshty, ed., *Ethics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2015), 18.
[51] Beshty, *Ethics*, 19.
[52] Globalisation has certainly contributed to the significant rise of biennials, with neoliberalism as a dominant variant that transcends national boundaries in the name of economic free trade. Biennials are occasionally in tow with global art market flow, movements and expansions. See more in Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: MIT Press, 2012).

a *demonstration* of how artistic projects would include activities "to educate and prepare the community" and "plans for community involvement, preparation, and dialogue," as Lacy indicates.[53] Inevitably, the possible 'uses' of the artwork in the social context were reconsidered and the artist was positioned as some kind of social service provider.

Regrettably, artists are now inscribed into the agendas and ideologies of sponsors whose aim is to utilise art for social engineering. As art historian Grant Kester accurately indicates,

> In some cases support is being given to artists' projects by organizations or funders whose primary interest is no longer in the arts but in social programs. […] [As some] state-sponsored, social programs have failed […] 'new approaches' are necessary. Thus, artists are being placed in the position of providing alternatives to existing forms of social policy. To the extent that artists (consciously or not) subscribe to a set of ideas about poverty or disempowerment … [54]

Hence, it is not surprising that the system of arts patronage from the '90s affected artistic production. Accordingly, art was transformed from being a construction of objects to be consumed by a passive bystander, to be an art of action to repair the social bond.[55] As such, it is possible to establish that the social turn consists of shifting from object-based art practice to the generation of social relations as a form of art practice; whereas the ethical turn entails the questioning of the aesthetic manifestation and the ethical implications of the action that alters social relations as a form of art practice.

[53] Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain*, 24.
[54] Grant H. Kester, "Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art," *Afterimage*, no. 22 (1995).
[55] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 11.

1.3. The Educational Turn

> *I think 'education' and the 'educational turn' might be just that: the moment when we attend to the production and articulation of truths—not truth as correct, as provable, as fact, but truth as that which collects around it subjectivities that are neither gathered nor reflected by other utterances. Stating truths in relation to the great arguments, issues, and great institutions of the day is relatively easy, for these dictate the terms by which such truths are both arrived at and articulated. Telling truths in the marginal and barely-formed spaces in which the curious gather—this is another project altogether: one's personal relation to truth.*
>
> Irit Rogoff[56]

The educational turn refers to a tendency in contemporary art to shift the attention of artistic and curatorial practices to the idea of gaining and sharing knowledge as part of the sensible experience.[57] It started in the mid-1990s and has prevailed ever since. One could say that the "educational turn" occurred as consequence of the "social turn", but in fact, these two shifts emerged simultaneously in the contemporary art context, and in a way, each is complementary of the other. In 2008, in the first issue of the influential journal *e-flux,* art theorist and curator Irit Rogoff brought to our attention the notion of the "educational turn in curating", which demarked an important shift in the understanding of both arenas: the curatorial and

[56] Rogoff, "Turning."
[57] Note that the sensible experience is not the same as the aesthetic experience. For Jacques Rancière a sensible experience is about the experience of a common world. "The aesthetic problem is not all about beauty. It is about the experience of a common world and who is able to share this experience." An aesthetic experience on the other hand has to do with the "reattribution of the sensible". See Jacques Rancière and Mark Foster Gage, "Politics Equals Aesthetics: A Conversation Between Jacques Rancière and Mark Foster Gage," in *Aesthetics Equals Politics. New Discourses across Art, Architecture, and Philosophy*, ed. Mark Foster Gage (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: The MIT Press, 2019), 9–25; Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2004).

the educational.[58] Born from the idea that the institutions—museums, universities and art schools—have the potential to be much more than they are, the educational turn positions artistic and curatorial practices as means to speculate, experiment and explore how to surpass the current functions of the institutional framework.[59]

Moving away from the structures of objects and market-driven aesthetics, the educational turn is based on the idea that learning can take place "in situations or sites that don't necessarily intend or prescribe such activity," as Rogoff explains.[60] The focus is on the process rather than on a resultant object, and it calls for open-ended experimentation that creates forms of democratic knowledge production that go beyond the confined walls of traditional institutions. It is important to clarify that the educational turn does not only apply to curatorial practices, in fact, it is often contextualised within different tendencies of contemporary art practice. Modes of speculation, unpredictability, self-organisation and criticality are some of the main features underlying the educational turn.[61] Attempting to challenge the instructive role of museums and exhibition spaces, the educational turn offers a platform for dialogue between the audience, the artists, and the public sphere. These practices emphasise the use of discursive, pedagogical methods and situations developed within and

[58] Rogoff, "Turning." The expression the "educational turn" was first used in the "Salon Discussion: 'You Talkin' to Me? Why Art is Turning to Education'," organized by Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London on July 14, 2008. Among others, this discussion was one of the preparations for the publication of Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, *Curating and Educational Turn* (Amsterdam: Open Editions/ de Appel, 2010). See *ica.org.uk.*
[59] Rogoff.
[60] Rogoff.
[61] Rogoff.

outside the exhibition space. Precedents of the implementation of educational tactics as a form of artistic practice can be found in the 1960s and 1970s, in cases such as the *AntiUniversity* (1968) in London—a self-organised education and communal living experiment—and Joseph Beuys' *Free International University* (1973). Recent examples of the engagement with educational and pedagogical strategies as a form of artistic and curatorial practice include: Daniel Buren and Pontus Hultén's *Institut des Hautes Études en Arts Plastiques* (1996); Anton Vidokle's *unitednationsplaza* and *Night School* (2006); Charles Esche's *proto-academy* (1997–2001); *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y*. (2010); Tania Bruguera's *Arte de Conducta* (2002–2009) in Havana; and *ArtSchool Palestine* (2005) to mention just a few.[62]

In relation to A.C.A.D.E.M.Y (2006), an artistic and curatorial project that is regarded as part of the educational turn in art, Rogoff elucidates that, "our interests were in the possibilities for the museum to open a place for people to engage ideas differently—ideas from outside its own walls. So the museum in our thinking was the site of possibility, the site of potentiality."[63] The educational turn can be considered to be an inclination of curatorial and artistic practices that is concerned with the self-revision of art institutions and their transformation into educational platforms.[64] In this

[62] Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, *Curating and Educational Turn* (Amsterdam: Open Editions/ de Appel, 2010).
[63] The project A.C.A.D.E.M.Y was a collective curatorial and artistic project between the Hamburger Kunstverein, MukHa Antwerp, Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven, and the Department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths, London University. It was initiated by Angelika Nollert and it took place in three different cities in 2006. It aimed to develop a counterpoint to the professionalisation, technocratisation and privatisation of academies occasioned from the Bologna reforms that started in 1999 and were fully implemented in 2010. Such reforms resulted in the monitoring and outcome-based culture characteristic of European higher education today. See Rogoff, "Turning."
[64] Eszter Lázár, "Educational Turn," Curatorial Dictionary — Tranzit.org, accessed December 8, 2015,

regard, one could say that the educational turn builds on strategies of Institutional Critique, as it challenges and questions the role of museums and other institutions, yet it goes beyond those tactics, because it offers a platform for non-hierarchical and horizontal dialogue.

Furthermore, one of the main goals of the educational turn is to find and develop new methodologies for the production of knowledge, as well as for the "formative engagement" of the participants, within an artistic or curatorial project. Manifestations of the educational turn in contemporary art are many and diverse. However, they are all based on the premise of providing democratic conditions of education or "the emergence of anti-hegemonic teaching methods and roles."[65] Yet, as curator Eszter Lázar points out, the problem with these projects, which are based on the ideas of democratic methodologies and "the voicing of different opinions", is that they often exclude, rather than include "outsiders."[66] These demonstrations can happen within the institutional framework—i.e. free universities, workshops, temporary and experimental schools realised during biennales, research projects parallel to exhibitions, etc.—and outside the institutional arena—i.e. the street, private houses, schools, libraries, etc. Such strategies are implemented as a way of considering the "socially constructed aspects of site-specificity as well."[67] For curator Nora Sternfeld, locating artistic and

http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/educational-turn/. The *Curatorial Dictionary* is a long-term collaborative research project created in 2012 by tranzit (a network of autonomous initiatives in contemporary art working independently in Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Slovak republic and Romania). See http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/about/

65 Lázár.

66 Lázár.

67 Lázár.

curatorial practices in social circumstances as educational projects is a way of creating distance whilst attacking the canon and the dominant school of thought or history.[68] These tactics can also be regarded as an expansion of educational praxis.[69]

With the educational turn, artistic and curatorial practices turned their gaze to 'education' to gain a new perspective that could give rise to political actions, that is to say, as "a platform that could bring together unexpected and momentary conjunctions" of artists, curators, academics, union organisers, and activists, amongst others. In Rogoff's words, "education signals rich possibilities of coming together and participating in an arena not yet signalled."[70]

[68] Nora Sternfeld, "Unglamorous Tasks: What Can Education Learn from Its Political Traditions?," *E-Flux Journal*, no. 14 (March 2010).
[69] O'Neill and Wilson, *Curating and Educational Turn*, 12.
[70] Rogoff, "Turning."

1.4. The Alter-Institutional Turn

Time is running out. Climate change is happening now and future warming is locked in. […] There are no simple solutions. Food shortages, droughts, rising sea levels, record-breaking temperatures, mass migration and war force the urgency of organization. Organizing is no longer a choice for the Left. It's a necessity.

"Institutional Liberation", Not An Alternative[71]

Rather than thinking in terms of art objects or cultural processes, art practice is now taking place in terms of structures. We are currently witnessing the rise of art projects where the centre of attention shifts from the critique of existing institutions to the invention of new ones. Whereas the majority of mainstream art institutions strive to be approachable and public-friendly, recent interdisciplinary collaborative projects are leaning towards a more investigative practice that aims to challenge and question given structural preconditions.[72] According to curator Maria Lind, this division has

[71] Not An Alternative, "Institutional Liberation," *E-Flux Journal*, no. 77 (November 2016), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/77/76215/institutional-liberation/.

[72] For a long time, institutions—such as museums, libraries and universities—have functioned as places where perspectives on politics, culture, society and nature could be established and communicated. They have served as sites where ideologies could be promoted and spread. In the book *Commonwealth*, the third volume of the well-known trilogy *Empire,* Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that institutions are based on conflict and multiplicity. For them, institutions are places of conflict in the sense that "…they both extend the social rupture operated by revolt against the ruling powers and are open to internal discord." Yet, they also are structures that "…consolidate collective habits, practices, and capacities that designate a form of life." In this way, institutions are open-ended constructions in that "…they are continually transformed by the singularities that compose them." Institutions are places where identities are created as they "…silently compel individuals to follow established patterns of behavoir, providing them with formulas for living." See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*, unknown edition (Cambridge, Mass London: Belknap Press, 2011), 357–59. These behavioural configurations are by no means spread evenly throughout society. They define identity formations in terms of race, gender, and class as if they were natural and necessary identarian attributes. "Since the nineteenth century, robber barons, financiers, oil magnets, and fossil fuel oligarchs have weaponized cultural institutions, presenting exploitation, hierarchy, and dispossession as if they were natural," as the activist art collective Not An Alternative bluntly puts it. In today's neoliberal world, "museums and other public

always existed, however, in the past decade distinctions have become more definite distinctions. Collaborative practitioners can be located within the public and commercial institutional framework, but there is a substantial number who are noticeably more comfortable functioning as "self-organised parallel initiatives." As she notices, "it is easier to strategically separate oneself as part of a group than on one's own. This urge to create a space for maneuver […] through strategic separatism, is both a means of protection and an act of protest."[73]

Deeming institutions to be sites of conflict and multiplicity, these innovative aesthetic configurations cleverly place themselves outside the institutional hypertrophy, defying those limits imposed by the financialised art institute whose programme is subject to market imperatives. Unlike the professionalised paradigm of socially engaged art practice—increasingly adopted as an official policy by museums, city agencies and non-profit organisations—these "organisational models" aim to move beyond a process of simply dissolving boundaries between institutional and non-institutional platforms.[74] In this way, these novel schemes antagonise the institutions, yet tactically engage with the institutional resources, such as monetary funds, exhibition platforms and public visibility. These initiatives tend to be long-term projects strategically located in zones of socio-political

institutions [have] become little more than apparatuses for public relations, resources for reshaping common sense according to capitalist values and priorities." See Not An Alternative, "Institutional Liberation."

[73] Lind, "The Collaborative Turn," 203–4.

[74] For more on the professionalisation of socially engaged art, see Holland Cotter, "Making Museums Moral Again," *The New York Times*, January 19, 2018, sec. Arts, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/17/arts/design/making-museums-moral-again.html.

conflict—i.e. refugee camps, warzones, slums, etc. They offer access to momentary infrastructures and they have the ability to galvanise the local community. The results of their intervention are presented within the existing institutional structures, such as biennales, art fairs, exhibitions, conferences, amongst others. This strategy can be read as an attempt to move away from existing institutions and to open up new configurations where the democratisation of the basic structures of life might be possible.

In the article *Social Media: Practices of (In)Visibility in Contemporary Art* (2015), art historian Sven Lütticken regards this rapidly spreading artistic phenomenon as an expanded form of Institutional Critique. However, unlike Institutional Critique, which focuses on the existing institutions and its operational logics, these new aesthetic configurations concentrate on the creation of intersectional collaborations that are somewhat based in the institutional framework. Yet, these are neither art organisations nor alternative art institutions—in the sense of artist run-spaces.[75] As such, these artistic approaches strive for the creation of social assemblages encompassed by experts from different fields and groups of people who have been rendered as socially invisible in order to decentralise and democratise resources that for too long have been exploited by the privileged few.[76] "The result, is a kind of generalised aesthetic practices that thrives on a pragmatic stretching of boundaries or on the exploitation of the increasing permeability of both institutions and social fields," as Lütticken claims.[77]

[75] Lütticken, "Social Media: Practices of (In)Visibility in Contemporary Art."
[76] Lütticken.
[77] Lütticken.

Within the existing literature, this aesthetic shift has been defined as "mockinstitutional aesthetics" by Gregory Sholette, "parafictional institutions" by Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "self-organised parallel initiatives" by Maria Lind, the "organisational turn" or "institutional activism" by Ekaterina Degot, the "infrastructural turn" by MTL collective and the "alter-institutional turn" by Marco Baravalle.[78] Although these definitions refer to the same aesthetic shift, there are some dissimilarities that characterise these designations. For instance, both art theorist Gregory Sholette and art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty, understand this emerging artistic genre within a state of superimposition between the real and the fictional. On the one hand, Sholette describes this emerging artistic genre as "an informally structured art agency that overtly mimics the name and to some degree the function of larger, more established organizational entities."[79] For him, mockinstitutions are fictional organisations that are not "completely absent [nor] entirely present at any given moment."[80] On the other hand, Lambert-Beatty proposes the term "parafiction" as deception, a stylistic mimicry, or the art of make-believe. Parafictional interventions are performative as "they make *someone* believe, however temporarily or ambiguously," and they operate "disruptively outside the artistic context." For Lambert-Beatty,

[78] Gregory Sholette, "Mockinstitutions," in *Dark Matter* (London & New York: Pluto Press, 2011); Carrie Lambert-Beatty, "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility," *October* 129 (2009): 51–84; Maria Lind, *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, ed. Brian Kuan Wood (New York, N.Y: Sternberg Press, 2010); Degot, "The Artist as Director: 'Artist Organisations International' and Its Contradictions"; MTL Collective, "From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation? A Decolonial Perspective on the Crises of Contemporary Art"; Baravalle, "Art Populism and the Alter-Institutional Turn."
[79] Gregory Sholette, "Glossary: Mocksituation," Art and Social Justice Working Group. Vera List Center for Art and Politics, accessed September 6, 2019, http://www.veralistcenter.org/art-and-social-justice/glossary/28/mocksituation/.
[80] Sholette, "Mockinstitutions," 156. Some examples of mockinstitutions include The Yes Men, Critical Art Ensemble and Los Angeles Urban Rangers.

the question of the veracity of these interventions is fundamental to their structure.[81] Some examples of mockinstitutions or parafictional interventions can be seen in the practice of The Yes Men, Critical Art Ensemble and Los Angeles Urban Rangers.

Another definition is provided by Lind, who moves away from the fiction/non-fiction conundrum, and instead regards these artistic formations in terms of strategies. For her, these "self-organised parallel initiatives" are groups of cultural practitioners working together outside the larger mainstream institutions. As a matter of fact, these organisations are developed "as a way to give room for practitioners to manuever around instrumentalizing effects of both the art market and publicly financed art alike," as she notes.[82] For her, the importance of these practices dwells on the fact that their collaborative strategy is an effective smokescreen for their ability to generate a sense of generosity and solidarity, even if it is temporary. In her words, "the purpose of collaboration lies in producing something that would otherwise not take place" within and outside the mainstream institutional framework.[83]

Moreover, art historian Ekaterina Degot suggests the term "organisational turn" based on the idea that the ultimate aesthetic configurations are taking place in the creation of structures, and as such, artists are becoming art curators or directors. In the article *The Artist as Director* (2015), Degot explains that artists are increasingly appropriating the role of the art manager as their practice is literally focusing on

[81] Lambert-Beatty, "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility," 56–70.
[82] Lind, "The Collaborative Turn," 203–4.
[83] Lind, 204.

management as art. According to her, these new forms of organisations are resultant of "a strong desire among curators and artists to stop the constant nagging of criticism, and to build a better reality […] [that] is to be sustainable rather than temporary; tangible rather than imaginary; collective rather than individualist; indisputably 'good' rather than ambivalently subversive." For her, these organisations have opened the door for a reconstruction of what she calls "institutional activism."[84] In a similar way, the MTL collective regards the "infrastructural turn" as the establishment of organisations founded by artists and activists and characterised by a reformist social and political agenda. According to the collective, this new tendency in artistic practice is partly informed by the principle of Institutional Critique that "art is not autonomous from the economic systems, ideological apparatuses, and institutional spaces within which it is produced, presented, and circulated." As such, these organisations use the visibility of the institutional platform to hold institutional actors accountable for "their complicity in perpetuating, concealing, or neglecting unjust and oppressive practices within and beyond the institution in question."[85] The collective focuses more on the confrontational and activist aspect of this artistic tendency rather than in the artistic practice itself. Some examples of these institutional activist or infrastructural practices can be seen in the cases of Ahmet Örgüt and the Silent University, the Gulf Labor Campaign (GLC), Global Ultra Luxury

[84] Degot, "The Artist as Director: 'Artist Organisations International' and Its Contradictions," 22.
[85] MTL Collective, "From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation? A Decolonial Perspective on the Crises of Contemporary Art," 193–94.

Faction (G.U.L.F), Chto Delat's School of Engaged Art, Decolonize this Place, and Idle No More.

Finally, art theorist Marco Baravalle characterises the alter-institutional turn as the creation of new institutions or organisations that work parallel to the art world and its institutional structures. Baravalle's description not only elucidates how these organisations are often conceived as artworks by a single artist, but also that their autonomy depends on the artist's capacity to economically sustain it. Because of this, he believes that these schemes cannot create or take part in the "real process of organization, and are unlikely put down roots after their initial realization."[86] In addition to this, Baravalle explains that these projects consciously operate in a space that is defined by the existing power structures, yet they attempt to create "new social bonds founded on irreducible multiplicity." In this respect, he clarifies that alter-institutional organisations not only avoid "populist reductionism", but also the "institutionalism of relational aesthetics."[87] Personally, I find Baravelle's description to be the most accurate, as it presents an account of the characteristics surrounding these aesthetic innovations and offers an insight into how these practices can operate. As such, henceforth I will refer to these artistic organisational models as alter-institutional initiatives.

It can be established, then, that alter-institutional initiatives aim to shift away from past strategies of transgression, inefficacy and critique—that is, the impasse of Relational Aesthetics to grasp the imbalance in power

[86] Baravalle, "Art Populism and the Alter-Institutional Turn."
[87] Baravalle.

relationships within society, the inadequacy of socially engaged art projects to substitute social services, and the failure of Institutional Critique which was swallowed up by the institution it stood against. Instead, these aesthetic configurations aim to move towards a form of "collective autonomy", to borrow Brian Holmes' term, where a collective counterpower to the status quo can be initiated.[88] To put it differently, we are currently witnessing a shift in the artistic practice that moves beyond previous tactics of the "singularly observed 'critical'" and instead strives for "the collectively accessed 'aesthetic'"[89] in order to gain a more ecological, political, spatial and social engagement. In the words of the Not An Alternative collective, "Our actions are not simply against. They are for: for emancipations, equality, collectivity and the commons."[90]

It is worth noting that these initiatives are generally geared towards the local people involved in the project, who, in principle, are the ones benefiting from these socio-eco-political artistic interventions; yet, these schemes are also directed to the mainstream of art—predominantly in the West—to encourage the audience to consider its own position of comfort and to reflect on the accomplices and perpetuators of the status quo. This raises questions about the reach and the positive impact these practices might truly have, as well as who they are really targeting. Moreover, it goes without saying that as these initiatives are usually located in geographic areas of social and/or ecological upheaval, access to premises for the

[88] Brian Holmes, "Artistic Autonomy and the Communication Society," *Third Text* 18 (November 2004): 547-555.
[89] Foster Gage, *Aesthetics Equals Politics*, 7.
[90] Not An Alternative, "Institutional Liberation."

general audience is limited. A very small percentage of the artworld will ever go to these remote places to witness first-hand the effects these organisational models have on the intervened community. Therefore, the veracity of the results presented in the institutional framework should be taken with a grain of salt, as the outcomes run the risk of being misrepresented by the rose-tinted view of the artist, who acts as a representative of those relegated to oblivion with no access to the mainstream artworld. An objective assessment of the project's achievements and the changes generated within the zone of intervention is, thus, hardly possible.

Alter-institutional initiatives are vast and diverse as they can articulate different levels of struggles outside the traditional forms of political intervention. Their objectives, rhetoric, position, and strategies differ according to the context in which they are inserted. The crux of understanding when these collaborative projects work—and when they do not work—lies in the specificity of their models, "in the precision of the 'here and now'," [91] as Lind puts it. To understand the perils and possibilities of these schemes, a consideration of the context, time and surrounding forces is, therefore, necessary. Additionally, it is important to bear in mind that despite these initiatives being context- and place-specific, what they have in common is the fact that they all implement different decolonial tactics or strategies as a way to disclose ethical alternatives to structural inequalities. Such decolonial approaches combine knowledge, practice and

[91] Lind, "The Collaborative Turn," 204.

creative expression, amongst other areas, in order to interrupt and shift away from the modern, colonial, capitalist, heteropatriarchal, eco-destructive matrices of power, and advance other ways of acting, and living in this shared world. Decolonial strategies encompass a variety of actions from the reclamation of /return to land, story-telling, remembering, reframing and restoring, to critical speculation, critical experimentation, unlearning, listening and commoning, amongst others. The use of decolonial approaches within alter-institutional practice is further examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

A Decolonial Perspective

We know that we have to decolonize being, and to do so we have to start by decolonizing knowledge.

Walter Mignolo[92]

In recent years, interest in theories and practices of 'decolonial liberation', alongside a more general questioning of the politics of worldwide solidarity, have increased. Although colonialism is supposedly a matter of the past, today, more and more movements involving independent artists, activists and intellectuals are identifying a global structure of management that controls and touches upon all aspects and trajectories of our lives. A structure that was created by the Western Atlantic imperial states.[93] Accordingly, a variety of 'initiatives of liberation' that challenge this form of global governance have arisen around the world—whether that be in sites where uneven processes of formal decolonisation have taken place in post-imperial European states, or in settler-colonial states such as Israel, Canada, South Africa and the United States. As such, the terms decolonisation and

[92] Walter D. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom," *Theory, Culture & Sicety* 26, no. 7–8 (2009): 13.
[93] Walter D. Mignolo, "Coloniality Is Far from Over, and So Must Be Decoloniality," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 43 (March 1, 2017): 38–45; Walter Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto," *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 2 (January 1, 2011), http://escholarship.org/uc/item/62j3w283; Mignolo, "Delinking"; Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, (Princeton, N.J. ; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2012); Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, 1 edition (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2011); Mignolo, "Coloniality Is Far from Over, and So Must Be Decoloniality."

'decoloniality' have become key to describing, analysing and empowering such actions.[94]

In the most general sense, decolonisation describes the efforts to become free through struggle. It is a combative and creative process that has at its horizon a more amenable collective existence in the world—between humans but also with non-human entities.[95] Scholars in ethnic and indigenous studies such as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang have noticed, nonetheless, that the decolonial terminology has become "superficially adopted" by scholarship, particularly in the arts and humanities, as a way of talking about social justice, critical methodologies, and practice multiculturalism within the established institutions. For them, this "easy adoption" can turn the process of decolonisation into a metaphor, an empty signifier that retrenches settler colonialism and exacerbates unfair social structures. In their own words, "this metaphorization of decolonization makes possible a set of evasions, or 'settler moves to innocence', that

[94] Coloniality and decoloniality are concepts used by a wide range of scholars, social activists and cultural practitioners. For a long time, these concepts were used most by those in the Americas, but increasingly, they are being adopted by those in Africa, Asia, Australia and Europe. See Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, *El Giro Decolonial. Reflexiones Para Una Diversidad Epistémica Más Allá Del Capitalism Global*; Arturo Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise: The Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Research Program," in *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, ed. Walter Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (London: Routledge, 2010), 33–64; Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*; Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*; Mignolo, "Coloniality Is Far from Over, and So Must Be Decoloniality"; Mignolo, "Delinking"; Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Thinking through the Decolonial Turn: Post-Continental Interventions in Theory, Philosophy, and Critique—An Introduction," *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 2011, https://escholarship.org/uc/ssha_transmodernity/1/2; Quijano and Wallerstein, "Americanity as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World-System"; Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 168–78; Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" Nepantla: Views from South," in *Ramose, M.B., "Transforming Education in South Africa: Paradigm Shift or Change?", South African Journal of Higher Education*, 2000, 533–580.

[95] MTL Collective, "From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation? A Decolonial Perspective on the Crises of Contemporary Art."

problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity."[96]

Operating within the settler-colonial nation-states context, Tuck and Yang understand decolonisation as a simultaneous process that involves the repatriation of land and the recognition of how land and relations to the land are differently understood and enacted.[97] For them, decolonisation is different from other civil and human rights-based projects that seek social improvement. Rather, decolonisation is about the experiences of oppression.[98] In general, decolonial approaches combine knowledge, practice and creative expression, amongst other areas, with the aim of interrupting and shifting away from the modern, colonial, capitalist, heteropatriarchal, eco-destructive matrices of power, and advancing other ways of living in this shared world.

In the same vein, in the article *Towards the 'tangible unknown': Decolonization and the Indigenous future* (2012) editors Aman Sium, Chandi Desai and Eric Ritskes explain that the process of decolonisation is intrinsically centred around Indigenous methods, peoples and lands, and that it is a constant (re)negotiation of power, place, identity and sovereignty.[99] Yet, they recognise that there are many visions and understandings of what the process of decolonisation implies, and thus, it is not surprising that definitions of 'decolonisation' and who is 'Indigenous'—

[96] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.
[97] Tuck and Yang, 7.
[98] Tuck and Yang, 3.
[99] Aman Sium, Chandi Desai, and Eric Ritskes, "Towards the 'Tangible Unknwon': Decolonization and the Indigenous Future," *Decolonization: Indigeneity*, *Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1.

and therefore the definition of Indigeneity—stay open and, to a certain extent, unknown. For them, these contradictions are altogether not unexpected, since "decolonization is a messy, dynamic, and contradictory process," as they claim.[100] Furthermore, scholars Marie Ann Battiste and James Youngblood Henderson argue that Indigenous epistemologies—and consequently the process of decolonisation—are part of communities and individuals and are deeply embedded in their everyday life. It is precisely for this reason that they cannot be categorised or defined.[101] The results of the process of decolonisation are "diverse and located at multiple sites in multiple forms, represented by and reflected in Indigenous sovereignty over land and sea, as well as over ideas and epistemologies," as Sium, Desai and Ritskes explain.[102] In this sense, it is possible determine that decolonisation is sustained and shaped by the particularities of the context and geographies where this process takes place.

The process of decolonisation takes different forms and meanings according to the specific context and the place in which this practice takes form. Decolonisation is site and context specific. So, regardless of its inflated status in academia and the mainstream of contemporary art, it should be acknowledged that the decolonial frame brings with it a set of stances and principles that offer a different perspective on current socio-political

[100] Sium, Desai, and Ritskes, 2.
[101] Marie Ann Battiste and James Youngblood Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge.* (Saskatoon, SK: Purich Publishing, 2000), 36 as cited in Sium, Desai, and Ritskes, "Towards the 'Tangible Unknwon': Decolonization and the Indigenous Future," 2.
[102] Sium, Desai, and Ritskes, "Towards the 'Tangible Unknwon': Decolonization and the Indigenous Future," 2.

issues.[103] Therefore, it is not surprising that many intellectuals and cultural practitioners are utilising decolonial discourses and methodologies for critical analysis and decentralising actions.

At this point, it is vital to clarify that being aware of the problematic connotations the misuses of the term 'decolonisation' can have, this thesis approaches the subject with caution. Despite its inflammatory implications, I still find the decolonial lens extremely valuable in deconstructing the dominant narratives and structures of power that continue to produce and reproduce the power dynamics rooted in colonial-imperial systems of thought. A decolonial perspective attempts to interrelate a diverse array of perspectives determined by the imperial-colonial dimension of modernity, for example the lived experiences of oppression, marginalisation and otherness.[104] In doing so, it enables an intersectional and relational approach that connects the struggles of oppression, as recognising their socio-political and historical specificities. Given the explicative power of the decolonial lens to underscore the ripple effects of colonialism that still permeate the global landscape, this dissertation uses the decolonial frame as a fundamental tool for the reading and comprehension of the socio-political dynamics that take place within the alter-institutional practice. For

[103] MTL Collective, "From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation? A Decolonial Perspective on the Crises of Contemporary Art," 194.
[104] Anthony Giddens defines modernity as "modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence. This associates modernity with a time period and with an initial geographical location, but for the moment leaves its major characteristics safely stowed away in a black box". Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 1. However, decolonial theorists consider modernity to begin with the 'discovery' of the Americas. See Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)," 65–66.

the purposes of this thesis it is absolutely essential to provide a thorough theoretical preamble, because it is only through a detailed understanding of the decolonial perspective that we can begin to comprehend and to recognise the interconnected nature of the systems of power being addressed and challenged by the alter-institutional initiatives being analysed in this dissertation. In using a decolonial perspective my aim is to provide a relational reading on how art can contribute to the process of envisioning and making decolonial paths that can lead to other possible futures.

There are two main schools of thought associated with the process of decolonisation: postcolonial studies and decolonial theory. The radical difference between these two lies in the genealogy of thought in which each tradition found its vision. On the one hand, postcolonial studies are mainly influenced by French structuralism and poststructuralism, and they underscore the postcolonial situation of ex-colonies with their associated material, socio-economic and cultural issues.[105] Postcolonialism, as an intellectual movement, was mainly consolidated and developed around the ideas of Homi K Bhabha, Edward W Said and Gayatri C Spivak. This school of thought began to take shape in the late 1970s, and it predominantly studies the 'historical' decolonisation of the twentieth century and its reverberations. On the other hand, decolonial theory finds its critical foundation in the intellectual debates stimulated in Latin America by José Carlos Mariátegui in the 1920s and in dependency theory and philosophy of

[105] Bhambra, "Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues," 115.

liberation that spread all over Latin America in the 1970s. Decolonial theory addresses the contemporary social, political, ethical, and epistemic issues in a socio-historical frame of the Global South. It emerged at the end of the twentieth century from the work of several Latin American scholars within the social sciences and humanities, most notably Anibal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo, Maria Lugones, Ramón Grosfouguel and Nelson Maldonado-Torres.

For decolonial theorists, postcolonial postures have adopted the logics of location in relation to the Global North—outside/inside, barbarians/civilised, other/self—and therefore, continue to study and qualify subjects according to the dominant logics of classification and separation that they aim to critique. As such, decolonial theory proposes an openness to 'other' forms of thought and ways of living that have not been recognised as relevant or important in the global logics of location and distribution of power. It is influenced by two main pillars: 1) from individual thinkers, such as: Waman Puma de Ayala, Ottabah Cugoano, Mahatma Gandhe, Amilcar Cabral, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, W.E.B. Dubois and Gloria Anzaldúa; and 2) from countless uprisings and social moments, such as: the Zapatistas and indigenous movements in Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia; the Palestinian liberation; and Indigenous activists in colonial-settler territories like New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the US.[106]

[106] Walter D. Mignolo, "Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (March 1, 2007): 155–67. Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), www.dukeupress.edu/on-decoloniality; Walter Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto," *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral*

Today, a variety of decolonial methodologies and strategies are being set in motion in order to unsettle the logics of dispossession, exploitation and extraction that have been globally present for centuries. As the question of coloniality has become central to the widespread demand for social justice, so have the decolonial approaches to confront it. Decolonial tactics are grounded in the practice of living, encompassing daily acts of resistance and refusal, as well as, in the economies of love, care and solidarity.[107] In order to comprehend the different creative decolonial strategies being implemented within the realm of art, in particular in alter-institutional art practice, this chapter provides a comprehensive description of what decolonial thinking entails and the different forms and shapes it takes. To this end, I explain the differences between the process of decolonisation that took place during the twentieth century—historical, or political decolonisation—and the process of decolonisation that is currently undertaking in different socio-political and cultural contexts around the world—contemporary decolonisation or decoloniality. I also elucidate how decoloniality functions as an analytic and as a praxis, and present a series of decolonial methodologies that are being used as 'weapons' of liberation. The intention here is not just to tell but also to show how decolonial

Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World 1, no. 2 (January 1, 2011), http://escholarship.org/uc/item/62j3w283.

[107] Irmgard Emmelhaiz, "Decolonial Love," *E-Flux Journal* 99 (April 2019), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/99/262398/decolonial-love/; Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor"; MTL Collective, "From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation? A Decolonial Perspective on the Crises of Contemporary Art"; See for instance Rolando Vázquez, "Towards a Decolonial Critique of Modernity. Buen Vivir, Relationality and the Task of Listening," in *Capital, Poverty, Development, Denktraditionen Im Dialog*, ed. Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, vol. 33 (Aachen: Wissenschaftsverlag Mainz, 2012), 241–52, http://www.ceapedi.com.ar/imagenes/biblioteca/libros/241.pdf.

methodologies can be implemented as part of alter-institutional practice. I argue that decoloniality as an analytic and as a praxis provides what Tuck and Yang call "an ethic of incommensurability", which connects and intersects different colonial wounds and can in turn enable the creation of paths towards a world where many worlds can co-exist.[108]

2.1. Decolonisation is not the same as Decoloniality

The process of decolonisation that is currently taking place around the world is different from the 'historical' or 'political' notion of decolonisation from the twentieth century whereby the territorial land domination—mainly in the Global South by European empires—ended. Whereby historical or political decolonisation describes the process through which national movements of liberation dismantle and/or remove the colonial-imperial powers established before World War I. This process of decolonisation mainly aspires to take back control of the state, and to obtain an intellectual liberation whereby the colonised 'nation-people' were set free from the internalised coloniser's ideas that for decades regarded them as inferior. In this sense, decolonisation is used to refer to a political, epistemic process whereby the internal rejection of colonialist mindsets and norms is a fundamental component.[109]

[108] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor."
[109] In this vast reshaping of the world, more than 80 former colonies gained independence. See more in "The United Nations and Decolonization," in https://www.un.org/en/decolonization/ (accessed last September 13, 2019).

Moreover, contemporary decolonisation or 'decoloniality' should be understood as a natural extension or continuation of the traditional process of decolonisation. But unlike 'historical' decolonisation, taking back control of the state is not the end point for decoloniality, rather it is the start of the process of epistemic and subjective reconstitution.[110] In this regard, Latin Americanist theorist Nelson Maldonado-Torres explains that the 'decolonial turn'—in thought and in practice—that took place in the twentieth century, is still unfolding and does not refer to a single theoretical school. As a matter of fact, there is a wide variety of decolonial discourse including African and Caribbean philosophy, African American theology, feminism, queer theory, Latin American liberation philosophy, Latinx epistemology, ethnic studies, and decoloniality theory and critique. These discourses have different terminologies and positions, but despite disparity they all share the view that the dominant structure of power was, and continues to be, organised around a colonial axis. This axis is a fundamental problem in the present day, and thus, decolonisation is a necessary task that remains unfinished.[111] One should bear in mind that the notion of

[110] Theorist Anibal Quijano laid the ground for the notion of decoloniality, and although in his fundamental article *Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality* (2007) he still uses the word 'decolonisation', his argument changed its meaning. In his words: "The critique of the European paradigm of rationality/modernity is indispensable—even more, urgent. But it is doubtful if the criticism consists of a simple negation of all its categories; of the dissolution of reality in discourse; of the pure negation of the idea and the perspective of totality in cognition. It is necessary to extricate oneself from the linkages between rationality/modernity and coloniality . . . epistemological decolonization, as decoloniality, is needed to clear the way for new intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences and meanings, as the basis of another rationality that may legitimately pretend to some universality. Nothing is less rational, finally, than the pretension that a specific cosmic vision of a particular ethnicity should be taken as universal rationality, even if such an ethnicity is called Western Europe because this actually pretends to impose a provincialism as universalism". Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 168–78.

[111] See Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality"; Mignolo, "Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking"; Maldonado-Torres, "Thinking through the Decolonial Turn."

'decoloniality' is solely used within the Latin Americanist decolonial tradition, but for practical reasons and to avoid any confusion between the notions of 'historical or political decolonisation' and 'contemporary decolonisation', henceforth I will refer to the latter as decoloniality, even when the scholars or authors being mentioned do not make use of this term.

The starting point of decoloniality is not the rejection of coloniality. Rather the decolonial project seeks to (re)imagine and (re)articulate power and knowledge dynamics through an array of epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies. Decoloniality is a process of unsettling and opening. According to scholars Sium, Desai and Ritskes, the process of decoloniality cannot take place without some sort of contestation. Decoloniality must necessarily push back against the colonial power relations that threaten Indigenous ways of being. For them, indigenous epistemologies are the starting point for resurgence and decolonization, as they are the "medium" through which we can be in the present but are also the "possibility" for an Indigenous future. "Without this power base," they explain, "decolonization becomes a domesticated industry of ideas. Decolonization is not always about the co-existence of knowledges, nor knowledge synthesis, which inevitably centers colonial logic. […] Decolonization necessarily unsettles," as they claim.[112]

Today, there is no blueprint for what decoloniality implies.[113] Decoloniality is a process that is necessarily context- and place-specific; it

[112] Sium, Desai, and Ritskes, "Towards the 'Tangible Unknwon': Decolonization and the Indigenous Future," 4.
[113] MTL Collective, "From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation? A Decolonial Perspective on the Crises of Contemporary Art," 195.

takes different shapes in each particular space. According to Papaschase Cree scholar Dwayne Donald, colonialism is an extended process of denying relationship. For him, everybody has been colonised regardless of skin colour or geographic location. Because of the fact that the colonial axis is all over, it is necessary to find a way where "we can speak to each other in more ethical turns," as he says. Therefore, decoloniality can only occur when we face each other across historic divides and begin to imagine a "qualitative different relationship: respectful, ethical, relational and ecological."[114] In this same vein, Torres-Maldonado explains that decolonial movements combine knowledge, practice and creative expression in efforts to challenge and change the—still present—axis of the colonial/modern world. The process of decoloniality "demand[s] a holistic movement that involves reaching out to others, communication, and organising," as he claims.[115] It is through this process that a new knowledge and critique—a new paradigm—is produced.

Likewise, in the context of settler-colonialism, Tuck and Yang believe that this decolonial epistemic reconstitution, or paradigm shift, can only start with the recognition that settlers have been using Indigenous lands—and bodies—for centuries as a resource for capital.[116] In conversation with

[114] Dwayne Donald, "Dwayne Donald's Lecture: On What Terms Can We Speak?" (September 24, 2010), https://vimeo.com/15264558 (accessed July 27, 2019).
[115] Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality," *fondation-frantz fanon*, http://fondation-frantzfanon.com/outline-of-ten-theses-on-coloniality-and-decoloniality/ (accessed January 15, 2019).
[116] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." In the article *Delinking* (2007), Walter Mignolo explains the colonial relation to land that gave a massive advantage to the colonial settlers and enabled them to implement the capitalist system. In his words, "capital was necessary to organize labor, production and distribution; and, the appropriation of land *enormously increased the size and power of capital.* It was the land, rather than money, that made possible the qualitative jump of mercantile economy into mercantile capitalist economy". See more in Mignolo, "Delinking," 481.

Tuck, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson explains that "…dispossession is a structural relationship Indigenous peoples have to the state. The destruction of Indigenous bodies takes place to remove us from our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual relationships to land primarily so that the land can be exploited for natural resources."[117] The current absolute capitalist hunger for natural resources means that the colonial processes of exploitation and dispossession are ongoing. Thus, the process of epistemic and subjective reconstitution—that is, decoloniality—must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land, and relation to land, have been differently understood and enacted: "*all* of the land, and not just symbolically," as Tuck and Yang bluntly state.[118] Accordingly, decoloniality requires 'unsettling' and restructuring the logics of extraction and dispossession, all of which need to be sustained on "epistemological, ontological and cosmological relationships."[119]

In this vein, Sium, Desai and Ritskes notice that for many colonized people living under the ongoing violence inflicted by settler-colonial power, the notion of decolonisation is defined by the urgency of land struggle and the restoration of traditional territories now divided by nation-state borders. For them, decoloniality is an emotional and spiritual process that goes beyond reason and cannot take place without recognising the primacy of land and Indigenous sovereignty over that land. As they poignantly claim:

> We cannot decolonize without recognizing the primacy of land and Indigenous sovereignty over the land. […] What often gets twisted

[117] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Indigenous Resurgence and Co-Resistance," *Critical Ethinc Studies* 2 (Fall 2016): 22.
[118] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 7.
[119] Emmelhaiz, "Decolonial Love."

> in this conception [of Indigenous nationhood], and where possibility of failure lies, is when we fail to recognize that land, spirit, and mind are inherently connected —creating sharp separations has been an important part of the colonial project. Indigenous connections to the land are spiritual. Relationship to the land, and not in a romanticized or fetishized 'noble savage' sort of way, generates the knowledge (and theory) that is required to survival. The spiritual is not absent from theory or day-to-day decisions. Each of these (mental, spiritual, material) are wrapped up, entangled, and enmeshed in one another. Decolonization demands the valuing of Indigenous sovereignty in its material, psychological, epistemological, and spiritual forms. [120]

In this sense, it can be established that decoloniality is anchored in the centrality of land and Indigenous claims to that land.

Moreover, the idea of decoloniality starts with valuing Indigenous sovereignty over land, yet it is crucial to clarify that it goes beyond the binary understanding of Indigenous/non-Indigenous. In fact, there is an ongoing problem with the concept of 'indigenous peoples' and Indigeneity, which are often used interchangeably. The notion of Indigeneity is a matter of native self-ascription or self-identification, but it is also, among other things, a matter of settler imposition.[121] In fact, it is often argued that deciding *who* is Indigenous through the colonial tools of differentiation would be a way of inscribing to the colonial strategies of measurement and containment.[122] There are many different ways in which Indigeneity is experienced, as well as ways in which it responds to colonial intrusion. "What these delineations of Indigeneity look like differ depending on context and place but the intent and logic behind them is similar," as Sium,

120 Sium, Desai, and Ritskes, "Towards the 'Tangible Unknwon': Decolonization and the Indigenous Future," 5.
121 Mathias Guenther, "The Concept of Indigeneity," *Social Anthropology* 14, no. 1 (2006): 26.
122 Sium, Desai, and Ritskes, "Towards the 'Tangible Unknwon': Decolonization and the Indigenous Future," 6.

Desai and Ritskes elucidate. The idea of Indigeneity is full of contradictions and contestations, both with itself and in relation to the outside.[123] But as Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes, "often only Western cultures are allowed to be diverse and contradictory, while Indigeneity is expected to be 'pure', of one mind and aesthetic, and easily identifiable."[124] As such, this thesis understands the idea of Indigeneity as closely connected to the occupation of particular land and places.[125]

There are vast differences and similarities in experiences, epistemologies and struggles of resistance to settler imposition. So, although issues of indigeneity, land sovereignty and governance are indeed central to the process of decolonisation, it is possible to find decolonial gestures at locations where there is not a direct engagement with such issues. With this in mind, this thesis uses a decolonial lens for the analysis of three case studies of alter-institutional initiatives that are located in places where struggles of resistance to settler imposition have taken place, even if these struggles do not engage directly with issues of indigeneity, sovereignty and governance. By doing so, my aim is to show how the process of decoloniality creates responsive connections between different colonial struggles and experiences, yet without collapsing their particularities.

123 Sium, Desai, and Ritskes, 8.
124 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 1st edition (London & New York: Zed Books, 1999) as cited in Sium, Desai, and Ritskes, "Towards the 'Tangible Unknwon': Decolonization and the Indigenous Future," 8.
125 George Dei, Dorothy Rosenberg, and Hall Budd, eds., *Indigenous Knowledges in Global Contexts: Multiple Readings of Our World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

Furthermore, decoloniality can only be articulated in the sense of the historical present and it requires a constant questioning of one's own role and location in what Walter Mignolo has called the "colonial matrix of power." Mignolo and other prominent decolonial theorists,[126] refer to the colonial matrix of power—'coloniality' in short—as a specific structure of power that controls and touches all aspects and trajectories of our lives and the eco-balance.[127] The term 'coloniality' was first used by Anibal Quijano to identify an invisible uneven structure of power—produced through conquest and colonialism—that is the most general form of domination in the world today.[128] This 'matrix' which was created by a minority of the human species, and rules the lives of the majority of human and non-human species, has four interrelated domains: 1) the control of economy—the appropriation of land, massive exploitation of labour and natural resources, and production of commodities; 2) the control of authority—institution, army; 3) the control of gender and sexuality—through family values and education; and 4) the control of subjectivity and knowledge—

[126] Anibal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Arturo Escobar and Rolando Vazquez, amongst others.

[127] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 168. Mignolo clarifies that the use of one term of the other depends on how much detail on wants to invoke with the expression. See more in Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 141.

[128] Please note the basic conceptual difference between colonialism and coloniality. Whereas colonialism refers to the practice of political control and economic exploitation over other nations, coloniality is understood as the matrix of power created by the massive processes of conquest (imperialism) and colonisation. Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215–32. The idea of an ongoing pattern of colonial power can be seen in the work of many scholars including Franz Fanon and Manuel Zapata Olivella, brought different colonial perspectives to their thinking. See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004); Manuel Zapata, *Las Claves Mágicas de América* (Bogotá: Plaza and Janes, 1989).

epistemological, educational and formation of subjectivity.[129] Its invisibility is sustained and affirmed by the visible narrative of Western civilisation.

In his ground-breaking article *Delinking* (2007), Mignolo elucidates that the colonial matrix of power was initially based on tactics of appropriation of land, using serfdom, slavery and oppression as the primary forms of labour, and racism as the fundamental issue to justify exploitation.[130] In this regard, Quijano highlights that if one observes the main forms of exploitation, oppression and social domination worldwide, and the distribution of resources and work amongst the global population, it is very clear that the majority of the people who continue to be exploited, dominated, and/or discriminated against, are precisely those who belong to "…the 'races', 'ethnies' or 'nations' into which the colonized populations were categorized in the formative process of that world power, from the conquest of America and onward."[131] So, even though political colonialism has been eradicated, the reverberations of the relationship between the Western European dominators (and their Euro-North-American descendants) and the colonised populations (including non-human entities) continues to be one of colonial domination.

One has to understand that there is no escape from within the colonial matrix of power; we are all part and complicit in it. Sium, Desai and Ritskes state this complicity is not something that can be collapsed into "simple and neat categories." On the contrary, to understand our own compliticity within the colonial matrix of power, we cannot do so "without

[129] Mignolo, "Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking," 156.
[130] Mignolo, "Delinking," 486.
[131] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 169.

historicizing the political legacy of colonialism and the way in which it manifested itself and continues to manifest itself" across the globe. As such, the process of decoloniality starts with a question of how "Western thought and presence displaced and endangered Indigenous ways of knowing and relationships to the earth, as well as the earth itself." For these scholars, the starting point of decoloniality is not rejecting colonialism, but rather recognising that we all have a responsibility to honour the Indigenous "laws of the land" and restore the right relationships. Whether Indigenous or not, we must recognise our individual responsibility to the land and its stewards.[132] This is not to say that there is a search for a "pan-Indigenous identity," but rather it is for relationships and alliances that strengthen local decolonial movements.[133]

On this subject, Anishinaabe scholar Wanda Nanibush believes that the act of decolonisation (as decoloniality) consists of a process of "unlearning and changing what colonialism is based on in terms of private property, manifest destiny, 'discovery', Enlightenment, Eurocentrism, Cartesian dualism, hetero-patriarchy, capitalism, positivism, sexism, racism, individualism, extraction, classism, violence and control." For her, decoloniality should confront all that is thought to be "proper and normal in the current settler colonial states," in order to heal today's wounds—especially those rooted in colonialism, capitalism or patriarchal

[132] Sium, Desai, and Ritskes, "Towards the 'Tangible Unknwon': Decolonization and the Indigenous Future," 3.
[133] Sium, Desai, and Ritskes, 6.

structures.[134] Likewise, Mignolo understands the epistemic assumptions listed by Nanibush—which are common to all the areas of knowledge developed during the European Renaissance and carried on through the European Enlightenment—as the normative political categories of modernity. Accordingly, he suggests that the task of decoloniality is to "uncover" the confinement of modernity—the Western model of civilisation—and the concurrent denial of its outside. It is about going beyond the universal modern thought and opening a critique towards an intercultural dialogue. In other words, in order to achieve decoloniality, we must disconnect from "…the theoretical tenets and conceptual instruments of Western thought."[135] In this sense, decoloniality strives for "another world" that is not solely based on the conceptual tools inherited from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. As Mignolo puts it, in order to decolonise "it is not enough to change the content of the conversation […] it is of the essence to change the *terms* of the conversation."[136]

Additionally, it is important to bear in mind that decoloniality aims to foster spaces so we can *listen* to what has been relegated to oblivion. It strives for the opening of platforms so that a dialogue with the voices that were silenced by Western narratives—based in a strict separation and implemented through forms of classification and negation—can be established. To start such a conversation, an awareness of the narratives

[134] Walter D. Mignolo and Wanda Nanibush, "Thinking and Engaging with the Decolonial: A Conversation Between Walter D. Mignolo and Wanda Nanibush," *Afterall* 45, no. Spring/Summer (2018): 25.
[135] Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, 7.
[136] Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom," no pagination.

'outside' modernity's rhetoric is, thus, required. If we are to go towards decolonising thought and the resultant power structures, the understanding of the relation between modernity and the colonial matrix of power is therefore crucial. In order to comprehend how the colonial matrix of power or 'coloniality' was created, transformed and managed throughout its long history, in what follows the relation between the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality is presented. This will allow us to understand how through the tactics of undoing, disobeying and disconnecting from the colonial matrix of power, decoloniality is constructing paths and praxis towards an otherwise of thinking, sensing, believing, doing, listening and living.[137]

2.1.1. Modernity/Coloniality

> *The crooked rhetoric that naturalizes 'modernity' as a universal global process and point of arrival hides its darker side, the constant reproduction of 'coloniality'.*
>
> Walter Mignolo[138]

> *Each local history and memory, was disturbed by the intervention and domination of Western civilisation, with the collaboration of elites in each local history.*
>
> Walter Mignolo[139]

[137] Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*.
[138] Mignolo, "Delinking," 450.
[139] Mignolo, "Coloniality Is Far from Over, and So Must Be Decoloniality."

Although colonialism (theoretically) ended after the formal independence and desegregation process of the twentieth century, its uneven structure of power and control—coloniality—is something that has continued to exist in the present day. In the book *On Decoloniality* (2018), Mignolo elucidates how the concept of coloniality is not a notion that emerged as a response to the local injustices prompted by the colonial matrix of power in the Global South. In his words, "Coloniality, then, is not a concept that emerged in Europe to account for issues of European concern—its economy, sensibility, and history—but a concern created in the Third World [the Global South], responding to the needs by local histories of coloniality […]. In Europe the concerns were on modernity, postmodernity, and globalization, not on coloniality, the darker side of modernity, postmodernity, and globalization."[140]

Furthermore, the concept of coloniality simultaneously opened up two trajectories: 1) it brought to light the darker side of modernity (coloniality) and, 2) it transformed decolonisation into decoloniality and decolonial thinking. This means that, paradoxically, decolonisation during the second half of the twentieth century was still enunciated in terms of modern thinking, as "it aimed at changing the contents rather than the principles in which modernity/coloniality was established."[141] In this sense, it is important to understand that decolonial thinking emerged at the very foundation of what decolonial scholars understand as the

[140] Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, 112.
[141] Mignolo and Walsh, 112.

modernity/coloniality dichotomy. As Mignolo explains, "thinking decolonially made it possible to *see* coloniality and seeing coloniality materialized decolonial thinking. The implications of seeing two sides of the story, modernity/coloniality, instead of only one side (modernity) are immense."[142] In other words, the decolonial epistemology arose precisely as a counterpoint to the modernity/coloniality structure.[143]

As mentioned before, Quijano first introduced the idea of coloniality to the Latin American debate within the global frame provided by Immanuel Wallerstein under the umbrella of 'modern world-system' in the early 1990s'.[144] According to Quijano and Wallerstein it was not the "discovery" that assimilated the Americas into an already existing capitalist system, but rather it was because of the "discovery and conquest of the Americas" that capitalism—as we know it—was able to be born.[145] In the article *Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America* (2000), Quijano elucidates that coloniality developed around two fundamental axes or patterns of power that came to be the foundation principles of modernity and the capitalist economy. The first was "the codification of difference between conquerors and conquered in the idea of 'race' […] as the constitutive, founding element of the relations of domination that the conquest imposed. On this basis, the population of America, and later the world, was classified within the new

142 Mignolo and Walsh, 112–13.
143 Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality."
144 See Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" Nepantla: Views from South," in *Ramose, M.B., "Transforming Education in South Africa: Paradigm Shift or Change?", South African Journal of Higher Education*, 2000, 533–580; Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America."
145 Note the quotation marks around discovery; the word implies an authoritarian position from the European standpoint. As Tuhiwai Smith claims, "We did not ask, need or want to be 'discovered' by Europe." See Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

model of power." The second was "the constitution of a new structure of control of labor and its resources and products. This new structure was an articulation of all historically known previous structures of control of labor, slavery, serfdom, small independent commodity of production and reciprocity, together around and upon the basis of capital and the world market."[146] Therefore, it was not the 'discovery' of the Americas that matters, but rather its consequences and the articulations developed from such event. For Mignolo, these consequences translate as the transfer of economic power from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and the transformations in the production of commodities, exploitation of labour and alterations of the commercial circuits.[147]

It is important to bear in mind that the colonisation of the Americas not only affected local histories and forms of living. As a matter of fact, this colonisation also affected the course of Europe's own internal history. Mignolo explains that,

> The European Renaissance and New World were two fundamental anchors of the modern/colonial world held together by the complicity between the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality. From the sixteenth century on, they co-exist and co-depend as well on the formation of 'capitalism' as we know it today. As a matter of fact, the modern/colonial world cannot be conceived except as *simultaneously capitalist. The logic of coloniality is, indeed, the implementation of capitalist appropriation of land, exploitation of labor and accumulation of wealth in fewer and fewer hands.*[148]

Therefore, it can be established that the appropriation of land, exploitation of labour and production of commodities on a greater scale were only

[146] Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1 no. 3 (2000): 533–34.
[147] Mignolo, "Delinking," 477.
[148] Mignolo, 477.

possible thanks to the emergence of the Americas in the European horizon. According to Mignolo, without this occurrence, capitalism could not have existed.

It is worth noting that Quijano's account not only provides a new reading to the formation of capitalism and the existing structures of power and control, but it also underscores the fact that Europe became modern in the process of conquest and colonial expansion.[149] A process that "made colonialism, more than a practice, an organizing logic and a modality of knowledge, power and being —that is, coloniality," as Maldonado-Torres asserts.[150] Likewise, one should bear in mind that the thesis of coloniality is framed around the notion of Western modernity. In the article *Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality* (2007) Quijano argues that as European colonial domination was consolidating itself, the cultural complex of European modernity rational was being constituted. In his words, "[t]he intersubjective universe produced by the entire Eurocentered capitalist colonial power was elaborated and formalized by the Europeans and established in the world as an exclusively European product and as a universal paradigm of knowledge and of the relation between humanity and the rest of the world."[151]

[149] Mignolo suggests that while capitalist economy is globally shared, the colonial matrix of power, created and controlled by Western imperial countries (from Spain and Portugal, to Holland, France, England and the USA), is today being challenged by China, Russia, some Islamic countries, India, and Union del Sur. See Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*; Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality."
[150] Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality."
[151] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 171–72.

With European colonial domination began the constitution of a new world order, which culminated in a global power covering the entire world. It goes without saying that the systematic fragmentation that occurred as a result of the European imperial-colonial period was not just physical and/or geographical, but was in fact, consolidated at an epistemological level. By this, I mean that for decolonial scholars, the concept of modernity is inextricably connected with the geopolitics and biopolitics of the knowledge of Europeans. In this regard, Enrique Dussel's central thesis elucidates how modernity in itself is a complex narrative originated in Europe; a narrative that builds Western civilisation and celebrates its achievements whilst hiding at the same time the uneven structure of power, that is, coloniality. In his own words,

> 1492 is the date of the 'birth' of modernity….[M]odernity as such was 'born' when Europe in a position to pose itself against an other, when, in other words, Europe could constitute itself as a unified ego exploring, conquering, colonizing an alterity that gave back its image of itself. This other, in other words, was not 'dis-covered'…, as such, but concealed[152]

To put it differently, the notion of modernity in itself was 'born' when Europe was in a position to put itself against the 'other'. In this sense, modernity is regarded not as the natural unfolding of the world history, but as the regional narrative of the Eurocentric worldview.

Moreover, one has to understand that although modernity is not simply a European phenomenon and it is inextricably entangled with the colonies, its rhetoric has been put forward by European intellectuals,

[152] Enrique Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)," *Boundary 2* 20, no. 3 (1993): 65–76.

philosophers and officers of state.[153] As Mignolo explains, the very idea of 'modernity' was conceived in where the emergence of Europe was articulated on a double front: "separated from the Middle Ages, in the temporal axis and on the Americas, where the barbarians were located, in the spatial axis."[154] As such, modernity could only affirm itself as *the* world historical reality, as the *now* of time and the *here* of space, the *present* of history and the *centre* of geography through conquest and colonialism.[155] Modernity, consequently, appears as a world historical reality with universal pretentions, which have functioned as a mechanism of exclusion—of all that does not fit into their particular universality—and as the concealment of the very exclusion that it produces.[156]

In essence, one cannot understand how coloniality of power came to be without the narrative of modernity that preserves it. The reason for this interrelationship dwells on the fact that the naturalised beliefs about the world order are rooted in an imperial-colonial epistemology, and continue to be so. The modern/colonial power differential was structured at all levels: economic, political, epistemological, military; but, it was the epistemological level where the rhetoric of modernity has gained more power.[157] The ideas about the essential differences between the West and the majority of the world were established by the narrative of modernity—

153 Mignolo, "Delinking," 469.
154 Mignolo, 477.
155 Vázquez, "Precedence, Earth and the Anthropocene"; Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*.
156 Rolando Vázquez, "Towards a Decolonial Critique of Modernity Buen Vivir, Relationality and the Task of Listening," 2012, http://www.ceapedi.com.ar/imagenes/biblioteca/libros/241.pdf (accessed August 13, 2017).
157 Mignolo, "Delinking," 469.

mobilised and promoted by both Christianity and capitalism—and have shaped hegemonic understandings of the world for the past five hundred years.[158] In this way, modernity consolidated and built the world's historical reality based on the negation of its outside, in the relegation of nature, bodies and other worlds of meaning.[159] As sociologist Rolando Vázquez expresses, "the condition of possibility of modernity's rule over reality is [in fact] the negation of alterity and the concealment of this negation."[160]

One should bear in mind that decolonial scholars believe that in previous periods of time, modernity had other names such as: Renaissance, progress, and the civilizing mission. Mignolo affirms that although the concept of modernity was not a common word before the second half of the twentieth century, what this notion represents is something that was already entrenched in the preceding centuries. In his words, this notion "was embedded in the well-known debate in sixteenth-century France between 'les anciens et les modernes.' *Modern* in the sixteenth century meant 'present time'. *The anciens* was a classification invented by those who considered themselves modern." In this context, the term 'modern' and its meaning: the 'present time' was referring to the present of Europe, seeing as 'ancient' all other civilisations outside the continent—Africa, South America, Asia.[161] In addition to this, one should bear in mind that modernity

[158] Alana Lentin, "Decolonising Epistemologies," *Alana Lentin.Net*, February 10, 2017, http://www.alanalentin.net/2017/02/10/decolonising-epistemologies/ (accessed August 15, 2018).
[159] Vazquez, "Precedence, Earth and the Anthropocene".
[160] Vázquez, "Towards a Decolonial Critique of Modernity. Buen Vivir, Relationality and the Task of Listening," 243.
[161] Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*; Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 110.

is an abstract idea, but it has some more concrete signifiers, such as civilising mission, modernisation, progress, development and market democracy. These signifiers have evolved and been replaced throughout history. In the second half of the twentieth century, for instance, the ideas of civilising mission and progress were replaced by the key notion of development.[162] In this regard, Mignolo determines that modernity and its rhetoric works through "the imposition of 'salvation'," whether that be in the form of Christianity, civilization, modernity development or market democracy.[163]

Before moving any further with the argument, I would like to pause and point out that there is a current debate regarding the notion of development and developmental schemes being implemented by international NGOs in conflict zones —usually in the Global South. Supposedly, developmental practices are addressing and tackling global inequalities and discriminatory attitudes created by the dominant modern/colonial power structures. However, as some argue, the logics of development are perpetuating the status quo and preserving the hegemonic power structure that created such global disparities in the first place. This is down to the idea that these schemes navigate with the "salvation flag" and continue to reproduce and reinforce modernity's discursive rhetoric.[164]

[162] Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, 110.
[163] Mignolo, "Delinking," 463.
[164] Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development. The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1995); Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development. From Western Origins to Global Faith* (London & New York: Zed Books, 2008); Wolfgang Sachs, ed., *The Development Dictionary*, 2nd Edition (London & New York: Zed Books, 2010); Ashish Kothari et al., eds., *Pluriverse. A Post-Development Dictionary* (New Delhi, India: Tulika Books, 2019).

This is an important issue to bear in mind when analysing alter-institutional practice and other socially engaged art projects, as a similar logic to the one described above often occurs. As I will elaborate in the following chapters, just like NGOs who proclaim to serve emergency victims, alter-institutional schemes depend on the 'victims', and more importantly, on their marginal status to generate funding streams that guarantee the continuation of their projects.

Going back to the main argument of this chapter, at this point it is important to clarify that decolonial critique uses the concepts of modernity and coloniality as coeval. In the article *Towards a Decolonial Critique of Modernity. Buen Vivir, Relationality and the Task of Listening* (2012), Vázquez justifies this approach by stating that, "In our mind, modernity designates the affirmation of 'the real', ranging from the material to the symbolic, whereas coloniality designates the denial and disavowal of all that belongs to the outside of that 'reality'."[165] In other words, modernity is the rhetorical formation affirming and restating the 'reality' created by the hegemonic structure of power that designates that 'reality', that is, coloniality. Perhaps John Law's conception of the One-World World can serve as an example to clarify the latter statement. As briefly explained in the introductory section of this dissertation, Law defines the One-World World as: a world allegedly composed of a single World and which assumes to be 'the' only world, subjecting all other worlds to its own terms, or otherwise, considering them to be non-existence. That is to say, the One-

[165] Rolando Vázquez, "Towards a Decolonial Critique of Modernity Buen Vivir, Relationality and the Task of Listening," 2012, 242.

World World is a world where only one world fits.[166] Having this description in mind, going back to Vázquez's consideration that modernity and coloniality are the designation and delimitation of reality and its outside, then we can determine that modernity is the rhetoric that affirms the vision of the One-World World, and therefore, coloniality is the structure that denies other worlds' existences and/or subjects them to the terms and conditions of the One-World World vision. In this sense, it is possible to say that modernity is the end that justifies the means: coloniality.

Vázquez continues to explain that the decolonial school of thought deems the modernity/coloniality dichotomy to exert its hegemonic power over the world largely through two modes of relating to the world: appropriation and representation. For him, each of these approaches manifests itself in different fields, discourses, mechanisms and practices.[167] On the one hand, the mode of appropriation is enacted through the privatisation of land, the exploitation of workers, the extraction and patenting of knowledge, and the extraction and manipulation of nature for the sake of profit, amongst other practices. The mode of representation, on the other hand, is seen through the self-referential system of meaning and narratives that preserves, sustains and preserves itself, that is, the hegemonic representation of history where alterity is excluded, silenced and negated.[168] For Vázquez, it is precisely this mechanism that allows a

166 Law, "What's Wrong with a One-World World?"
167 Vázquez, "Towards a Decolonial Critique of Modernity. Buen Vivir, Relationality and the Task of Listening," 242.
168 Vázquez, 242.

form of "…temporal discrimination in which the 'other' is relegated as being either in the past (as barbarian, underdeveloped…) or simply negated as absent as outside of history," as he says.[169]

Furthermore, Quijano's thesis explicitly connects coloniality of power in the political and economic spheres with the coloniality of knowledge. In the modern world, knowledge remains a fundamental aspect of the colonial matrix of power. In this way, decolonial critique believes that if knowledge is colonised, one of the tasks ahead is to liberate the production of knowledge, reflection, and communication from the pitfalls of European modernity rationale.[170] As he further clarifies,

> The critique of the European paradigm of rationality/modernity is indispensable—even more, urgent. […] It is necessary to extricate oneself from the linkages between rationality/modernity and coloniality, first of all from all power which is not constituted by free decisions made by free people. It is the instrumentalization of the reasons of power, of colonial power in the first place, which produced distorted paradigms of knowledge and spoiled the liberating promises of modernity. The alternative, then, is clear: the destruction of the coloniality of world power. First of all epistemological decolonisation, as decoloniality, is needed to clear the way to new intercultural communication, of an interchange of experiences and meanings, […] The liberation of intercultural relations from the prison of coloniality also implies the freedom of all peoples to choose, individually or collectively, such relations […] This liberation is, part of the process of social liberation from all power organized as inequality, discrimination, exploitation and as domination.[171]

This statement, although somewhat prophetic, presents an option of "liberation" from the "crooked rhetoric" that naturalises modernity as a global universal process, and instead, introduces a critique from "the

169 Vázquez, 247. See also Rolando Vázquez, "Modernity Coloniality and Visibility: The Politics of Time," *Sociological Research Online* 14, no. 4 (August 2009): no pagination.
170 Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 177.
171 Quijano, 177–78.

receiving end," that is to say, from the places of colonial brokenness.[172] This is decoloniality.

2.1.2. Delinking, Relinking, Re-existing and Resurgence

One of the basic hypotheses of decolonial theory is that knowledge in the modern world was, and is, a fundamental aspect of the colonial matrix of power, or coloniality. To end this matrix, it is therefore necessary to end the "fictions of modernity." In conversation with Nanibush, Mignolo explains that those "fictions" occur when knowledge is conceived and managed—i.e. languages, institutions, actors—to justify dispossession and control in all the instituted domains —i.e. politics, economic, knowledge, racism and sexism, and the ontologisation of 'nature'.[173] Accordingly, the decolonial task involves a process of: 1) uncovering the confinement of modernity and the concurrent denial of its outside—the Western model of civilisation—in order to, 2) go beyond the universal modern critical thought, and consequently, 3) open the possibility for an intercultural dialogue with the voices silenced by those narratives that are based on strict separation and implemented through modernity's forms of classification and negation.

[172] Walter Mignolo, "The Decolonial Option and the World Today. Lecture by Walter Mignolo" (March 5, 2015), https://www.macba.cat/en/lecture-walter-mignolo (accessed September 26, 2018).
[173] In this context, 'knowledge' is defined as theology, as studied in the Renaissance, and science, philosophy and economics, as they are understood from the eighteenth century. Languages are the official languages of xxx: Greek-Latin and the modern European languages of English, French, German Italian, Portuguese and Spanish. Actors are social roles. All the instituted domains impinge on land dispossession. Mignolo and Nanibush, "Thinking and Engaging with the Decolonial: A Conversation Between Walter D. Mignolo and Wanda Nanibush."

Decoloniality is not about denying the presence of the modernity/coloniality rationale. On the contrary, it is about the emancipation from the epistemological logics that normalise processes of dispossession and colonial violence. In this sense, the decolonial process of liberation strives to "open up the cracks" to other ways of thinking and to foster spaces where the *listening* to what has been relegated to oblivion becomes possible.[174] Yet, to establish such a dialogue with those voices requires an awareness of modernity's outside. And to think *without* modernity and move away from its fictions is, "one major decolonial challenge," as Mignolo bluntly claims.[175]

In this regard, decolonial scholars suggest that a project of liberation from modernity/coloniality involves a two-step gesture. First, a re-embodiment and relocation of thought, in order to "unmask" the limited and inaccurate principles, assumptions and beliefs laid out in the macronarratives of modernity and their manifestation through the colonial matrix of power. This initial action is what Mignolo understands as "delinking."[176] For the semiotician, delinking means to disconnect and deframe from the theoretical principles and conceptual apparatuses of Western thought. Delinking presupposes border thinking or border epistemology because the Western foundation of modernity and its knowledge is "unavoidable and […] highly limited and dangerous."[177]

[174] Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option," 48.
[175] Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, 109.
[176] It is important to clarify that Mignolo's argument is based on Quijano's conceptualisation of coloniality and "desprendimiento" (to disconnect). See more Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*.
[177] Mignolo, "Delinking," 455.

In the ground-breaking article *Delinking* (2007), Mignolo insists that the act of delinking brings to the foreground other epistemologies, and other principles of knowledge and understandings, and therefore, other economies, politics and ethics. In his own words,

> De-linking presupposes to move toward a geo- and body politics of knowledge that on the one hand denounces the pretended universality of a particular ethnicity (body politics), located in a specific part of the planet (geo-politics), that is, Europe where capitalism accumulated as a consequence of colonialism. De-linking then shall be understood as a de-colonial epistemic shift leading to other-universality, that is to pluri-versality…[178]

Then, it can be established that delinking is the act of disconnecting from the universalities within Western categories of thought, so that 'other' ways of seeing, living, knowing and sensing can be acknowledged.

It is important to highlight that delinking requires one to know from what, and how to, disconnect.[179] This process entails working at the peripheries, at the margins between hegemonic forms of knowledge, economic practices and political demands; it means "using the system but doing something else, moving in different directions: toward a truly democratic organising instead of using the rhetoric of democracy to control authority by violence and war."[180] Additionally, one should be aware of the fact that delinking is not about denying and disregarding Western categories of thought and their contributions to the histories of human species on the planet. Rather, it is about denaturalising concepts and conceptual fields that totalise the "One-World World."[181] In essence,

[178] Mignolo, 453.
[179] Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, 120.
[180] Mignolo, "Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking," 160.
[181] For definition of the One-World World see section 2.1.1.

delinking strives towards a vision of life that is not dependent upon, or structured, by the forced imposition of one ideal of society over those that differ—including non-human species—which is what the rhetoric of modernity and the logics of coloniality do.

Fundamentally, delinking is presented as an option that suggests alternative visions to the hegemonic conceptions of what knowledge and understanding are, and accordingly, what economy, politics, philosophy, ethics, technology, and the organisation of society should be like.[182] Additionally, Mignolo elucidates that delinking implies a process of "epistemic disobedience" rather than "the constant search for newness."[183] This takes us to the second step of the decolonial process of liberation, that is, the gesture of "relinking." The decolonial scholar understands relinking as an act of reconnecting with the forms of living, knowing and doing that were once dispossessed and/or silenced, and that, decolonially speaking, one wants to preserve.[184] In this sense, the act of relinking is an indication of remembrance: "a remembrance that wrests the voices out of the silence and oblivion of coloniality. A remembrance that provides an ethical orientation, as it engages in the task of understanding the suffering of the oppressed," as Vázquez clarifies.[185]

The decolonial process of liberation, in other words, entails the action of disconnecting (delinking) in order to reconnect (relinking) to

[182] Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*.
[183] Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option," 45.
[184] Mignolo, "Delinking"; Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*; Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*.
[185] Vázquez, "Towards a Decolonial Critique of Modernity. Buen Vivir, Relationality and the Task of Listening," 243.

something that was dispossessed and should be recovered, whether that be in the form of land, language, believes, knowledge, etc. As such, the decolonial process means to remove oneself from the visible dominant narrative sustained by the invisibility of the colonial matrix of power and to re-establish—by recognising, listening and recovering—a relationship with the alternatives outside of the narratives and logics of modernity/coloniality. It is important to bear in mind that the acts of delinking and relinking are both individual and collective processes, which are interwoven in the political, epistemic, ethical, and existence-based work of affirmation. "[A]ffirmation as opposed to negation," as Latin Americanist Catherine Walsh specifies. And she continues, "[a]ffirmation of life against the project of death which increasingly defines global coloniality today."[186] In this sense, delinking and relinking are sought as indispensable steps for imagining and building democratic, just and non-imperial/colonial societies.[187]

At this point, it is important to clarify that decolonial theorists deem decoloniality as an option, rather than as an imposition of a universality. Decoloniality is a choice as one decides how, for, and from what, to delink and relink. Mignolo states that,

> if the decolonial is argued as an option, it is because life is lived among options, and options are built by people and institutions according to their own assumptions and interests. Interests are not bad in and of themselves: being interested and acting in favour of conviviality, harmony, creativity, and plenitude are some of the ideals and interests that decoloniality promotes; being aware, nonetheless, that this is not the direction that states, corporations, finances are taking and mass media promoting.[188]

[186] Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, 247.
[187] Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom."
[188] Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, 109.

In brief, the project of decoloniality starts through the two-step process of 1) delinking from the narratives that naturalise Western universal totalities; and 2) relinking to those legacies and knowledge declared non-existent or illegitimate by the One-World World. This process is required in the search for alternative spaces where "other" worlds and ways of living to be possible. The "decolonial option" that emerges with this process creates a space for the sharing of "colonial wounds" across borders and movements.

Moreover, in the article *¿Interculturalidad sin decolonialidad? Colonialidades circulantes y practicas de re-existencia* (2008), Adolfo Albán Achinte advances Mignolo's proposition and suggests a third step in the process towards decoloniality, that is, the act of "re-existing."[189] It is vital to clarify that the Afro-Colombian scholar does not refer to re-existence in the sense of resistance, but rather in the sense of fundamental existence. For him re-existence is,

> the mechanisms that human groups create and implement as a strategy of questioning and making visible the practices of racialization, exclusion and marginalization, procuring the redefining and re-signifying of life in conditions of dignity and self-determination, while at the same time confronting the bio-politic that controls, dominates, and commodifies subjects and nature.[190]

[189] For Albán Achinte, it is in the specific context of the construction of Black subjectivities that re-existence takes meaning and form.

[190] Adolfo Albán Achinte, "¿Interculturalidad Sin Decolonialirdad? Colonialidades Circulantes y Practicas de Re-Existencia," in *Diversidad, Interculturalidad y Construcción de Ciudad*, ed. Wilmer Villa and Arturo Grueso (Bogotá: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional/ Alcaldía Mayor, 2008), 85–86. Here cited from Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, 18.

In this sense, re-existence is a call for the agency, action and praxis of the otherwise. It is to signal affirmation and hope in spite of conditions of negation, violence and despair.

Decolonially speaking, re-existence suggests the formation of ways to exist as subjects and not just to resist, that is, "to re-exist resisting and to resist re-existing." Re-existence, therefore, is about building projects of society and life in order to overcome adverse conditions—i.e. enslavement, dehumanisation, discrimination—to live with dignity.[191] In a similar vein, the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanna Simpson proposes the contention of "resurgence," which implies the mapping of colonial thinking by confirming Indigenous lifeways and other alternative ways of being in the world: a kind of renaissance that is simultaneously resistance.[192]

For Simpson, the work of resurgence generates new knowledge on how to resurrect —re-exist— from within. In her own words,

> We cannot just think, write or imagine our way to decolonized future. Answers on how to re-build and how to resurge are therefore derived from a web of consensual relationships that is infused with movement through lived experience and embodiment. Intellectual knowledge is not enough on its own. […] All kinds of knowledge are important and necessary in a communal and emergent balance.[193]

The reference here is to a collective resurgence understood as renewal, restoration and revival of knowledge, but also of life, practice and existences.

[191] Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, 95.
[192] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Theorizing Resurgence from within Nishnaabeg Thought," in *Cetering Anishinaabeg Studies:Understanding the World through Stories*, ed. Jill Doerfler, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 279–93.
[193] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (2014): 16.

In essence, we can establish that decoloniality starts with the process of disconnecting from the foreign power's control over lives and reconnecting with modes of existences that were ignored and/or denied; this is in order to rebuild, re-exist and/or resurge under new conditions of life that are fundamentally non-hierarchical, nonexploitative, nonauthoritarian and nonextractivist.[194] In this process a new kind of knowledge production and critique are formed. In this regard, Walsh suggests that decoloniality's aim is to make visible, open up, and advance "…radically distinct perspectives and possibilities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis and thought."[195]

It is important to understand that decoloniality is deemed as a critique and as a praxis. It is an undoing and a redoing. Mignolo expresses that,

> After undoing [delinking] comes redoing: re-existence. […] The goal of decoloniality in my conception is delinking […] to engage in epistemic reconstitutions […], in re-existing (not only resisting […]), engaging in forms of life that we like to preserve rather than be hostage of the [sic] modernity's designs and desires, and of nationalists' selection of the past of nations; of the resurgence in needs […]; and last but not least—and in a different sphere but similar political orientation of delinking—cultural dewesternization and political re-emergence.[196]

As such, decoloniality is envisaged as a struggle and a form of survival—most especially, but not exclusively, by colonized and racialized subjects. It is an epistemic, existence-based response, and a creative and combative

[194] Mignolo, "Coloniality Is Far from Over, and So Must Be Decoloniality"; Simpson, "Indigenous Resurgence and Co-Resistance."
[195] Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, 17.
[196] Mignolo and Walsh, 120.

practice "*against* the colonial matrix of power in all of its dimensions, and *for* the possibilities of an otherwise."[197] Decoloniality, thus, refers to the efforts of rehumanising the world, of breaking hierarchic differences that have dehumanised and destroyed other human and non-human worlds. In other words, decoloniality is the action of creating "counter-discourses, counter-knowledges, counter-creative acts, and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality," and envisioning other ways of living and reconnecting with this land —our shared world.[198]

It would be a surprise to some to know that colonialism impacts everybody. One does not have to have been on the receiving end of oppressive relations to be affected by the modern/colonial apparatus. Yet, it is important to highlight that the effects and consequences of colonialism are not the same for everybody. Nanibush reminds us that "the impacts of colonialism are different for those bodies that benefit from it than for those whose labour, bodies, emotions, lands and children are taken without permission."[199] Colonialism and its hegemonic power structure—the colonial matrix of power—brought complete disorder to the colonised people, disconnecting them from their culture and traditions, their social relations, their landscapes and their own ways of thinking, feeling, and interacting with the world.[200] It was a process of systematic fragmentation that caused an evident "brokenness." This "colonial brokenness," to use Irmgard Emmelhainz's term, is not of the same scale as in the places where

[197] Mignolo and Walsh, 17.
[198] Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality," 10.
[199] Mignolo and Nanibush, "Thinking and Engaging with the Decolonial: A Conversation Between Walter D. Mignolo and Wanda Nanibush," 26.
[200] Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 28.

colonialism took place, and therefore, it is not felt in the same way.[201] However, what every colonial wound has in common is the fact that they were all inflicted by the same structure of control, and each place has to deal with the unescapable manifestation of the colonial matrix of power or modernity/coloniality apparatus.[202]

There are many directions that each action of delinking, relinking, re-existing and resurging can take. Mignolo avers that the process towards decoloniality takes place in that what unites us as human species, that is, our bodies. "It is through our bodies that reconnecting to land and earth is possible and necessary," as he says. Therefore, "it is imperative to delink from the principles of a civilisation that trained us to block our bodies in order to give privilege to our minds, simultaneously with land conceived and instituted as private property."[203] As I will elaborate in the following section, decoloniality as an action is both, an analytic and a praxis. As an analytic, it presents critique of the omnipresent modernity/coloniality apparatus, its constitution and its transformation. Whereas as a praxis, it seeks to advance creative processes in order to generate decolonial narratives that legitimise 'other' ways of doing and living.[204]

[201] The colonial wounds and therefore the decolonial enactments are different according to their place of origin. In conversation with Nanibush, Mignolo clarifies that "the colonial subjugation […] and the colonial wounds […] are significantly different among First Nations in South America and Central America, Africa and the Caribbean to the US and Canada, New Zealand and Australia. Different times, different imperial powers. Africans and the African diaspora also carry a different intensity of the colonial wound, and so do immigrants (and of course, refugees)." Mignolo and Nanibush, "Thinking and Engaging with the Decolonial: A Conversation Between Walter D. Mignolo and Wanda Nanibush." For more on colonial brokenness see Emmelhaiz, "Decolonial Love"; Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Islands of Decolonial Love* (Winnipeg, Canada: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2013).
[202] Mignolo, "Delinking," 497.
[203] Mignolo and Nanibush, "Thinking and Engaging with the Decolonial: A Conversation Between Walter D. Mignolo and Wanda Nanibush," 26.
[204] Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, 146.

2.2. Decoloniality as Analytic

Decoloniality as analytic strives for epistemic reconstitution through the process of delinking/relinking/re-existing/resurging. It is epistemological because it exposes the limits to modernity and the obscured body- and geo-politics of coloniality, and consequently, moves towards reconnection with the thought-structure that has been denied and/or lost. Decoloniality is not about reversing the positions of dominance and control, but is rather about comprehending the colonial differential—of enslavement, dehumanisation, racialisation, discrimination, etc.—and in doing so, it simultaneously creates responsive connections and intersections between different colonial struggles and experiences without collapsing them.[205] This is what Tuck and Yang understand as "an ethic of incommensurability." The scholars explain that there is so much overlap between the struggles that is incommensurable. An ethic of incommensurability is that which recognises decolonial struggles are not parallel, they are not shared equally and do not bring neat closure to the concerns of all involved.[206] What each decolonial struggle has in common with others, is that "they all have to deal with the unavoidable presence of the modern/colonial world and its power differentials," as Mignolo reminds us.[207]

[205] Mignolo, "Delinking," 498.
[206] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 31.
[207] Mignolo, "Delinking," 497.

In this sense, decoloniality connects the different colonial wounds created by, and entwined in, the modernity/coloniality structure as a way to refract from the universalities of the One-World World vision, and subsequently, strive towards a world where many worlds can co-exist. This is what decolonial theorists understand as pluriversality. Within the existing decolonial literature there are many similar definitions of the term pluriversality. Here I present the one that resonates more with my argument. Inspired by the Zapatistas invitation of 'reworlding possibilities', in the book *A World of Many Worlds* (2018), editors Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser define pluriversality as "heterogenous worldings coming together as a political ecology of practices, negotiating their difficult being together in heterogeneity."[208]

Furthermore, it is important to understand that pluriversality can only be conceived through a relational thinking or relationality.[209] This idea is clarified by Vázquez in the article *Towards a Decolonial Critique of Modernity. Buen Vivir, Relationality and the Task of Listening* (2012), where he explains that relationality questions the dichotomic mechanisms of thinking that are characteristic of modernity's thought-structure.[210] For Vázquez, relationality in the social and political sphere takes shape as

[208] de la Cadena and Blaser, *A World of Many Worlds*, 4. For more on pluriversality see also Mignolo, "Delinking"; Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*; Kothari et al., *Pluriverse*.

[209] In *Introduction to the Grundrisse* (1857), Karl Marx exposes what he calls the 'relationality' of persons, worlds, and things that appear as given and discrete. Marx's position on labour, commodity and all varieties of beings and objects was to expose their sociality and spatiotemporal connection on which their self-definition depended. See Stuart Hall, *A Reading of Marx's 1875 Introduction to the Grundrisse* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Centre for Contemporary Studies, 1973).

[210] Vázquez, "Towards a Decolonial Critique of Modernity. Buen Vivir, Relationality and the Task of Listening," 244.

"togetherness" where there is no dichotomy between coloniser and colonised, master and slave, exploiter and exploited.[211] Relationality, therefore, helps us to have a deeper understanding of how individual histories and experiences can be positioned in relation to one other.[212] In this sense, relationality presents the opportunity to think across the colonial difference and to open paths towards a decolonial understanding where a pluriverse world can be achieved.[213] In the words of the Zapatistas, "we are equal because we are different."[214]

Perhaps Donald's argument on "ethical relationality" and "ecological imagination" will help to clarify the latter idea. The Papaschase Cree scholar envisions "ethical relationality" as:

> an enactment of ecological imagination. Ethical relationality doesn't deny that we're different, so it's not a way to say we're all the same. But it seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other. It puts those at the forefront: who you are, where you come from, what your commitments are, what your experiences have been. So, it's a desire to acknowledge and honor the significance of the relationships we have with others, how our histories and experiences position us in relation to each other, and how our futures as people in the world are similarly tied together. It is an ethical imperative to see that despite our varied place-based cultures and knowledge systems, we live in the world together and must constantly think and act with reference to those relationships.[215]

Donald's definition of ethical relationality is deep-rooted in what he defines as our "ecological imagination." At its core, Donald's viewpoint of

[211] Vázquez, 245.
[212] Donald, "Dwayne Donald's Lecture: On What Terms Can We Speak?"
[213] Vázquez, "Towards a Decolonial Critique of Modernity. Buen Vivir, Relationality and the Task of Listening," 246.
[214] Silvia Marcos, "II Seminario Internacional de Reflexión y Análisis" (Cideci, Chiapas, December 30, 2012), http://radiozapatista.org/?p=4946.
[215] Dwayne Donald, *On What Terms Can We Speak? Lecture at the University of Lethbridge*, 2010, https://vimeo.com/15264558 (accessed August 8, 2019).

our position as humans in this world is grounded in balance and reciprocity. As he explains,

> I use that term 'ecology', and this comes from, I guess, the little bit I know about Cree and Blackfoot philosophies, which I know are connected in this way. And of course, I use ecology not in the sense it is typically used in Science. I don't mean 'ecology' in that you study the environment separate from where we live or who we are as people. Actually, ecology, the way I think of it—the way I've been taught to think about it—is: paying attention to the webs of relationships that you are enmeshed in, depending on where you live. So, those are all the things that give us life, all the things that we depend on, as well as all the other entities that we relate to, including human beings.[216]

In this sense, relational thinking—and acting—should be understood not solely amongst humans, but also between humans and non-human species. Relationality is about questioning one's position and role within the colonial matrix of power, it is also about understanding one's involvement in the different webs of relations. To put it differently, relational thinking enables us to see beyond the modern/colonial dichotomies and to move towards a non-dualist understanding that we are just one part of the enormous web of relations: the pluriverse.

To recap, decoloniality as analytic strives for an epistemic reconstruction through the process of connecting, sharing and healing of the colonial brokenness—that remains present due to the incessant implementation of the colonial matrix of power. This intersection between colonial wounds can be obtained through a relational thinking that allows us to see beyond the dichotomies imposed by the modern/colonial apparatus and move towards the pluriversal realm: a world made of many worlds.

[216] Donald.

2.3. Decoloniality as Praxis

Decoloniality as praxis is the ongoing processes and practices, projects and propositions that build, cultivate and enable decoloniality. Decoloniality as praxis is the active and creative process of making decolonial paths. As Dussel puts it, "Without praxis no pathway is made." Yet, the decolonial path cannot be made without points of reference that orientate us in the right direction. For Dussel, this direction can only be discovered "…in concrete application with the material of day-to-day, militant, and solidarity-based praxis."[217] As mentioned above, the material basis of decoloniality lies in our bodies. Our body is what connects us to the land and to others. Decoloniality as praxis, thus, is the materialisation of decoloniality as analytic and it is embodied through action of different shapes and forms, for example walking, asking, reflecting, analysing, theorising, listening, acting. The actions can be put into practice through a range of processes and solidarity-based activities, but the underpinning question will always be: How can more sustainable relationalities and life conditions be developed in this shared world?

Decolonial approaches are many and diverse. Several strategies have emerged thus far in characterising decoloniality as praxis. In the book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Methodologies* (1999), Linda Tuhiwai Smith outlines twenty-five case studies where

[217] Enrique Dussel, *16 Tesis de Economía Política: Interpretación Filosófica* (Ciudad de México: Siglo XXI, 2014), 322.

instances of decolonial methodologies are being implemented. According to the author the following actions fall into the category of decolonial strategies: *claiming, testimonies, story-telling, celebrating survival, remembering, indigenising, revitalising, connecting, reading, writing, representing, gendering, envisioning, reframing, restoring, returning, democratising, networking, protecting, creating, negotiating, discovering*, and *sharing.*[218] It is important to understand that these projects are not purely utopian, as they embody ways to resist the still-colonial landscape. They encourage processes of mobilisation and community transformation at a local level, and in doing so, are contributing to the process of healing colonial wounds process. The importance of decolonial methodologies lies in their endeavour to map concrete practices that can lead to positive social transformations.

Although Tuhiwai Smith provides a substantial recompilation of decolonial approaches, the process of decolonisation—and our understanding of it—has exponentially expanded in the last five years. Subsequently, new methodologies have come to the surface. In what follows a brief description of other decolonial gestures that are not mentioned by Tuhiwai Smith, is provided. I must add that these approaches are present across the three case studies analysed in this thesis, and thus understanding what these actions entail is fundamental.

[218] Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.

2.3.1. Unlearning

> *When we are taught that we cannot know things unless we are taught by great minds, we submit to a whole suite of unfree practices that take on the form of a colonial relation.*
>
> Judith Halberstam[219]

In both, postcolonial and decolonial traditions of thought, the idea of unlearning the imposed dominant knowledge has been a recurrent topic. But the simple idea of leaving the learnt knowledge behind is difficult to grasp. The process of unlearning is not an easy task, as literally, it is not something we have learned to do.[220] So, what does it mean to learn to unlearn from a decolonial perspective? Is this even possible? In order to answer these questions first one has to understand that the act of learning does not merely imply obtaining a set of skills and knowledge. In fact, learning is a political act, insofar that it also consists of performing and preserving existing power relations. Knowledge can be a powerful tool for improvement and progress, however, it can also create social and political differences. That is to say, knowledge as a source of classification creates blind spots in the orders and distinctions that it generates. We learn how to order, differentiate, classify, and categorise by identifying what belongs to what and what does not belong, what seems to be important and unimportant. We learn this knowledge by applying it in daily life and passing it on. In this way, the knowledge we learn can create individualities.

[219] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 12.
[220] Nora Sternfeld, "Learning Unlearning," *CuMMA Papers*, no. 20 (2016): 3.

We learn to differentiate the 'I' from the 'other'. We learn who 'we' are, and who are the 'others'. We also learn how to behave as 'men', as 'women', as 'citizens'.[221] In this process we are caught in a vicious cycle of negating the 'other' in order to legitimise our own position. Learning, thus, can also be a form of violence, or to be more precise it can be a form of "epistemic violence," as the scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak conceives it.[222]

In the postcolonial and decolonial context, the act of unlearning is deemed as an important practice to challenge the "value-encoding apparatus" from within the structure of knowledge production, that is to say, from within the institution.[223] In fact, Spivak has often called for an "unlearning one's learning" and "unlearning one's privilege as loss."[224] For the postcolonial theorist, the act of 'unlearning' dwells precisely in the process of actively questioning the predominant divisions and the power relations at play, and specifically, in doing this from the 'periphery'. In this sense, unlearning is not solely a reflective process. On the contrary, the act of unlearning requires one to become aware of powerful epistemological forms of discrimination and understand their inherent binary logic: 'us' vs. 'them'.

Furthermore, Spivak's central thesis claims that the process of unlearning constitutes a double recognition. First, it is to acknowledge that because we are able to think about unlearning, we are relatively privileged,

221 Sternfeld, 5.
222 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999).
223 Sternfeld, "Learning Unlearning," 2.
224 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Spivak Reader*, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 1996).

at least in terms of educational opportunity, citizenship, location in regards to the international division of labour, and therefore, race, class gender, nationality, etc.[225] Second, it is to recognise that it is precisely because of these privileges that we have been unable to obtain 'other' kind of knowledge. Spivak continues to explain that this "other knowledge" is not just "simply information that we have not yet received, but the knowledge that we are not equipped to understand by reason of our social positions." To unlearn one's learning thus refers to the realisation that having learnt all these social divisions, one may reverse them.[226] It is important to understand, nonetheless, that this reversal starts with the recognition of one's situation and contribution to the structures of domination—that is, the colonial matrix of power.[227] Having grasped that there are things about the 'other' that one is not "equipped to understand," one should then seek to learn and gain some "knowledge of the others who occupy those spaces most closed to our privileged view," as she states.[228]

In addition to this, one should bear in mind that unlearning is not the act of 'getting rid of' our previous knowledge. Decolonially speaking, the process of unlearning is not about erasing the truths about power structures, the histories of domination, and the way these are produced. On the contrary, unlearning is about identifying ways to avoid hegemonic power and thereby formulate counter processes that name and socially transform narratives of violence. Unlearning is not a corrective process,

225 Spivak, 4.
226 Spivak, 4–5.
227 Sarah Danius, Stefan Jonsson, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak," *Boundary 2* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 24.
228 Spivak, *The Spivak Reader*, 4–5.

rather, it the practice of becoming aware of how our experiences shape the forms of knowledge available to us. Paradoxically, unlearning is a form of active learning. It is the process of acquiring "a different politics of history and a different kind of remembering" by rejecting "dominant, privileged, exclusionary, and violent forms of knowledge and acting," as curator Nora Sternfeld notes.[229] But of course, this is not an easy task, as we have been programmed to think, see, and act, otherwise.

Finally, it is essential to clarify that rather than an individual process, unlearning is a collective practice. In this regard, Spivak describes this practice of learning to unlearn as an act of knitting invisible threads into the already existing fabric. This means that our individual process is, in fact, contributing to the envisaging and making of another kind of society. Unlearning, therefore, should be regarded as a process that, in itself, is directed towards embodying collective forms of knowledge and ways of thinking and doing. As Spivak puts it, "Unlearning our privilege as our loss is a task for everybody […]. Doing one's homework in the interests of unlearning one´s privilege marks the beginning of an ethical relation to the Other."[230]

Having establish what it is understood as the process of unlearning through the postcolonial and decolonial lens, this thesis then understands unlearning as the collective efforts to heal from the pre-established, alienating knowledge in order to open the space to imagine possibilities of the otherwise. As will be exposed in the following chapters, the practice of

[229] Nora Sternfeld, "Shaking the Status Quo*," mezosfera.org, September 2016, http://mezosfera.org/shaking-the-status-quo/ (accessed June 5, 2019).
[230] Spivak, *The Spivak Reader*, 5.

unlearning is one of the most common and useful decolonial approaches being implemented within alter-institutional practice. This methodology is particularly evident in the alter-institutional initiative Campus in Camps, which uses the process of unlearning as a strategy to move away the pre-conceived ideas of refugee status in order to rethink and speculate about other possible ways of living within a refugee camp.

2.3.2. Commoning/Uncommoning

Another decolonial approach worth considering is that of 'commoning' or 'uncommoning'. The term 'common' or alternately 'the commons' emerged in three historical contexts. The first was in medieval England to refer to cultural as well as natural resources—such as water, air, and land—that were held in common and available to all members of a community. The second, was during the Italian autonomia during the 1960s. And third, is the present day and the revival of commons through forms of file-sharing networks and the alter-globalisation movements.[231] There is an important difference between the notion of 'the commons' and 'common goods.' In recent years, this distinction has given rise to a lively discussion regarding the ambiguous nature of the concept. Whereas some scholars claim that the

[231] An Architektur, "On the Commons: A Public Interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides," *E-Flux Journal*, no. 17 (June 2010), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/17/67351/on-the-commons-a-public-interview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/.

'commons' simply refers to a shared pool of resources, others state that its meaning has expanded to describe a political space outside of neoliberal capitalism. Marxist historian Peter Linebaugh explains, for instance, that to refer to the commons as if it were a natural resource is "misleading at best and dangerous at worst." For him, "the commons" is an activity that expresses relationships in society that are indivisible from relationships to nature. Consequently, to avoid confusion he proposes that rather than keeping the word as a noun or a substantive, we use it as a verb or an activity.[232] Thus, when referring to the commons as a verb, that is 'commoning', it should not be understood as 'making common' resources such as land, knowledge, capital, space, matter, etc., but rather as a process of creating and nurturing community. In this sense, political economist Massimo De Angelis states that the commons are a means for the development of a new political discourse that builds on, and helps to enunciate, different struggles, recognising their counter power against capitalist society.[233]

Many discourses of the commons have proposed that the future could start in the present by gradually spreading commoning practices over capitalist social production.[234] In today's neoliberal individualist world, we are still faced with the challenge of building communities. In this regard, Silvia Federici states that if commoning has a meaning, it should be that of

[232] Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2008), 279.
[233] An Architektur, "On the Commons."
[234] See David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, *The Wealth of the Commons. A World Beyond Market & State* (Amherst, Massachusetts: Levellers Press, 2012); David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, *Patterns of Commoning* (Amherst, Massachusetts: The Commons Strategies Group, 2015).

"the production of ourselves as a common subject."[235] For this feminist Marxist scholar, commoning is not about a group of people joined together by particular interests they have in common which simultaneously separates them from others. It is not the creation of a gated reality. Rather, commons are necessarily created and sustained by a community. For Federici, the idea of community is something that suggests "a quality of relations, a principle of cooperation and of responsibility to each other and to the earth, the forests, the seas, the animals." But, if there is "no commons without community," and building community is based on collaboration and responsibility, then it can be established that commoning is the action of creating a community based on the principles of solidarity, cooperation and collectivity—between humans and beyond human agents.[236]

This process of building community is, nonetheless, rife with many contradictions. Some scholars argue that the commons and its practice of commoning is, in fact, deeply engrained in the settler colonial logics, and thus, the reclamation of the commons often neglects to acknowledge the modern/colonial structure in which such action takes place. Therefore, such reclamation often ends up being entangled with dynamics that actually further imposed Western forms of governance, and thus, the process of decolonisation seems an impossible task. In this regard, scholars Tuck and Yang argue that, "claiming land for the Commons [in a settler colonial context] and asserting consensus as the rule of the commons, erases

[235] Silvia Federici, "Feminism and the Politics of the Commons," in *The Wealth of the Commons. A World Beyond Market and State*, ed. David Bollier and Silke Helfrich (Amherst, Massachusetts: Levellers Press, 2012), 50.
[236] Federici, 50.

existing, prior and future Native land rights, decolonial leadership, and forms of self-governance."[237] In other words, how can we talk about the action of commoning as a decolonial approach?

Roughly along the lines of the problems raised by Tuck and Yang, Glen Coulthard argues in the book *Red Skin, White Masks. Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014) that projects aiming to reclaim the commons tend to overemphasise capitalism and the state and often fail to recognise the settler colonial context in which these actions take place. For Coulthhard, these movements—above all the Occupy movement—are potentially antagonistic to Indigenous attempts to re-assert and sustain decolonial relations. Consequently, he suggests that if a decolonial path is sought through the practice of commoning, a crucial analysis of settler colonialism is necessary. In his own words,

> by shifting our analytical frame to the colonial relation we might occupy a better angle from which to both anticipate and interrogate practices of settler-state dispossession justified under otherwise egalitarian principles and espoused with so-called 'progressive' political agendas in mind. Instead, what must be recognized by those inclined to advocate a blanket 'return of the commons' as a redistributive counterstrategy to the neoliberal state's new round of enclosures, is that, in liberal settler states such as Canada, the 'commons' not only belong to somebody —the First Peoples of this land— they also deeply inform and sustain Indigenous modes of thought and behaviour that harbour profound insights into the maintenance of relationships within and between human beings and the natural world built on principles of reciprocity, nonexploitation and respectful coexistence.[238]

Although Coulthard's argument indicates some of the contradictions inherent in seeking to reclaim the commons—namely, the complicity in producing and maintaining the colonial structures through the

[237] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 28.
[238] Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 12.

naturalisation of settler polities and systems of governance—it also signals the significant affinity between the reclamation of the commons and the relational ways of being that inform Indigenous land and place-based sovereignties. In this regard, sociologist Craig Fortier argues that the struggle to reclaim the commons—and its practice of commoning—can be reconciled with indigenous governance as long as such reclamation "…give[s] way to a process of decolonization that transforms settler relationships with the land, Indigenous peoples, and with each other." [239] So, rather than deeming the notion of the commons as an object of ownership of land and resources, Fortier argues it is necessary to realign our relationships to the territories in which we live. In the current context we live in, we must "re-imagine the commons not as a territorial re-appropriation, but as decolonial practices, places and relationships," as he puts it. [240]

Moreover, in the extensive literature of the commons, the notion of enclosures has been posed as the antithesis of commoning.[241] Yet, enclosures and commons converge insofar as they require relations—such as labour and property—that connect (natural) resources and to humans, elements that are often considered detached from each other. On this

[239] Craig Fortier, *Unsettling the Commons. Social Movements Within, Against, and Beyond Settler Colonialism* (Winnipeg, Canada: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2017), 59.
[240] Fortier, 60.
[241] Some of the most relevant theories on the commons include: Hannah Arendt, "The Public Realm: The Common," in *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 50–57; Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*; An Architektur, "On the Commons"; David Harvey, "The Future of the Commons," *Radical History Review* 109 (2011): 101–7; Bollier and Helfrich, *The Wealth of the Commons. A World Beyond Market & State*; Bollier and Helfrich, *Patterns of Commoning*; Peter Linebaugh, "Enclosures from the Bottom Up," in *The Wealth of the Commons. A World Beyond Market & State*, ed. David Bollier and Silke Helfrich (Amherst, Massachusetts: Levellers Press, 2012); Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto*.

subject, scholars De la Cadena and Blaser explain that, the commons and enclosures are often regarded in the field of political economy as opposite to each, with the former being destroyed by the latter through neoliberal capitalist practices. But despite being articulated by a series of binaries—i.e. individual and collective, private and public, basic subsistence and profit—these concepts, in fact, frequently converge, because one sustains the other.[242] A similar stance is provided by David Harvey in his article *The Future of the Commons* (2011), where he elucidates how not everyone or everything comes to be part of a particular commons. As a matter of fact, the commons imply some degree of enclosure, as both terms involve "some sort of domaining."[243] For Harvey, the commons is not something that existed and is now lost. Rather the commons is something that is constantly being produced, whether that is in the social, the urban, or the political fabric. The problem, however, is that the commons is also continuously being enclosed, appropriated and commodified by capitalism.[244] This is an important idea to keep in mind when discussing the case studies, because, as it will be seen, when applying methods on 'commoning' within particular communities or locations, there is always someone or something—human or beyond human—that is not part of that 'domain'.

Additionally, in the article *The Uncommons* (2017), De la Cadena and Blaser underline the issue surrounding the conceptual assumptions. Where the commons are proposed as an alternative to current enclosures, this

[242] Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser, "The Uncommons: An Introduction," *Anthropologica* 59 (2017): 185–86.
[243] Harvey, "The Future of the Commons."
[244] Harvey, 105.

ignores worlds of thought that do not assume a discontinuity amongst humans and between humans and nature. The authors establish that these assumptions facilitate a sort of relation that objectifies everything that is non-human as a natural resource. And the problem is that the access, use and distribution of such resources has also become a point of dispute among humans.[245] In this light, De la Cadena and Blaser propose the notion of 'uncommons' and 'uncommoning' as the negotiated coming together of heterogenous worlds —and their practices— as they strive for what makes each of them what they are, which is also not without others.[246] In their words,

> we propose uncommons as counterpoint to the common good and to enclosures, and, as important, to slow down the commons (including its progressive versions.) […] we propose the uncommons as the heterogeneous grounds where negotiations take place toward a commons that would be a continuous achievement, and event whose vocation is not to be final because it remembers that the uncommons is its constant starting point.[247]

In this sense, uncommoning is then sought as the action oriented towards a more democratic and just constitution of a human and non-human commons.

The concept of uncommoning allows us to understand the commons as that which is different but still can foster and nurture community, including non-humans, as active agents. The point of uncommoning "is not to preclude the possibility of commoning but rather, whenever possible, to

[245] de la Cadena and Blaser, "The Uncommons: An Introduction," 186.
[246] de la Cadena and Blaser, *A World of Many Worlds*, 4.
[247] de la Cadena and Blaser, 18–19.

seek ways to base the latter on the more solid grounds of recognised productive divergences," as De la Cadena and Blaser clarify. [248]

This dissertation considers the notion of commoning and uncommoning as the action of 'coming together' of 'divergent' worlds—human and non-human—and as the activation of collective power for the constitution and preservation of the common good. As will be seen in the following chapters, the practice of commoning or uncommoning as a decolonial methodology is present in the three case studies of alter-institutional practice being analysed. In the case of Campus in Camps the practice of commoning is particularly evident through the execution of their urban spatial interventions whereby the local community is mobilised and the principles of solidarity, cooperation and collectivity are activated. Likewise, the Institute for Human Activities project offers a platform where the strategy of commoning is found through the development of an economic and ecological self-sustainable and profitable model based on cooperation and collaboration. However, the collective World of Matter presents a particular case, because it uses the tactic of commoning as a way to propose and envision the uncommoning of human and non-human worlds.

[248] de la Cadena and Blaser, "The Uncommons: An Introduction," 190-191. The authors borrow the notion of "divergence" from Isabelle Stengers. It refers to the constitutive difference that makes practices what they are and as they connect across difference, even ontological difference. See Isabelle Stengers, "Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices," *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2005): 183–96.

2.3.3. Speculation of Care

Probably one of the most common decolonial approach is that of speculation, which enables us to (re)imagine and envisage other possible futurities based on land sovereignty, governance, political horizontality and multispecies justice. Speculation may be understood as the exercise of imagining alternative ways of thinking about different phenomena in order to provide an opportunity to challenge our prevailing ways of acting, knowing and sensing. One of the most useful descriptions on the notion of speculative practices is provided by Alfred North Whitehead. The philosopher describes speculation as a means to explore what it is possible to know about the world. He uses the metaphor of the flight of an airplane to elucidate how the practice of speculation can be a useful method for new ways of thinking. In this metaphor, a plane takes off from the ground of a particular point of observation, it flies in the thin air of imaginative generalisation, and then it lands on the ground again for renewed observation, now informed by the previous flight.[249] Whitehead's example allows us to understand that the practice of speculation is not about concrete results, rather it is about observing and imagining from a critical viewpoint. In this sense, speculative imagination has a world-making element in the sense that it is a conceptual and spatial intervention on the possible ways of living.

[249] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (London & New York: The Free Press, 1978), 5.

Speculative thinking is open-ended and nonnormative. Most often speculative practice is defined as a branch of the science fiction and fantasy genres. In the feminist tradition the speculative approach is a useful mode of thought to engage with a provoking political and ethical imagination in the present. It is a way to think about the future in the present day. In the book *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (2017), for instance, Maria Puig de la Bellacasa connects speculation with the notion of 'ethics of care' and deems speculative ethics to be a form of political imagination that fuels hope and desire for transformative action.[250] Within the field of art, speculative thinking and practice have gained a lot of traction as they create fictional as well as real-life scenarios of potential futures. Speculative approaches can be activated to support actors in taking matters of their lives into their own hands. They are usually presented as an opportunity to think about how things could be different. It is worth noting, nonetheless, that these approaches have been heavily criticised as some deem them to be an extension of colonial attitudes in creating dystopian scenarios, whilst others condemn them as having close links to corporate capitalism.[251]

In considering the speculative approaches within the realm of art, I found Alessandro Keegan and Max Razdow's definition the most compelling. For the editors of the *Speculative Arts Research* journal,

[250] María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care. Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
[251] Luiza Prado and Pedro Oliveira, "Futuristic Gizmos, Conservative Ideals: On (Speculative) Anachronistic Design," *Modes of Criticism*, February 27, 2015, http://modesofcriticism.org/futuristic-gizmos-conservative-ideals/; Cameron Tonkinwise, "Design Fictions About Critical Design," *Modes of Criticism*, March 2, 2015, http://modesofcriticism.org/design-fictions-about-critical-design/.

speculative art includes "any art practice that uses imagination, vision or intuition to genuinely delve into the outré limits of the world and question materialist assumptions about science, spirituality, technology, the human mind and all the most vital issues of our lives."[252] Speculative practices present different ways of comprehending the present reality and imagine possible futures. In this sense, the presumptive power of speculative methodologies is precisely its ability to "elevate the possible from quotidian and temporal constraints, becoming instead a self-made vehicle for imagined futurity," as Keegan and Razdow point out.[253] Having said that, this dissertation considers the practice of speculation to be a decolonial methodology, because it confronts the present reality by questioning and imagining real-life scenarios of potential futures. As will be exposed in the following chapters, the three case studies of alter-institutional practice utilise speculative approaches to activate and politicise their participants and audiences. Whether that is by speculating about the contemporary reality of the Palestinian refugee camps (Campus in Camps), proposing alternative economic models (the Institute for Human Activities) or imagining non-anthropocentric ways of being and interacting in the world (World of Matter).

[252] Alessandro Keegan and Max Razdow, "Foreword," *Speculative Arts Research*, no. 1 (August 15, 2018).
[253] Keegan and Razdow.

2.4. Some Lessons Learned: A Critical Account on my own Research Methodologies

The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith[254]

The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples (check pg.)
Linda Tuhiwai Smith[255]

In the seminal book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Methodologies* (1999) Linda Tuhiwai Smith attentively explains how the process of decolonisation engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels. One of these levels is that of research, which has become institutionalised through academic disciplines, scientific societies and scholarly networks. For her, "research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise" but rather "an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions."[256] Research, and its associated methodologies, is situated in a much larger historical, political and cultural context. Thus, a decolonial approach must include an examination of the critical nature of research within those dynamics. For researchers, this approach "is concerned with having a more critical understand of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices," as she suggests.[257] Building on Edward Said's notion of "positional superiority", Tuhiwai Smith articulates that just like

254 Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 1.
255 Tuhiwai Smith, 1.
256 Tuhiwai Smith, 5.
257 Tuhiwai Smith, 20.

land and raw materials, knowledge "was also there to be discovered, extracted, appropriated and distributed" by Western academics.[258]

Although there has been significant progress made amongst critical scholars to resist imperial-colonial assumptions within academia, the fact is that most research in the humanities and social sciences continues to be bound by Western ontologies and epistemologies. As a result, most subjects of study continue to be thought and examined through a lens that is perceptible and legible according to the Western ways of understanding the world. In this regard, Indigenous criticisms often point out the fact that research is expressed within the single terms of "white research," "academic research" or "outsider research."[259] Kanienkehaka scholar Audra Simpson, for instance, notes that this "historical perceptibility is used, and is still used to *claim*, to define capacities for self-rule, to apportion social and political possibilities, to, in effect, empower and disempower Indigenous peoples in the present."[260] A process of decolonisation within research, therefore, includes a critical questioning of our own positionality and our research positionality. Such questions vary from issues of ownership, agency, location, exposure, and dissemination—i.e. Whose research is it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed and framed its scope? How will its result be disseminated? What is the purpose of the research project? Where will it be presented?

[258] Tuhiwai Smith, 58.
[259] Tuhiwai Smith, 42.
[260] Audra Simpson, "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship," *Junctures* 9 (December 2007): 69.

Before moving into the analysis of each case study, it is important to present a self-reflective account of the various research methodologies required for a thesis such as this one, which adopts a decolonial lens. I begin with these considerations precisely because I want to situate the following chapters in the context in which they were written. I acknowledge that I am writing from within the walls of the Western institution, and that my academic and epistemological roots have not adequately prepared me for engagement with the concept of decolonisation. I am also aware of the risk of superficially adopting the language of decolonisation, as Tuck and Yang poignantly have warned, and to some extent this dissertation does not fully escape such criticism. However, as a scholar operating within the Western academy, I have the responsibility to engage in self-reflective research around the relationships established through the colonial matrix of power, and to be critical about my own positionality and how my work perpetuates those relations or contributes to the development of relationships of solidarity within that matrix. This section aims to bring attention to the methodological approaches utilised whilst conducting this research project, and to discuss some of the challenges, barriers, successes and limitations I encountered during the process.

It is crucial to understand that there is no standard model or practice for decolonising research methodologies. As mentioned before, in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999), Tuhiwai Smith provides 25 examples of strategies that critical scholars have implemented to conduct research with Indigenous communities in New Zealand; however, none of these approaches is applicable to all situations. Given that this research project

focuses on the analysis of alter-institutional initiatives located in geographic areas where access is limited, it was important to adjust my methodological approach according to the context in which I was operating. This meant understanding the limitations and possibilities a research project such as this one has in the wider scheme of things

With an awareness of the fact that a research project such as this thesis runs the risk of excluding or silencing the voices of the participant communities central to the alter-institutional project, it was my original intention to mainly focus on the testimony of participants regarding their involvement with the alter-institutional initiative. My aim was to gather information on the immediate and long-term impacts the artistic interventions might have had on the local communities. And through such information, I hoped to understand whether the outcomes were perceived in the same way by all of those involved or if in fact they continued to be misrepresented through the idealised view of the artist. However, a set of tensions and contradictions emerged in the process of engaging in this research project, which I will elaborate below.

As briefly mentioned in the introductory chapter, my methodology consists of four core components: 1) data collection; 2) semi-structured interviews with artists and participants in the alter-institutional projects; 3) fieldwork research; and 4) analysis and assessment of literature and collected data. I started this research project by collecting and examining the existing data (i.e. scholarly publications, media coverage, reviews, and writings by artists). To my surprise, most of the literature solely portrays the artist's perception, with little —or none—representing the viewpoint of

the participants. This finding took me to the methodological decision of conducting semi-structured interviews with the artists and the participants of the projects.

Based on this decision, I chose to held in person interviews as part of fieldwork research. Given monetary, time and safety restrictions, I was only able to conduct a fieldwork investigation in Palestine. Whilst hugely enriching, this experience also came with challenges and constrictions. Establishing contact with the participants of Campus in Camps was challenging, and access to the premises where some of the interventions took place was difficult to obtain. While I tried to plan my visit ahead of time by asking the artists Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti to put me in touch with the participants, setting up meetings with the refugees was a futile task. This was due to the fact that the some of the participants were not currently living in the camp, whereas others refused to meet and talk about their participation in Campus in Camps. Despite this, I was able to interview some of the refugee participants, who kindly showed me around and talked through their experience participating in Campus in Camps. Overall, conducting research in Palestine was a fruitful experience that enabled me to have a deeper understanding of the constraints of the region and allowed me to witness, first-hand, the actual impacts the alter-institutional initiative had for the local refugee community.

Unfortunately, during the course of my project a series of political limitations arose which impeded me to conduct fieldwork research for my two other case studies, the Institute for Human Activities and World of Matter. These limitations included difficulty in establishing contact with the

participant communities due to language or technological barriers (e.g., limited access to email, Facebook, Skype); monetary restrictions to visit the remote locations where the interventions were held; anonymity of the participants (the identity of which is generally not publicly available and extremely difficult to find); as well as unwillingness on the part of artists to collaborate with me on this research project, be it by being interviewed or establishing some sort of link between myself and the participants. These limitations forced me to rely heavily on the existing literature, and separating my own understanding of the projects from the artists' accounts was a major challenge.

Furthermore, after analysing the case study World of Matter, I soon realised that this alter-institutional initiative primarily focuses on providing a visual reading of the different files, actors, ideas and territories that play a role in the global ecologies of resources, exploitation and circulation. However, the art and research collective does not perform any sort of *in situ* intervention. So, although a decolonial lens can be utilised to understand how the practice of World of Matter offers a platform to question how humans can relate differently to nature and nonhuman beings, it does not perform any kind of direct intervention where decolonial strategies are being implemented. However, I believe it is precisely within this relational approach that World of Matter presents a variety of perspectives and epistemologies where a decolonial path can be built.

Parallel to this, I became more aware of the importance to implement decolonial methodologies within one's research. As this research project progressed, I started questioning the different

methodological approaches I could have taken to participate in the construction of a decolonial path from my own positionality as a scholar. But by the time I faced the situation to adapt my methodology, it was too late in the project to fully address the gaps. As such, the thesis must be read with these limitations in mind.

By exploring some of the methodological obstacles and restrictions I experienced through this research project, I seek to underscore the variability of theory when it is applied in practice. By presenting some of the core decisions that I made during this research project, I aim to highlight the tensions and contradictions that continue to shape the academic process in hopes that my experiences will help to improve our collective practices of scholarly research and contribute to the construction of a decolonial path.

Chapter 3: Campus in Camps

Introduction

The colonial world is a compartmentalized world. […] Yet if we penetrate inside this compartmentalization we shall at least bring to light some of its key aspects. By penetrating its geographical configuration and classification we shall be able to delineate the backbone on which the decolonized society is reorganized.

Frantz Fanon[261]

The notions of the public, the private and the common have for a long time been hugely controversial in Palestine. The space of the common is, nonetheless, different from both the public and the private spaces. Whereas the public and the private are mediated by the state apparatus, the common space exists beyond institutionalised regulations of the state. Prior to its colonisation, there were numerous forms of communal land equally distributed among farmers in Palestine. These spaces, referred to as *al masha* in Arabic, could only exist if the people decided to cultivate the land together. Until 1948—when Israel was established as a state—*al masha* existed not only as a legal category of common territory, but also formed part of communal life in Palestine. However, suspicious of this type of ownership—because it was neither private nor public—the Israeli authorities declared *al masha* to be state land and took control over those spaces. In this sense, the common space in Palestine was expropriated as

[261] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 3.

exclusionary public space.[262] Until the early 1990s, Palestinian cities were directly managed and supervised by the Israeli military. Through this "civil administration" the Israeli military controlled the urban development and planning of Palestinian cities, turning them into "dormitory towns with very little public space."[263] In this way, the Israeli colonisation not only brought about the material expropriation of land, but it also imposed changes on the ways of living in Palestine, where designated public areas are now minimal or non-existent.

Moreover, after the Oslo Accords of 1995, when Israel withdrew its presence from certain areas in the West Bank, the recently established Palestinian Authority (PA) regained the power to supervise and perform civil administration tasks.[264] Yet, the difficulties of building and maintaining

[262] See Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal, and Eyal Weizman, *Architecture After Revolution* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 179–82.
[263] See footnote 11 in Sandi Hilal, Alessandro Petti, and Eyal Wiezman, "The Future Archaeology of Israel's Colonisation," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, no. 20 (Spring 2009): 23.
[264] The Oslo Accords is an agreement signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to effectively bring the Israeli–Palestinian conflict to its end by means of territorial concessions and facilitating the creation of the Palestinian Authority (PA), which has some, limited, powers of self-governance of parts of the West Bank and Gaza strip territories. The PA was given self-governance in phases and the Gaza strip and West Bank were divided in three zones: Area A, which would be under the PA's full control and included all Palestinian cities and surrounding areas with no civilian Israeli presence; Area B, which would be under the PA's civil control and Israel's security control and included areas of dense Palestinian population with no civilian Israeli presence; and Area C, which would be under full Israeli control, except over Palestinian civilians. This area includes all West Bank settlements and their immediate vicinity as well as strategic areas regarded as 'security zones'. The agreement also gave the Palestinians control over Gaza and Jericho. When the Accords were finalised in September 1995, Israel withdrew from densely populated areas in the West Bank. The Oslo I Accord was signed in Washington, D.C. in 1993 and the Oslo II Accord was signed in Taba, Egypt in 1995. The Oslo Accords are considered to have had a significant impact on the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, yet their nature remains controversial. For more on the territorial divisions, see Serge Schmemann, "In West Bank, 'Time' for Settlements Is Clearly Not 'Out,'" *The New York Times*, December 5, 1997, https://www.nytimes.com/1997/12/05/world/in-west-bank-time-for-settlements-is-clearly-not-out.html; Azmi Bishara, "4 May 1999 and Palestinian Statehood: To Declare or Not to Declare?," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, no. 2 (1999): 5–16; Sean F. McMahon, *The Discourse of Palestinian–Israeli Relations. Persistent Analytics and Practices* (London & New York: Routledge, 2010); World Bank, "West Bank and Gaza – Area C and the Future of the Palestinian Economy (English)" (Washington DC:

public institutions only continued to exist. The main reasons impeding the establishment of open public spaces were the borders instituted for Palestinian self-administered areas. According to architects Sandi Hilal, Alessandro Petti, Hilal and Eyal Weizman, "[t]hese borders were drawn tightly around the built-up area of the Palestinian cities and villages, leaving out little potential land for new construction. The structure of land ownership within Palestinian cities meant that very little land was not privately owned, and municipalities have had a difficult [sic] access to lands."[265] Paradoxically, most of the public open spaces and new public institutions established after the Oslo Accords were built by international organisations and NGOs. Because of such circumstances, the Palestinian community has become suspicious of the notion of the 'public', as this concept is often associated with authoritarian political regimes and colonialism. [266]

After the uprisings of the Arab Spring in late 2010, the relationship to public places drastically changed in the Arab world. During the Egyptian revolt in Tahrir Square, the world witnessed how a public square ceased to be just a public area and was transformed into a common space owned by

World Bank Group, 2013), http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/137111468329419171/West-Bank-and-Gaza-Area-C-and-the-future-of-the-Palestinian-economy; B'Tselem, "Planning Policy in the West Bank" (B'Tselem — The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, November 11, 2017), https://www.btselem.org/planning_and_building.

[265] See footnote 11 in Hilal, Petti, and Wiezman, "The Future Archaeology of Israel's Colonisation," 23.

[266] Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, "Reimagining the Common: Rethinking the Refugee Experience," in *The Human Snapshot*, ed. Thomas Keenan and Tirdad Zolghadr (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), no pagination, http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/Arles_Reimmagining-ghe-common.Petti-Hilal_copyedited_FINAL.pdf.

the people themselves. The public plaza was no longer regarded as a space of authority, but rather as a common place of the people. With these non-violent events, the Tahrir Square became "the political space where new claims were invented, represented, and translated into political actions," as Hilal and Petti highlight.[267] This was a moment when a novel political horizon was forming throughout the Arab World. It was a period of time when the 'commons' could be reclaimed and reactivated and, at last, spaces for the people could be created. These events energised a response to oppressive regimes and low living standards in many countries across North Africa and the Middle East. In the case of Palestine, a new sense of possibility arose and innovative creative tactics based on collective action were adapted to their own struggle.[268]

Inspired by the aftermath of the Arab Revolts whereby the reactivation of the commons was obtained, in the year 2012, the artists and architects Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti created Campus in Camps, an experimental art and education project based in the refugee camp Dheisheh, located near Bethlehem, Palestine. For Hilal and Petti, the desire to establish such an experimental alter-institutional initiative within Palestinian refugeehood grew from the knowledge and relations that they had developed during their time living and working in the West Bank. Theoretically speaking, a refugee camp is a temporary settlement for people who are seeking safety after they have been forced to flee from their home

[267] Hilal and Petti.
[268] Yasmine Ryan, "Palestinian Activism Energised by Arab Spring," June 8, 2011, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/06/201168131013184315.html; As'ad Ghanem, "The Palestinians – Lessons from the Arab Spring," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 6, no. 3 (July 1, 2013): 422–37.

country because of persecution, war or violence.[269] These camps are generally developed in an 'impromptu fashion' with the aim of meeting basic human needs for a short period of time and with the intention of eventually being demolished. However, in the Palestinian refugee camps this is not the case, and the temporary shelter has mutated into more long-lasting urbanisation: "the urbanity of exile," as Petti and Hilal call it.[270] Aiming to recuperate, re-appropriate and recreate forms of representation and practices of cooperation and 'commoning' that have been lost in this "urbanity of exile", Campus in Camps combines conceptual speculation, pragmatic spatial interventions, discourse analysis, and collective learning as part of its practice.

The idea of Campus in Camps matured from two simultaneous occurrences. As a first instance, in 2007 Hilal and Petti, in collaboration with Israeli architect Eyal Weizman, founded Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency (DAAR) based in Beit Sahour, Palestine.[271] The aim of this

[269] The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "What Is a Refugee?," unrefugees.org, https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/ (accessed October 10, 2019). Palestinian refugees hold a different status with the UNHCR. According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Palestinian refugees are defined as "persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict." See more in The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), "Palestine Refugees," UNRWA, https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees (accessed October 10, 2019).

[270] Alessandro Petti, "Architecture of Exile," Campus in Camps, April 30, 2012, http://www.campusincamps.ps/architecture-exile/; "'The Architecture of Exile: Refugee Heritage,' with Suad Amiry, Nikolaus Hirsch, Thomas Keenan, Jorge Otero-Pailos, Alessandro Petti and Sandi Hilal – Announcements – e-Flux," accessed March 21, 2017, http://www.e-flux.com/program/95979/the-architecture-of-exile-refugee-heritage-with-nbsp-suad-amiry-nikolaus-hirsch-nbsp-thomas-keenan-nbsp-jorge-otero-pailos-nbsp-alessandro-petti-and-sandi-hilal/.

[271] In 2011 Professor Weizman was awarded The European Research Council Starting Grant, which founded the Forensic Architecture project. Because of this, since 2011 Weizman has not been actively involved with DAAR's agenda. Yet, as Hilal clarified to me in a personal conversation "we still consider him a partner, but in this period of time we

ongoing project is to use their creative skills and knowledge to engage with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as an arena of speculation. With this framework, the residency works in collaboration with international cultural practitioners to work collectively to produce powerful speculative visualisations of how the architecture of occupation—i.e. Israeli military sites and settlements—could be "stripped of their intrinsic colonial features and recuperated, rather than smashed, once peace was agreed upon," as the architects claim.[272]

Parallel to this, Hilal and Petti were working in different organisations that engaged with everyday life in Palestine. On the one hand, Hilal was also working as the head of the Infrastructure and Camp Improvement Programme in West Bank at United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).[273] From an ongoing dialogue between Hilal and the Refugee Camp Communities of the Southern West Bank arose an urgency to explore and produce new forms of representation of the refugee camps that moves away from the dominant notions of victimisation and marginalisation.[274] On the other hand, Petti was working as a professor at the Al-Quds Bard University. In conversations with Al-Quds Bard students from refugee camps, Petti noticed that they were able to engage in critical conversation and express their ideas freely in the

are working on different projects." Sandi Hilal, Personal Interview with co-founder of Campus in Camps Sandi Hilal, Skype, September 27, 2016.

272 See DAAR, "Decolonzing Architecture Art Residency – About," DAAR, April 11, 2008, http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/about/; Petti, Hilal, and Weizman, *Architecture After Revolution*, 2014; Bianca Elzenbaumer, "Speculating with Care: Learning from an Experimental Educational Program in the West Bank," *Architectural Theory Review* 22, no. 1 (2018): 100–119.

273 Hilal worked in this position from 2008 to 2014. DAAR, "Decolonzing Architecture Art Residency – About."

274 Alessandro Petti, "Decolonizing Knowledge," *Archis* 45 (September 2015): 73.

'protected space' of the university. However, as Hilal and Petti later discovered, such discussions were not occurring in the camp itself. As Petti recalls,

> I realized that [the students'] narrations, ideas and discourses were able to flourish in a protected space, such as the university, but needed to be grounded in context and connected with the community. Reciprocally, by moving to camps, the university was able to open its doors to other forms of knowledge, to an experimental and communal learning process able to combine critical reflection with action.[275]

From these interactions, Hilal and Petti realised that, similar to themselves, the refugees wanted to create new discursive and visual representations of their situation and their 'right of return'.[276]

Accordingly, Campus in Camps was conceived as a way to erase the gap between theory—what was been said at the university—and action—what was happening at the camp. That is to say, it was a way of bringing the "island of knowledge"—the university campus—to the "island of exclusion"—the camp— in order to activate different forms of knowledge production that goes beyond the confined walls of academia, and to engage and connect with the lived experiences of the participants and the broader communities.[277] Hilal and Petti wanted to provide a platform that would allow refugees to speculate about their contemporary reality, which in a

[275] Petti, 73.
[276] The right of return was spelled out in the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194, which states that "refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible." This right has been repeatedly disregarded in the peace negotiations of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. See "Resolution 194," United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), https://www.unrwa.org/content/resolution-194 (accessed September 17, 2019).
[277] "About," Campus in Camps, April 5, 2012, http://www.campusincamps.ps/about/ (accessed July 6, 2018).

way, goes beyond the idea of the 'right of return' as described in the UN General Assembly Resolution 194. In regards to the inception of Campus in Camps, designer and scholar Bianca Elzenbaumer explains that,

> the idea was that equipping third-generation refugees with a set of conceptual and practical tools not currently available to them would enable them to foster speculations that take their desires and needs as starting point, while also recognising and strategically mobilising the constraints the Israeli–Palestinian conflict places on all attempts at transformative intervention.[278]

So, rather than inviting international colleagues to speculate about matters of decolonisation and transformation of the camps, Hilal and Petti saw it was only pertinent to start a camps-based university program that brought together young refugees, scholars, activists, and spatial practitioners.[279]

In this chapter, I argue that through the use of decolonial approaches Campus in Camps creates practical community-driven projects that foresee alternative forms of life in the camps, based on confrontation, cooperation and collective action. In reflecting on the different phases and methodologies of the project, I draw on the work of curator Irit Rogoff to explain the operational similarities with non-governmental organisations as they "start in the middle" rather than trying to solve the problem.[280] In this way, I show how the practice of Camps in Camps thrives from what I call 'prolific failures', and consequently, chooses to 'harness those setbacks and work around them' I argue that in doing so, the Campus in Camps

[278] Elzenbaumer, "Speculating with Care: Learning from an Experimental Educational Program in the West Bank," 7.
[279] Elzenbaumer, 7.
[280] Rogoff, "Starting in the Middle."

sparks a sense of hope amongst the refugee participants that alternative forms of living in the camp are in fact possible. In order to comprehend the forms of representation and practices of cooperation and 'commoning' that Campus in Camps aims to recuperate and reactivate, first it is crucial to understand how alternative forms of communality have developed within the particular socio-political context of Palestine. In what follows, a description of the alternative educational models developed during the first *Intifada*, which inspired the formation of Campus in Camps, is presented.

3.1. Historical Context: Alternative Education in Palestine after the First *Intifada*

They know how highly we value our education [...] to formulate the best way to struggle and to communicate our struggle. We don't have guns and weapons. We must use education.

Jerusalem Media and Communication Center, JMCC[281]

As noted in chapter 1, knowledge can be a powerful tool for social liberation; however, it can also be the means for political oppression. In the particular case of Palestine, education has become a crucial tool in their struggle to gain freedom and autonomy. According to scholar and activist Yamila Hussein, "[f]or Palestinians education is a right, a weapon for

[281] Jerusalem Media and Communication Center. "Palestinian Education: A threat to Israel's security? The Israeli policy of school closures in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip (Dec 1987 –May 1990) ", August 1990 as cited in Hussein, "The Stone and the Pen," 22.

liberation, and a venue for becoming part of the modern world."[282] The reason for this goes all the way back to the history of colonisation of knowledge and the closure of schools and universities in Palestine after the first *Intifada*.[283] During the first two years of the 1987 Palestinian *Intifada* any sort of education—formal and informal—became illegal in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The Israeli military prohibited people from gathering together to learn and closed all sorts of educational institutions 'until further notice'. Palestinian students and teachers were harassed and arrested for joining classes or for just carrying books. Paradoxically, it was through this military decree of closing educational institutions entirely, "that Israel created a fleeting space for Palestinians to assume responsibility for their own education," as Hussein explains.[284] Precisely because knowledge and education are so highly regarded in Palestine, that Israel lost control over the Palestinian educational system. This was the first ever opportunity for Palestinians to regain some sort of agency despite occupation, as they took matters into their hands and decided what and how to learn.[285]

It is crucial to understand that even before education was declared illegal in 1987, the infrastructure of Palestinian schools in the West Bank and Gaza had been highly neglected.[286] Once Israel occupied the West Bank,

[282] Hussein, 17.
[283] *Intifada* refers to the Palestinian uprising for national rights, self-determination and independence from Israeli occupation. See Zachary Lockman and Joel Beinin, eds., *Intifada. The Palestinian Uprising Against Israeli Occupation* (Washington DC: South End Press, 1989); Jamal R. Nassar and Roger Heacock, eds., *Intifada. Palestine at the Crossroads* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990); David Pratt, *Intifada. The Long Day of Rage* (Havertown, PA: Casemate, 2006).
[284] Hussein, "The Stone and the Pen," 17.
[285] Hussein, 17.
[286] Hussein, 17.

it ran every aspect of governmental schools: maintenance, staff, budget and school-year calendar. All schools were administrated and had to follow the Jordanian—in the West Bank—or the Egyptian—in Gaza—Israeli-censored curriculum, which under Israel's orders, did not contain any references to Palestinian culture and history, or any idea that contradicted the Israeli government's political agenda.[287] Israeli-controlled education also involved the frequent closure of selected schools and universities for long periods of time. The closure of educational institutions was considered a collective punishment that depleted the community's intellectual resources and asserted Israeli control. Palestinians saw this as a "policy of *ignorization,"* which intended to destroy the Palestinian "culture's academic capacities."[288] It is because of these policies and actions that learning became a vital device for the autonomy and freedom of Palestinians.

In the article *The Stone and the Pen. Palestinian Education During the 1987 Intifada* (2005), Hussein presents a detailed description of the different strategies implemented by the Palestinian civil society to counteract the forced closure of schools. The author explicates that given the fact that Palestinians did not have the means or the power to force the Israeli government to reopen educational institutions, they quickly acted and executed three simultaneous tactics: 1) they started an international campaign to rally support from abroad; 2) they organised resistance

[287] Hussein, 18. See also Meron Benvenisti, *West Bank Data Project: A Survey of Israel's Policies* (Washington D.C.: The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1984); B'Tselem, "Information Sheet, Banned Books and Authors" (B'Tselem — The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, October 1989), https://www.btselem.org/publications/all/1989.
[288] Hussein, "The Stone and the Pen," 18.

activities; and 3) they initiated alternative education projects through the organisation of an 'undercover' network of schools and universities, both at an institutional and a popular level, in private houses, garages and shops. Unfortunately, once these underground practices were discovered, they were forbidden by the occupational forces.[289]

3.1.1. *Substitute Schooling and Popular Teaching*

Alternative education initiatives were a quick, organic and vigorous response. Such organisations followed two parallel paths: institutional and popular. At an institutional level, there was the 'Substitute Schooling' initiated by private administrators, teachers, and some officers of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in an attempt to fill the vacuum created by the school closures. Hussei explains that, "[p]ublic schools, under the full control of the Israeli government had no leeway and actually were prohibited from engaging in any alternative education activities."[290] Thus, 'Substitute Schooling' attempted to bring education within the current structure—i.e. through learning kits being delivered to children at home—and aimed to sustain normalcy and minimise disruption. However, these efforts had no intention of reforming the official curriculum.

[289] Hussein, "The Stone and the Pen."
[290] Hussein, 19.

In sharp contrast, 'the Popular Teaching initiative' was a grassroots project that attempted to develop alternative modes of education. With this kind of system, teaching and learning was no longer limited to the confined walls of schools and universities, as teachers and students began to use different spaces—such as villages, towns and cities—as learning environments.[291] Its goal was to "*Palestinianize* the curriculum with a vision of national identity and the national struggle for independence."[292] Unlike the traditional, standard curriculum, Palestinian history, poetry, drama, and music were an integral part of the Popular Teaching curriculum.[293] Self-sufficiency activities, such as growing fruits and vegetables, and raising animals, were also part of this 'informal' curriculum. The practical knowledge obtained from action and experimentation was considered to be just as important as the theoretical knowledge gained from more traditional methods of teaching. [294] This learning environment not only reconnected with the Palestinian past, but also fostered a space where the people could reflect on issues of social justice, inequality and democracy.

It is important to bear in mind that the strength of this educational scheme lies precisely in its flexible 'informal' curriculum. Given the lack of a pre-set programme and textbooks, materials such as old newspapers, political leaflets, and graffiti were often utilised to teach subjects such as history, mathematics, language and literacy. Lessons came from specific circumstances or personal experiences.[295] In this way, these unique

[291] Petti, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 72.
[292] Hussein, "The Stone and the Pen," 19.
[293] Hussein, 19–20.
[294] Petti, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 72.
[295] Hussein, "The Stone and the Pen," 20.

learning processes fostered a non-hierarchical relationship between the one communicating the information and the one acquiring the knowledge.[296]

Moreover, the Israeli government was increasingly expressing concern about the rise and growth of organised popular structures that "threatened the core of occupation" by leading the Palestinian people in a "process of disengagement" from Israel's administrative system and towards "civil disobedience."[297] In consequence, the Popular Committees were banned by August 1988 and even though this prohibition did not name all the subcommittees functioning under this umbrella—which included the Popular Teaching—all of the members belonging to the larger informal network of Popular Committees were therefore subject to the policies of Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance.[298] Hundreds of members were arrested with others forced into exile. Such measurements were serious enough to frustrate these decentralised and unprotected initiatives. Subsequently, by early 1989, alternative education in Palestine had become "no more than scattered efforts and could no longer hold the promise of saving children's learning," as Hussein points out.[299] Despite all its significance for community-building and political resistance to Israeli occupation, alternative education was, in Hussein's words, "…one of the weakest *intifada* projects and among the first to dwindle."[300] Ultimately, Palestinian

[296] Petti, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 72.
[297] Hussein, "The Stone and the Pen," 20.
[298] The Palestinian Human Rights International Committee (PHRIC), Update August 23, 1988 cited in Hussein, "The Stone and the Pen."
[299] Hussein, 21.
[300] Hussein, 21.

civil society did not succeed in designing a strategy to defend its schooling and to resist. However, the attempt to *Palestinianise* the content of education was an important first step, as "education became openly an act of resistance."[301]

3.2. Campus in Camps

> *Campus in Camps is to look at the present, toward the future both theoretically and practically, with a sense of the ideal but grounded in the real. It's the bridge that we build with our hands between the past, the present and the future.*
>
> Murad Owdah, Campus in Camps participant[302]

Aiming to recuperate and revitalise these forms of learning, knowing, sensing and acting fostered through the alternative educational models used during the first *Intifada,* in 2012 Hilal and Petti established Campus in Camps*.* The project Campus in Camps was envisioned as a way to move beyond the conventional educational structures in Palestine by creating a space for the production of critical knowledge and for art production. Providing the infrastructure and intellectual space for 15 participants—third-generation Palestinian refugees who were engaged or involved one way or another with community work—the two-year programme intended to facilitate debates on topics linked to the ideas and narratives embedded

[301] Hussein, 21.
[302] Elzenbaumer, "Speculating with Care: Learning from an Experimental Educational Program in the West Bank," 100.

in the refugee camps.[303] It also aimed to draw on the refugees' own lived experiences in order to create cultural and artistic initiatives within and beyond the camp, which in a way, could "open up possibilities for yet-unimagined futures."[304] These strategies were not only sought as a means to deal with "new forms of visual and cultural representations of refugee camps after decades of displacement," but also to revolutionise the "politics of refugee subjectivity," as Petti elucidates.[305]

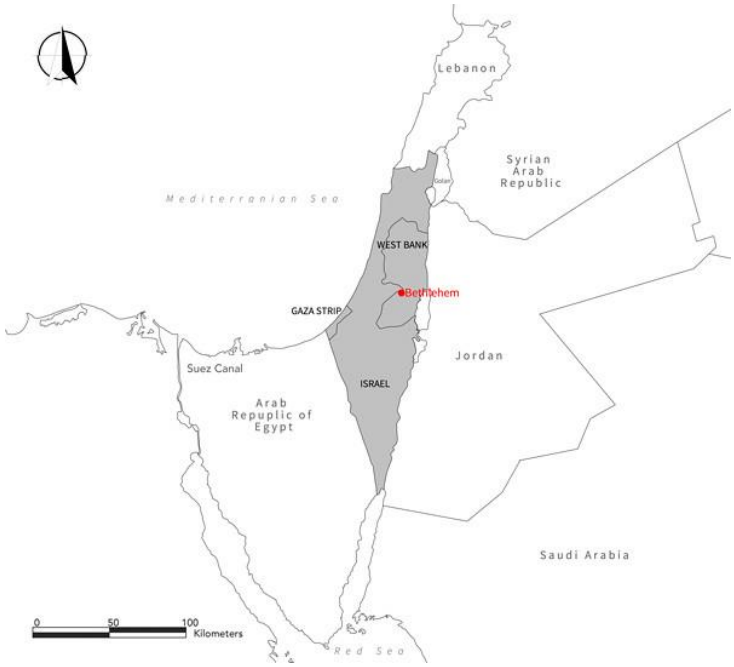

Image 1
Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency (DAAR), *Map showing the placement of Bethlehem in the Region*, 2017. Digital image obtained from: http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/i-indentification/

[303] The participants, aged between 23 and 35 years old, were Marwa Allaham, QussayAbu Aker, Alaa Al Homouz, Saleh Khannah, Shadi Ramadan, Ahmad Al Lahham, Aysar Al Saifi, Bisan Al Jaffarri, Nedaa Hamouz, Naba' Al Assi, Mohammed Abu Alia, Ibrahim Jawabreh, Isshaq Al Barbary, Ayat Al Turshan, and Murad Odeh. They all had BA degrees from Palestinian universities in a range of subjects, from management to social work. They were the first group of participants of Campus in Camps. There was an attempt to continue Campus in Camps with a second group of participants after the 2-years programme. However, after six months this endeavour was terminated. See Campus in Camps, "Campus in Camps — About," Campus in Camps, accessed June 28, 2019, http://www.campusincamps.ps/about/; Elzenbaumer, "Speculating with Care: Learning from an Experimental Educational Program in the West Bank."
[304] Elzenbaumer, "Speculating with Care: Learning from an Experimental Educational Program in the West Bank," 101.
[305] Petti, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 72.

The group was assembled through an open call for participation within several refugee camps and mosques, and by word of mouth.[306] During this process, Hilal and Petti conducted informal interviews for the selection of the participants—young men and women from various West Bank camps and backgrounds [Image 1]. It is important to clarify that there was not a formal process of selection, rather the artists met with the applicants on several occasions to discuss and assess if they shared a mutual interest in embarking on the experimental project.[307] In return for their engagement in the programme "as active co-producers of contents and initiatives," participants received compensation.[308] This fact can be perceived by some as a payoff, and therefore renders the results of the project as inauthentic. However, after talking to the artists and participants, and understanding more about the surrounding context, I realised that this was the only incentive Hilal and Petti could provide so that the participants stayed in the project and regarded their involvement as valid work. It is worth adding that this remuneration was initially the inducement, however, once the programme started, the participants soon realised that what they were obtaining in return for their work was much more than economic capital.[309] The results of the programme were translated into "practical

306 Silvia Franceschini and Luca Guerrini, "Campus in Camps. Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of Un-Learning," *Re-Visiones*, no. 7 (2017), http://www.re-visiones.net/index.php/RE-VISIONES/article/view/202/368.
307 Campus in Camps, "Campus in Camps — About."
308 Franceschini and Guerrini, "Campus in Camps. Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of Un-Learning."
309 Qussay Abu Aker, Personal Interview with participant of Campus in Camps Qussay Abu Aker, in Dheisheh Refugee Camp, January 8, 2018; Aysar Al Saifi, Personal interview with participant in Campus in Camps Aysar Al Saifi, Skype, January 15, 2018; Ayat Al Turshan, Personal interview with participant in Campus in Camps Ayat Al Turshan, Skype, February 2, 2018.

community-driven projects and incarnate representational practices to make them visible in the camps."[310]

The programme of Campus in Camps was held at the Al-Feniq Centre in Dheisheh refugee camp and sponsored by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), which is the Regional Social and Cultural Fund for Palestinian Refugees and Gaza Population on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). It is important to understand that the GIZ is one of the main funding bodies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and it has been working in the Palestinian territories since the 1980s. Advocating for the two-state solution, this organisation focuses on providing humanitarian aid in terms of water and sanitation, economic reform, institution and civil society building, and civil peace service. Due to the social and political constraints of the region, the GIZ only provides economic support to organisations officially registered as non-governmental organisations (NGOs). One should bear in mind that Campus in Camps is not registered, and hence not recognised, as an NGO. Therefore, the money that the GIZ was providing had to be channelled through the AL-Quds Bard University where Petti was working. This fact allows consideration of the type of negotiations that are required around financial viability in this region. For Elzenbaumer, this occurrence reflects Petti and Hilal's commitment to the Campus in Camps, and in her view the project was only made possible because the architects were not paralysed by the bureaucratic constraints in the place.[311]

[310] Petti, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 73.
[311] Elzenbaumer, "Speculating with Care: Learning from an Experimental Educational Program in the West Bank," 8.

After the two-year programme concluded, there was an attempt to create a second group of participants to start a new Campus in Camps programme, but after six months after initiating the second course the GIZ stopped funding the project and it finished abruptly. The reasons why the GIZ discontinued its support are unknown. Attempts to contact the GIZ and find out why the funding stopped were made, but unfortunately nobody could provide me with an answer. With regard to issues on decolonisation and decolonising methodologies within alter-institutional practices, the information about the financial support is of considerable relevance, especially when these projects claim to be implementing a variety of decolonial methodologies. In the particular case of the Campus in Camps programme, which heavily relies on funds delivered by a European entity concerned mainly with offering humanitarian aid, how can we talk about decolonisation when the initiative is not really challenging the colonial matrix, but rather continues to reinforce and reiterate the 'camp condition'?

It is worth noting that Campus in Camps originated from the understanding that "…refugee camps in the West Bank are in a process of a historical political, social and spatial transformation."[312] Notwithstanding the unfavourable circumstances, Palestinian refugee camps have developed a relatively autonomous and independent social and political fabric—I say relatively as they are highly-dependent on humanitarian aid. In this sense, Campus in Camps deems the refugee camp as "a site of social invention" where "new political and spatial configurations" can be born.[313]

[312] Campus in Camps, "Campus in Camps — About."
[313] Campus in Camps.

Additionally, the programme stresses the importance to the process of learning of moving beyond the conventional disciplines confined within the traditional walls of academia, and instead, integrating experiences of daily life and dialogues with the broader community into the knowledge production process.

The first year of the programme mainly concentrated on the creation of a common language and methodology among the participants. By contrast, the second year primarily focused on the creation of temporal art and social interventions in order to engage with, and galvanise, the wider camp community. Through a series of lectures, seminars and educational cycles during the first year, the participants were subjected to the process of *unlearning* and "*healing* from pre-packed alienating knowledge"[314] that positions them at the bottom and at the margins of the structure of power.[315] The educational cycles focused on a balance between theoretical inquiry and practical exercises. There were a dozen seminars and lectures, which were structured as biweekly meetings for a month. During this year, the programme included contributions from international critical scholars and spatial practitioners who were familiar with the Palestinian context and with creating urban interventions. The participants were exposed to

314 Italics are mine. Alessandro Petti, "Campus in Camps: Knowledge Production and Urban Interventions in Refugee Camps," in *The Routledge Companion to Planning in the Global South*, ed. Gautam Bham, Smita Srinivas, and Vanessa Watson (New York: Routledge, 2017), 338.
315 Petti, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 73.

experts in a variety of areas such as citizenship, refugee studies, humanitarianism, gender, mapping, and research methodologies.[316]

In this way, it can be established that the first year consisted of delinking from the pre-established universal knowledge created and reinforced by the colonial matrix of power. As participant Aysar Al Saifir explained to me,

> we inherit the idea that our reality is that of 'poverty and misery' and we share that idea with the people outside the camp. So, Campus in Camps was a space to stop and rethink how we (refugees) have built this image in our minds. One that comes from the Palestinian discourse that always talks about us the 'poor marginalized victims', and one that comes from the [international] associations [and NGOs] that we work with.[317]

Thus, the primary goal at this stage of the programme was to unlearn (delink) the information and vocabulary assimilated from the institutionalised humanitarian system as a first step towards a healing (relinking) process.[318]

Furthermore, the decision to invite guest lecturers and people who were experts in particular topics was based on what the group considered relevant and crucial to discuss.[319] For this reason, Campus in Camps had no fixed structure, and its programme configuration was constantly being

316 Campus in Camps, "Campus in Camps — About"; Petti, "Campus in Camps: Knowledge Production and Urban Interventions in Refugee Camps," 338; Elzenbaumer, "Speculating with Care: Learning from an Experimental Educational Program in the West Bank," 2.
317 Al Saifi, Personal interview with participant of Campus in Camps Aysar Al Saifi.
318 Petti, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 73.
319 Guest speakers included artists, architects, scholars, lawyers and political experts such as: David Harvey, Michel Agier, Ruba Saleh, Beatrice Catanzaro, Basel Abbas, Ruanne Abou-Rhame, Wilfried Graf, Tariq Dana, Felicity D. Scott, Mohammed Jabali, Moukhtar Kocache, Hanan Toukan, Shadi Chaleshtoori, Jeffrey Champlin, Manuel Herz, C.K. Raju, Fernando Rampérez, Emilio Dabed, Samer Abdelnour, Sari Hanafi, Michael Buroway, Gudrun Kramer, Sandi Hilal, Muhammed Jabali, Munir Fasheh, Aaron Cezar, Pelin Tan, Thomas Keenan, Shuruq Harb, Umar Al-Ghubari, Khaldun Bshara, Jawad Al Mahal and Ayman Kalifah. See Campus in Camps, "Campus in Camps — About"; Petti, "Campus in Camps: Knowledge Production and Urban Interventions in Refugee Camps," 344.

reshaped and adjusted according to the interests and issues being raised through the interactions between the participants and their proximate milieu.[320] The sessions discussed a wide range of topics, including camp improvement projects; international law and human rights; the relationship between agricultural practices, food production and political power; and culture and representations. During this first stage of the programme, the participants were able to engage, explore and connect their own lived experiences to the postcolonial and decolonial theories and doctrines.

In this process, the participants were able to engage with the territorial reality of the camp at trans-local levels, whether that was by reflecting on personal experiences, going on excursions, conducting photographic investigations, or interviewing and learning from those "usually invisible to academics, scholars, and the educated in general"—i.e. mothers and teachers—whose knowledge of "dealing with life in terms of keeping hope, love, and non-stop energy in managing and doing what needs to be done" to survive in the camp, is usually not recognised within the confines of institutional walls.[321] In doing so, the participants were encouraged to heal from the hegemonic terms and academic categories, and instead learn the knowledge that develops in the social fabric of the camp. In this way, Campus in Camps provided an institutional platform that had the flexibility to explore, speculate and experiment with 'unconventional'

[320] Petti, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 74.
[321] Munir Fasheh, "The House of Wisdom (HoW) with Campus in Camps (CiC)," in *Campus in Camps. A University of Exile*, 2013, 151, http://www.campusincamps.ps/about/ (accessed January 4, 2017).

forms of knowledge production but without restricting its programme to a hierarchical and restrictive institutional configuration. To an extent, the educational initiative "practice[d] an institution without being an institution," as Silvia Franceschini puts it.[322]

Many of the seminars and lectures were open to the broader public in the camp. This was a way to connect with the wider community of the camp and university students.[323] In doing so, the programme extended its invitation to join the process of unlearning. It would be interesting to see how many of the people in the community really engaged with this procedure. Unfortunately, there is no way to measure this, as there is no public information regarding the number of people attending such events.

After eight months of engaging with the participants' own lived experiences and deconstructing the attitudes and intellectual mindset resulting from the social and political context of the camp, the refugees started working with six international spatial practitioners—the 'project activators'—to find ways of merging theory into action.[324] The project activators were invited to be part of the Campus in Camps programme so that they could support the refugees in their efforts to create urban interventions that were situated in, and relational to, life in the camp. However, as Elzenbaumer recalls from her involvement with Campus in Camps as one of the project activators, the initial proposals soon turned out

[322] Silvia Franceschini, "The Politics of Affinity. Experiments in Art, Education and the Social Sphere," in *The Politics of Affinity* (Biella: Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto, 2018), 42.
[323] Petti, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 73.
[324] The 'activators' were Diego Segatto, Sara Pellegrini, Giuliana Racco, Matteo Guidi, Fabio Franz and Bianca Elzenbaumer. Elzenbaumer, "Speculating with Care: Learning from an Experimental Educational Program in the West Bank," 9.

to be "tied to agendas and definitions set out by international aid agencies […] or to be set into the realm of the almost purely imaginative and unattainable."[325] So, when the participants tried to put into practice what they had just theoretically unlearned, they soon realised that they were still thinking 'inside the box', and their proposals for transformative actions were not moving away from conceptions of marginalisation and victimisation. This major challenge led to the redefinition of a series of concepts considered "fundamental for the comprehension of the contemporary condition of Palestinian refugee camps."[326] The results were articulated and captured in a series of publications—booklets—called the *Collective Dictionary* (2013).[327]

What is interesting to see, in my opinion, is that this 'challenge'—which is one of the many obstacles they had to face throughout the programme—was some sort of stimulus to push the project further in the attempts to find alternative ways to decolonise knowledge. In this regard, Elzenbaumer claims that Campus in Camps was only possible as Hilal and

[325] Elzenbaumer, 10.
[326] Alessandro Petti and Sandi Hilal, "About," Campus in Camps, http://www.campusincamps.ps/about/ (accessed July 6, 2018).
[327] The booklets are in both Arabic and English. In the article *Speculating with Care: Learning from an Experimental Educational Program in the West Bank* (2018), author Bianca Elzenbaumer recounts her involvement with Campus in Camps as one of the "project activators". Through the collective design practice, Brave New Alps, Elzenbaumer, in collaboration with Fabio Franz (co-founder of Brave New Alps) facilitated the social and material design skills for the participants of Campus in Camps to create the printed outputs of the so-called *Collective Dictionary* and for the "urban interventions that would allow for transformative social, intellectual, and affective engagements with the camps and the condition of refugeehood." In 2008, Elzenbaumer and Franz had previously collaborated with Petti and Hilal in the early stages of the *Decolonizing Architecture* project. See Elzenbaumer, "Speculating with Care: Learning from an Experimental Educational Program in the West Bank."
The idea of compiling terms or phrases to provide a kind of political lexicon echoes Raymond William's *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society,* rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press,1985).

Petti were not paralysed by the region's social and political constraints. In her own words,

> Considering the nuances the negotiations around financial and social viability requires, it is clear that Campus in Camps only became possible because Petti and Hilal had 'stayed with the [Israeli–Palestinian] trouble' through their architectural practice for many years, continuously showing that they care through their willingness to respond to the necessities on the ground…[328]

This fact not only demonstrates the kind of commitment Hilal and Petti had towards the refugee community and the project, but it also reflects the artists' refusal to acquiesce to the dominant biopolitical power of the place.

In recognising and working around the socio-political constraints of the region, and working towards a form of critique that challenges the hegemonic narratives and logics of power and control, Campus in Camps is in fact using failure as a constructive tool to recognise the alternative forms of living that are already present in the reality of the camp. As Halberstam claims, "as a practice, failure recognises that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent."[329] It is precisely in this practice of 'prolific failure', as I call it, that Campus in Camps is able to reflect on ways to unsettle prevailing narratives and power structures, to rescue and reactivate those alternative forms of living, and to move towards a practice that can transform the refugeehood's reality. In this sense, I regard the notion of 'prolific failure' as the action of shifting away from the thwarted attempt to achieve the project's original goal, 'work

[328] Elzenbaumer, 8.
[329] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 88.

through the setbacks' and instead continue to adapt and tailor the project's aim towards the construction of a decolonial path.

3.2.1. *Reclaiming through a Collective Dictionary*

The terms compiled in the *Collective Dictionary* [Images 2-3] are the product of the actions and active dialogues with the camp community, as well as from written reflections on participants' personal experiences, interviews, excursions, and photographic investigations.[330] Each contributor had to propose a word with no evident link or connection to the preconceived idea of the camp and had to unlearn its meaning. In return, the participants had to redefine the concept based on their personal stories. Interestingly, the participants decided not to use the words 'help' and 'development', since these notions express and reaffirm a colonial mentality.[331] Instead, concepts such as vision, participation, responsibility, citizenship, ownership, sustainability, and political, amongst others, were proposed. In particular the term 'common' came up multiple times. Accordingly, there are two issues on the common, which explore the idea of what the 'right of return' could mean if the notion of returning what was once private property shifted to the 'return to the commons'.

[330] Petti, "Campus in Camps: Knowledge Production and Urban Interventions in Refugee Camps," 338.
[331] Petti, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 73.

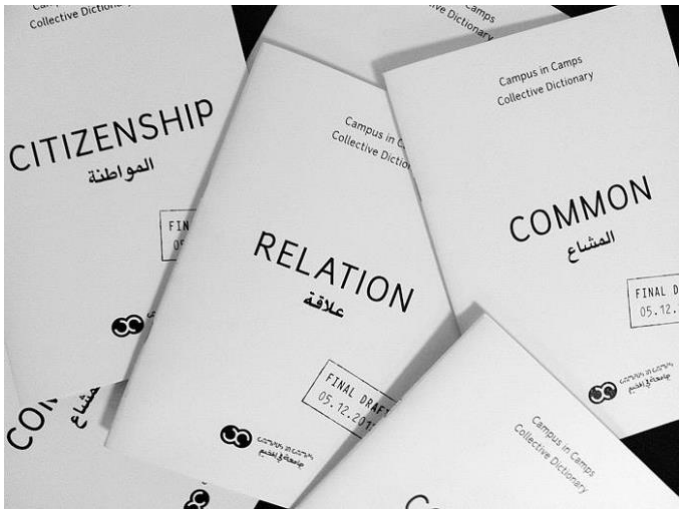

Image 2
Campus in Camps, *The Collective Dictionary* booklets, 2013.
Digital image obtained from:
https://www.facebook.com/CampusinCamps/photos/a.409447292414736/637710839588379/?type=3&theater

For Petti, the redefinition of the terms selected for the *Collective Dictionary* provided the semantic grounds to "make different languages and cultural traditions resonate."[332] It was a way to rescue what the residents of the camp have in common—beyond the physical space and the history of exile—and to emphasise and embrace the particularities of the camp community. In a way, this creative process not only established new forms of collective learning and knowledge production, but also equipped the participants with a form of autonomy and agency, similar to the one founded in the alternative education techniques used during the first *Intifada*. For Benjamin Leclair-Paquet this process of re-defining words and concepts "allowed for the neutralisation of colonial meanings, the power

[332] Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, *Permanent Temporariness* (Stockholm: Art and Theory Publishing and Royal Institute of Art, 2018), 40.

inscribed in these terms was profaned, and re-programmed through the act of making the collective dictionary itself."[333]

Image 3
Campus in Camps participants getting ready for public presentation of the *Collective Dictionary,* 2013
Dheisheh Refugee Camp, Palestine. Digital image obtained from:
https://www.facebook.com/CampusinCamps/photos/a.582974651728665/582974968395300/?type=3&theater

Moreover, in reflecting on the outcomes of the *Collective Dictionary*, Hilal affirms that it had a remarkable impact in the refugees' unlearning process and in their attempt towards finding forms of representation that can trigger previously unimagined futures. In her own words,

> By creating a new language, Dheisheh's refugees are creating a new image through their actions. Through the process of colonization, the first loss for the colonized is the ability to imagine one's own future. The negative effect is immediate: one's future lies in someone else's hands. Thus, these refugees are reversing the effects of colonization by taking their futures in their own hands and reshaping them to create a new common.[334]

[333] Benjamin Leclair-Paquet, "The Ethics of Potential Urbanism: Critical Encounters between Girogio Agambe and Architecture," *The Journal of Architecture* 23, no. 2 (2018): 346.
[334] Hilal and Petti, "Reimagining the Common: Rethinking the Refugee Experience."

The *Collective Dictionary* is the core framework of all the interventions and community-driven initiatives developed in the second year of Campus in Camps.

3.2.2. *The Initiatives*

During the second year, the programme mainly focused on the kind of knowledge that arises from the daily activities that happen in the camps, such as walks, gatherings, events, and urban actions. From this form of knowledge that emerges "…not as a pre-constituted information but rather as critical understanding of the social and political context," the spatial interventions in the urbanization of the camp—referred to as the 'initiatives'—were created.[335] These urban spatial interventions consisted of creating different actions that would stimulate and activate the camp community to make explicit use of the already existing infrastructure of the camp—i.e. a garden, a public square, a pedestrian bridge. The aim here was to engage more directly with the architecture of occupation and the "camp condition".[336] Petti discerns that "[w]hat is at stake in these interventions is the possibility for the participants to realize projects in the camps without neither normalizing their exceptional condition nor blending into the surrounding cities."[337]

[335] Petti and Hilal, "About."
[336] Understand the "camp condition" as "a space suspended from the surrounding legal, social and political order." See Campus in Camps, "Campus in Camps — About."
[337] Petti, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 73.

It is vital to understand that Campus in Camps' pedagogical approach is fundamentally based on the relation between knowledge production—the *Collective Dictionary*—and spatial interventions in the urban area of the camp—the initiatives.[338] That is to say, the knowledge produced and articulated in the *Collective Dictionary* was then materialised in physical interventions within the camp. With regard to this, Elzenbaumer asserts that,

> Framing speculative proposals in the form of tangible outcomes was important in strengthening the refugees' confidence in their desires, thinking, and doing, sparing them from having to produce project proposal [sic] that they thought international funders might support or proposals so remote from reality that they were bound to remain in the realm of imagination.[339]

Furthermore, the names of these initiatives—i.e. the garden, the pathways, the municipality, the suburb, the pool, the stadium, the square, the unbuilt, and the bridge—are based on what Petti and Hilal have described as "the urbanity of exile".[340] Deeming the very existence of these so-called common places—a pool or a square—within the camp as opportunities, Campus in Camps speculates and ponders upon the possibilities for new spatial and social formations that go beyond the idea of the camp as a site of marginalisation and political subjugation.[341] The

[338] Petti, "Campus in Camps: Knowledge Production and Urban Interventions in Refugee Camps," 338.
[339] Elzenbaumer, "Speculating with Care: Learning from an Experimental Educational Program in the West Bank," 14.
[340] Petti, "Architecture of Exile"; Alessandro Petti, "Campus in Camps: A University in Exile," 2013, http://www.campusincamps.ps/about/; Fasheh, "The House of Wisdom (HoW) with Campus in Camps (CiC)."
[341] Petti, "Campus in Camps: Knowledge Production and Urban Interventions in Refugee Camps," 338.

initiatives aimed to analyse the history and present condition of specific sites within the camp. The main idea underlying these interventions was that collective participation generates the site and not the other way around.[342] To have a better grasp of what these projects consist of, in what follows I explore three different initiatives stirred by the term 'common'.

3.2.2.1. Pathways

The idea of public and private property does not exist in refugee camps, as there are no laws or political authorities to determine what is the public sphere and what is private. Precisely because of this, during the first and second *Intifada*, the walls in the camp—which literally belonged to the commons—were the only means to express and portray the sense of collective spirit and shared experiences of the struggle. The *Intifadas* generated a unique intellectual and social fabric, and the walls became a sort of makeshift canvas to illustrate political writings and symbols of the time. As such, the art of graffiti provided an important platform were some of the most significant and influential symbols of the Palestinian struggle took their shape. Some of the most internationally recognised Palestinian symbols, such as the Palestinian scarf, the flag, the hand sign of victory, the olive tree, and the Dome of the Rock, were products of this creative

[342] There are some 'off-site' initiatives deployed outside the four refugee camps involved in the *Campus in Camps* programme. These initiatives germinated after the two-year programme ended. They are deemed as a continuation of the work developed in *Campus in Camps.* See Campus in Camps, "Off-Site Initiatives," Campus in Camps, http://www.campusincamps.ps/category/off-site/ (accessed September 26, 2019).

process.[343] The images depicted on the walls gained the respect and acknowledgement of the families living in the camp, and its impact is something that has persisted to the present day. In a way, "the walls became a form of social media to spread information about the political, social, and economic suffering of the refugees as well as a way to fix social problems through painting and writing,"[344], as refugee Al-Saifi points out.

Image 4
Graffities of Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani and Palestinian political cartoonist Naji Al Ali with the cartoon character Handala, n.d.
Dheisheh Refugee Camp, Palestine. Digital image obtained from:
http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/06-the-pathways/

Aiming to commemorate the 65th Nakba Day,[345] the initiative *Pathways* (2013) gathered together a group of ten young refugees to revive those practices of painting, drawing and writing on the walls in the camp that sparked a sense of hope and resistance during the first *Intifada*. The intention was to establish a "common intellectual ground that is built on

[343] Tamara Abu Laban, "The Revolutionary Spirit of Graffiti," in *The Pathways. Reframing Narration*, Campus in Camps Initiaves (Dheisheh Refugee Camp, 2013), 49.
[344] Aysar Al Saifi and Murad Odeh, "The Pathways. Reframing Narration," Campus in Camps Initiaves (Dheisheh Refugee Camp, 2013), 15, http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/06-the-pathways/.
[345] The 1948 Palestinian exodus is also known as the Nakba.

common education and cooperation."[346] The initiative was divided into two tasks. The first was the restoration of old graffities that in their own way portrayed the reality of living in the camps, and that "…enriched the walls in the camp with past events and expectations of the future."[347] For example, the graffiti of Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani, who wrote extensively about the Palestinian political situation, or the graffiti of Naji Al Ali, the Palestinian political cartoonist who created the famous cartoon character of Handala, which became a symbol of resistance and struggle [Image 4]. The second task was the creation of six new paintings to reflect the present condition of the camp and depict the speculative future of the refugee community [Image 5]. Some graffities depict the dream of refugees to return, while others portray the value of the camp 65 years after the Nakba. Prior to the commemoration of the Nakba Day, the group held several meetings where they established an intellectual common ground and a plan of action for how they would create the images to transform the walls of the camp. The activity took over two weeks to complete. [348]

[346] Al Saifi and Odeh, "The Pathways. Reframing Narration," 20.
[347] Al Saifi and Odeh, 20.
[348] Al Saifi and Odeh, 23.

Image 5
Participants of Campus in Camps creating *The Pathways* initiative, 2013.
Dheisheh Refugee Camp, Palestine. Digital image obtained from:
http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/06-the-pathways/

What I found fascinating about this initiative is that it was encouraged by the community who wanted to acknowledge and rescue the social and cultural heritage of the camp. Despite the camp being the "urbanisation of exile" and supposedly 'temporary', there are over seventy years of history captured in the camp's walls, years which are worth acknowledging and preserving. Interestingly, there is an unspoken understanding that the walls of the camp only contain images that are part of the "act of resistance".[349] Thus, anything being captured on the camp's walls should be "a continuation of the revolutionary art that rejects the reality of exile."[350] Accordingly, *Pathways* sought to sustain the idea that "refugeehood doesn't pass away but rather transfers from one generation to the next," and the camp walls are a way of acknowledging and reiterating that common ground.[351]

[349] Al Saifi and Odeh, 50.
[350] Tamara Abu Laban, "The Revolutionary Spirit of Graffiti" in Al Saifi and Odeh, 50.
[351] Al Saifi and Odeh, 23.

Image 6
Campus in Camps, *The Camp is the Political Exception,* 2013.
Dheisheh Refugee Camp. Palestine. Digital image obtained from:
http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/06-the-pathways/

As a case in point, consider the graffiti *The Camp is the Political Exception* [image 6], which illustrates the life of the camp for the new and the old generation. Using Naji Al-Ali's widely known cartoon character of Handala[352] as a symbol, the graffiti depicts the camp as the "political exception" where younger generations can acknowledge their own heritage—the camp heritage—without denying the collective struggle—the right of return. The image portrays three figures: two young children standing next to an elder male character holding a cane. The child on the left side of the image is holding hands with the old man, whilst the child on the right clings onto the man's clothes. The three figures show their backs to the spectator, as they are standing still looking towards the background, which is in fact the refugee camp. They are all connected, they are all refugees, they

352 The refugee child who refuses to look back at the camp and continues to look towards the direction of his original homeland.

are all Handala. There are some inscriptions framing both sides of the image. The writings on the left are in both English and Arabic, and they read: *The Camp is the Political Exception.* On the right side, is a list of cities and villages that were sized or depopulated in the *Nakba*.[353]

Handala's image is being used as a way to acknowledge the Palestinian struggle and to close the generational gap. The graffiti illustrates how younger generations can acknowledge their own heritage—the camp heritage—and the collective struggle—the right of return—while, at the same time as looking into the future: the camp is a place of political exceptionality. Participants Al-Saifi and Al-Barbary explain that, "this picture illustrates the life of the camp: how the new generation takes over the responsibilities of the camp and the homeland, and how we take on the role of building our vision in a way that addresses both [,] the current situation of the camp and the future of return." [354] As such, the *graffiti* presents a shift of perspective, one of looking towards the future and not remaining stuck in the past. Using the 'old methods'—that is, graffiti on the wall—rather than new technologies—such as social media—to transmit political and social messages, the initiative *Pathways* not only manages to

[353] The cities and villages included in the list are: Jarash, Akkā (known as Acre in Israel), Qabāb, Hayfa (known as Haifa in Israel), Ṣafad (known as Safed in Israel), Zakariā (sometimes also refered to as Az-Zakariyya), Sar´a, Yāffā (known as Jaffa in Israel), Sufla, Qastina, Tall al-Tarmus, Artuf, Ajjur, Ishwa´, Derābān, Dayr Yāsīn, al-Walaja, al-Suflā, Mughallis, Allar, Bayt Nattif, Dayr al-Shaykh, Ras Abu 'Ammar, al-Quds (in Jerusalem), Dayr al-Hawā, Bayt Jibrin, and al-Burayj. For more on depopulated cities and villages in Nakba see Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992); Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[354] Al Saifi and Odeh, "The Pathways. Reframing Narration," 25.

erase the generational gap, but also recuperates the common social fabric of the community that has slowly faded out within the camp.

In essence, the *Pathways* initiative implemented decolonial approaches such as *remembering* and *protecting* prior forms of communication that fuelled practices of commonality and solidarity; *returning* and *reactivating* those 'old methods'; *negotiating* between the past and the present reality of the camp; and *speculating*, *representing* and *(story-)telling* the dreams about the future of the camp. I believe that it is precisely through these approaches that the initiative was able to spark a sense of hope amongst the participants that alternative forms of dealing with the everyday life in the camp are in fact possible.

3.2.2.2. The Square

> *The first time we gathered fifty women in the square we feared people's reactions and perceptions. But we were shocked to see how many people strongly supported the idea of using the square as a common space. It seems now, a few months since that moment, nobody can bear being inside closed spaces any longer: we were all longing [for] some fresh air.*
>
> Ayat Al Turshan[355]

Open spaces in Palestinian refugee camps are very limited and almost inexistent. This condition not only affects the activities and people's interactions in the camp, but also the possibility of any sort of collective actions. In order to respond to this, the Camp Improvement Unit—one of

[355] Ayat Altursha n and Nida' Alhmouz, "The Square," *Campus in Camps*, http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/02-the-square/ (accessed last March 21, 2017).

UNRWA's operating projects in the West Bank under Hilal's supervision—in collaboration with the community of Al Fawwar refugee camp agreed to create a 'public space' accessible to all the people in the camp. Accordingly, in 2007 UNRWA turned two old shelters into a 510 square metre plaza.[356] One has to understand that refugees are sceptical about any sort of 'improvement' of the camp. Broadly speaking, they often see any form of edification as a way of normalising their condition, as a way of encouraging them to accept their permanency in the camp, and in so doing, giving away their right of return. During the initial plans, therefore, questions about the potential political repercussions of a new common area were asked by the local people. Some of the interrogations were: "Is the plaza merely a wretched attempt to mitigate the conditions of total subjugation? Or is the plaza the physical indication that the refugees have abandoned their strategy of convincing the whole world of their misery through their architectural misery; that they are instead initiating a new strategy of capitalizing on their strengths as refugees rather than their weakness as victims?"[357]

Once the community managed to overcome such fundamental questions and accepted that indeed the very existence of such space would be beneficial to them, further discussions regarding the activities that could be held in the plaza arose. Issues regarding who would be able to use it, how it should look, and more importantly, what role women should have in this space, were interrogated. As Hilal recalls,

356 Altürshan and Alhmouz.
357 Altürshan and Alhmouz.

> When asking about women's appearance in the square some women were against sitting in the square to have their morning coffee there or any other of their daily activities. […] The women were accusing their men of not accepting and allowing them to go out, and the men were defending themselves saying that the women themselves refused to go out.[358]

After five years of debating with the community, in 2012, the public square was finally completed. The square is located in the middle of the camp, and it has four entrances—one for each cardinal point. It is surrounded with closed houses and until today it is the only common space in the camp.

Aiming to activate and revive the idea of *Mujaawarah*—a learning style that depends on collectivity—in the public square, participants of Campus in Camps Nida' Alhmouz and Ayat Altursha n created *The Square* (2013) initiative. The idea emerged from the belief that learning is a right for everyone, for both men and women. Altursha n explains that,

> learning here is considered as a common that everybody has a right to engage in, since common as a concept cannot only be applied to spaces, but also to thoughts. […] In our camp, learning as a common is another missing element. It is generally not accepted for women to join certain learning sessions side by side with men…[359]

In this regard, the initiative intended not only to reactivate collective practice, but also provide a space for women to be empowered. One should bear in mind that *The Square* initiative was inspired by the 'Gender and Public Spaces' learning cycle, which aimed to create debates around women's role in public spaces.[360]

358 Altursha n and Alhmouz.
359 Altursha n and Alhmouz.
360 Franceschini and Guerrini, "Campus in Camps. Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of Un-Learning."

Image 7
Al Qassas Square, 2012.
Dheisheh Refugee Camp, Palestine. Digital image obtained from:
http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/02-the-square/

In October 2012, Alhamouz and Altursha started meeting with different women in the camp to figure out what kind of collective learning could be held in the common square. After several meetings with a range of women, a consensus was reached to hold English lessons in the square. This resolution, however, did not come without its challenges, as many women were worried about being observed from the houses surrounding the square—the sole idea of being seen was embarrassing for them. The problem was quickly solved by encouraging these women to use the space to do something they do on daily basis, for example cooking. Thus, in December 2013 the women from three refugee camps—Fawwar Arroub, Dheisheh, and Deir Ballut—gathered together in the public square to cook the traditional Palestinian dish *maftoul.* It was also an occasion for having a short English lesson delivered in the form as a game through the activity of cooking [Images 7-8]. According to Altursha this action "broke any fear […]

about appearing in and using the public square […] it was a contextual lesson that expressed the leisure nature of the event, the nature of the women and the nature of the place itself."[361] This was the first of many gatherings in the public square that formed part of *The Square* initiative.

Image 8
Campus in Camps, Refugee women gather together in Al Qassas public square during *The Square* initiative, 2013.
Dheisheh Refugee Camp, Palestine. Digital image obtained from:
http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/02-the-square/

Moreover, it is crucial to bear in mind that this initiative was only possible because of the engagement with a group of women who desired a space, a public space that could be a place of freedom for them. It was about "reclaiming the right to be in the public space," as Petti asserts in conversation with curator Shumi Bose.[362] This action was a turning point for the gatherings in the square. Before this assembly, the space was never used

[361] Altarshan and Alhmouz, "The Square," 57.
[362] Alessandro Petti and Shumi Bose, "Imagining What Comes Next," in *The State of the Art of Architecture. Chicago Architecture Biennial (2015)*, ed. Irene Sunwoo (Lars Muller Publishers, 2018), 139, online version obtained from: http://2015.chicagoarchitecturebiennial.org/exhibition/publications/ and http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/articles/.

exclusively for female activities. However, through *The Square* initiative, the possibility of women using public space to get-together and practice *mujaawarah* became a reality.

The Square initiative not only encouraged the women in the camp to participate and use the common space, but also continues to reanimate the plaza through a series of activities: from planting trees for a greener and shadier place, to exhibitions where the women sell their handmade products as a way of promoting sustainability in the camp. What is of great significance is the fact that this project managed to shift the community's approach to the 'public space', and now, in the present day, those "women who had said that it was impossible to have a cup of coffee in the square" are the ones who are found drinking coffee in such a space.[363] This initiative not only enhanced the social relations amongst people, and broke down social barriers attached to gender and age, but also saw the common space—the square—as the point that "re-gathers the people again; [where] they will again have the direct contact they had before in the past."[364] Ironically, the public square, which was already there, was able to provide the foundation on which to build new healthy social relations based on "mutual comprehension and communication."[365] In this sense, it is possible to say that *The Square* initiative reconfigured the notion of 'public' from a space associated with authoritarianism and colonialism, to that of a place where practices of cooperation and commoning were activated. From all the initiatives developed in the two-year programme, *The Square* is the only

[363] Altarshan and Alhmouz, "The Square," 79.
[364] Altarshan and Alhmouz, 79.
[365] Altarshan and Alhmouz, 79.

initiative that remains active, and today it is regarded as a continuation of the work created by Campus in Camps.

In the case of *The Square* initiative, the decolonial approaches of *reclaiming, reframing, negotiating, sharing, envisioning, reactivating* and *commoning* were implemented. These methodologies were the framework that allowed the initiative to succeed. As mentioned in Chapter 2, scholars Tuck & Yang believe that the process of decolonisation starts with the recognition of how land, and relations to the land, are differently understood and enacted. It is precisely because of this that "decolonisation is necessarily unsettling, especially across lines of solidarity," as they claim.[366] I believe this is exactly what *The Square* initiative managed to do. In *reclaiming, reframing* and *negotiating* the use of the common space, this initiative not only unsettled preconceived dominant narratives and ideas about women's roles in the refugee community, but it also reactivated practices of collectivity and solidarity that were once part of the daily life in the camp. In this sense, I consider *The Square* initiative to be completely successful in creating paths towards a process of decoloniality. But, of course, as I will establish in what follows, this success seems to be the exception rather than the rule within the practice of Campus in Camps.

[366] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 7.

3.2.2.3. Concrete Tent

The prolonged 'temporary' condition of Palestinian refugee camps has produced different social, spatial and political structures within them. More than seventy years after their formation, the camps have been reinforced and readapted, and the collection of frail tents has now turned into more solid structures. The camps today constitute an entirely different materiality; they are no longer fragile fabric structures but rather permanent concrete urbanisations.[367] These urban spaces have no governance system, yet they have their own social, political and spatial structure. An example of this can be seen with the Al-Feniq Centre, a multifunctional institution with a large conference hall, a library, offices, a women's gym and a guesthouse.[368] Its name translates into English as Phoenix, and it suggests the idea of destruction and re-birth. A name to reflect the unique character of the camp in which it is located: the Dheisheh refugee camp. Before it became a recreational space for the refugee community, the site functioned as a British colonial prison, a Jordanian prison, and later on as an Israeli civil administration office.[369] After Israel withdrew its presence from the camp, the community debated what to do with the abandoned space. There was a general concern from residents that if such area turned into a space for leisure—and subsequently improved the state of the camp—it would be an act of normalising their condition, and

[367] Note that these urbanisations are not cities as such, because cities have public institutions that organise, manage and control life within them. Unlike cities, the camps have no state government as such.
[368] Hilal and Petti, "Reimagining the Common: Rethinking the Refugee Experience."
[369] Hilal and Petti.

thus, they would be jeopardising their 'right of return'. Despite these concerns, the Al-Feniq Centre was built and inaugurated in 2004. The site is administrated by the Popular Committee.

Image 9
Campus in Camps, *The Concrete Tent,* 2013. Al Feniq Centre, Dheisheh Refugee Camp, Palestine. Digital image obtained from: http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/the-concrete-tent/

Deeming the camp as a place "full of stories that can be narrated through its urban fabric,"[370] the *Concrete Tent* initiative was conceived as an effort to acknowledge and preserve those stories as part of the heritage of this "culture of exile". The initiative consisted of building a structure that would represent life in the camp. As its name suggests, the *Concrete Tent* is a structure in the shape of a tent and is made of concrete. It has an open access platform that functions as a gathering space for communal learning—i.e. cultural activities, social meetings, and a working area for the

370 Hilal and Petti, *Permanent Temporariness*, 251.

refugee community [Images 9-10]. The structure has a number of illuminated square cells throughout. These squares in fact are windows with lightbulbs within. They are covered with a thin layer of gauze-like material to protect the bulbs and allow light to travel through. The structure has its own electrical network. The idea of such a structure emerged from the dialogues and discussions generated during the two years of the Campus in Camps programme. The goal was to materialise and give form to the narrations and representations of the refugee camps beyond the conventional notions of "poverty, marginalization and victimization."[371] The *Concrete Tent* was built in the garden that belongs to the Al-Feniq Centre in 2015. It was the final initiative produced by Campus in Camps and its inauguration marked the culmination of the two-year programme.

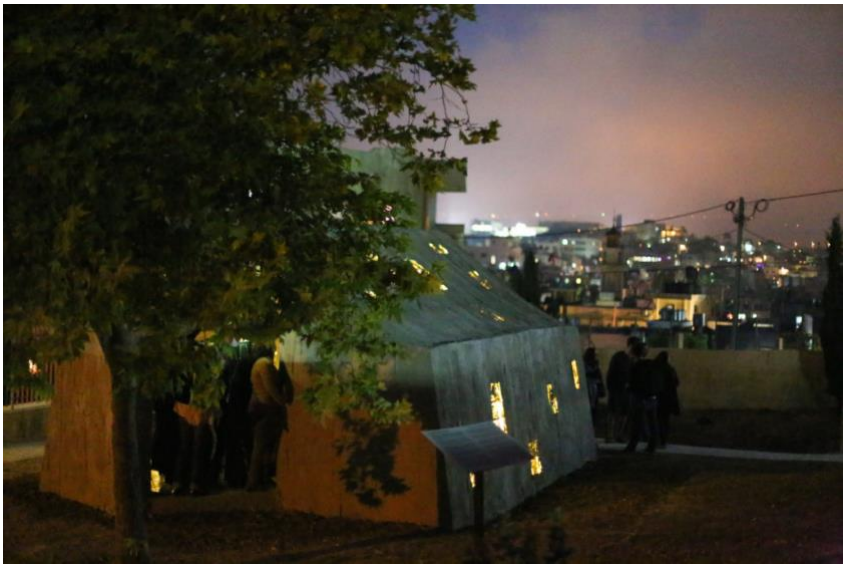

Image 10
Campus in Camps, *The Concrete Tent,* 2013.
Al Feniq Centre, Dheisheh Refugee Camp, Palestine. Digital image obtained from: http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/the-concrete-tent/

[371] Hilal and Petti, 252. See also Petti and Bose, "Imagining What Comes Next," 139.

The structure of the *Concrete Tent* itself solidifies the mobility of a tent into a concrete edifice. The result is a hybrid between a fragile tent and a solid building, between temporary and permanent, soft and hard, movement and stillness. By combining these elements, the *Concrete Tent* represents the contradiction of the present condition of Palestinian refugee camps: "a permanent temporariness."[372] Moreover, it is important to understand that within the humanitarian industry, architecture is often reduced to a practice that is meant to address the community's needs.[373] In the specific context of Palestine, such discipline is often used for its apparent potential to alleviate and improve the living conditions in the camp. However, as Petti points out, architecture is rarely used for its power to "give form to social and political problems and to challenge dominant narrations and assumptions."[374] Using architecture to preserve the idea of the tent as the "symbolic and historical value" of the camp's heritage,[375] the *Concrete Tent* initiative not only recognises the cultural and symbolic importance of the archetype—the tent—but also engages with "the present political condition of exile."[376] In Petti's words,

> Claiming the life in exile is historically meaningful is a way to recognize refugees as subjects of history, as maker [sic] of history and not simply victims of it. Claiming the camp as heritage site is a way to avoid the trap of being stuck either in the commemoration of the past or in a projection into an abstract messianic future that is constantly postponed and presented as salvation.[377]

[372] Alessandro Petti, "The Concrete Tent," *Campus in Camps*, May 27, 2015, http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/the-concrete-tent/ (accessed May 16, 2018).
[373] Petti.
[374] Petti.
[375] Petti.
[376] Petti, "Decolonizing Knowledge," 75.
[377] Petti, "The Concrete Tent."

It is worth noting that the *Concrete Tent* functions not only as a place of gathering and to exert common practices—i.e. *Al-Mashà, Mujaawarah*, Popular Teaching—but also as a symbol of the refugee identity, which is based on the contradiction of permanent temporariness. In other words, claiming the history of the camp opens up a new horizon for fresh political and social configurations; the camp as a common space and as "a counter-site for emerging political practices and a new form of urbanism."[378] By generating different demands from those that the older generations put forth, and by creating a new language, a new narrative and a new image, this initiative presents a shift in narration. As such, the *Concrete Tent* embodies the life in the camps and reclaims the refugee heritage that it is not based on the notion of the 'right to return' as a return to the single-family house that was taken away, but on the idea of 'returning back to the common'.

One should bear in mind, nonetheless, that the *Concrete Tent* does not represent contentment with, or acceptance of, the condition of exile. It is not offering any sort of solution but, rather, it is presenting a different perspective of the situation. It is presenting a possibility: the possibility of embracing "the contradiction of an architectural form emerged from a life in exile." [379] It is in this embracement of the incongruity of life in the camp, of the "permanent temporariness", which means that Campus in Camps is in fact offering a space where a sense of hope is triggered.

[378] Petti.
[379] Petti.

Image 11
Campus in Camps, *The Concrete Tent,* 2013.
Al Feniq Centre, Dheisheh Refugee Camp, Palestine.
Photo: Ana Varas (January 2018)

Image 12
Campus in Camps, *The Concrete Tent,* 2013.
Al Feniq Centre, Dheisheh Refugee Camp, Palestine.
Photo: Ana Varas (January 2018)

Image 13
Campus in Camps, *The Concrete Tent,* 2013.
Al Feniq Centre, Dheisheh Refugee Camp, Palestine.
Photo: Ana Varas (January 2018)

In the year 2018, I had the opportunity to visit the Dheisheh refugee camp and carry out fieldwork research. Whilst highly enriching, this experience also came with constrictions and limitations. Contacting the participants of Campus in Camps was challenging and getting access to the Al-Feniq Centre, where the *Concrete Tent* is located, was difficult to obtain. As noted in chapter two, although I tried to plan my visit ahead of time by asking Hilal and Petti to put me in touch with the participants, setting up meetings with the refugees was a futile task. This was due to the fact that the some of the participants were not currently living in the camp, whereas others refused to meet and talk about their participation in Campus in Camps. I soon discovered that despite their experience in the two-year programme, most of the refugee community continues to distrust 'outsider' researchers. This experience enabled me to witness first-hand some of the constraints Hilal and Petti might have experienced when the initially started working in the refugee camp.

Furthermore, when I went to see the *Concrete Tent* at the Al-Feniq Centre, I found, to my surprise, a neglected and unkept edification. It seems that after Campus in Camps ended, the building was not maintained, leading to its abandonment and vandalisation [Images 11-13].[380] It is important to understand that the *Concrete Tent* is being presented in the international art world—by Hilal, Petti and other members of Campus in Camps programme—as a venue still used by the refugee community. However, from my own experience and from the conversations I held with the local community of Dheisheh, I can conclude that that is not the case. In fact, the structure seems to only be used when the artistic duo is present to galvanise the community. This raises serious questions about the ethico-political obligations, as well as the sustainability and feasibility of the project. So, what does this tell us about the project as a whole? Are Petti and Hilal falling into the trap of commodifying the "camp condition" in order to advance their artistic careers? Are they not aware of the state of the *Concrete Tent?* Are the actions performed during the two-year programme just a glimpse of what the future could be like, but that without the presence of international artists in the camps these alternative forms of living are not really feasible? How to envisage a 'return back to the commons' when clearly it is not a sustainable commons as long as it remains highly-dependent on humanitarian funds? Was the activation of the refugee community always meant to be temporary? Is speculation the easy way out?

[380] During my visit I had the pleasure of talking to the executive manager of the Popular Committee who explained what happened.

Perhaps the abandonment of the *Concrete Tent* can be seen as another form of failure, yet, it can also be seen as a way of 'returning back to the commons.' If we are to regard this as failure, the question remains: failure according to whom, and over what period of time? As noted earlier, the inauguration of the *Concrete Tent* represented the culmination of the two-year programme, and despite its setbacks, Campus in Camps was seen as successful. Yet notwithstanding Hilal and Petti's efforts to continue the work generated during the two-year programme with a new group of refugees, Campus in Camps ceased to exist. This could, of course, just mean that once the project was concluded, life in the camp went back to its traditional state of marginalisation and relegation. However, the relinquishment of the edification could also be regarded as a decolonial gesture whereby the refugee community is taking back control of the space and striving towards a form of autonomy that goes beyond Hilal and Petti's vision. In this case, the project would be regarded as successful in the construction of a decolonial path. Either way, it is still fascinating to see how Campus in Campus continues to generate unexpected socio-political dynamics within the urban fabric of the camp, even after the project's completion. I believe it is precisely in these unexpected social dynamics where the practice of Campus in Camps finds its strength.

Additionally, when visiting the site, I notice an explanatory panel next to the *Concrete Tent* [Image 11]. The panel is written in both, English and Arabic. This could be regarded as a tactic to turn the initiative into some sort of monument or permanent site-specific artwork. However, as Hilal and Petti explain, when the idea of the *Concrete Tent* was conceived, they

were "aware of the danger of monumentalization and overt symbolism" this structure could have. Despite this, they decided to "take the risk" so they could create projects that engage with "social and political problems that concern the refugee community."[381] It seems to me that it is precisely in this willingness to 'take the risk' and failing, that Campus in Camps situates its practice, as it is specifically in the challenges that they encounter where the collective's practice thrives. At this point I would like to highlight that Campus in Camps was not just offering a platform to engage with the present reality of the camp, but as a matter of fact, it is through prolific failure that the alter-institutional initiative presented a space where a temporal sense of hope was sparked. And what is hope if not a powerful form of resistance that can organise and mobilise social movements where alternative forms of living can be obtained? As sociologist Ana Cecilia Dinerstein claims, "Hope is the ultimate category of struggle."[382]

Furthermore, in the book *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), Halberstam reminds us that failure can be productively linked to geopolitical awareness, anticolonial struggle, and diverse formulations of the temporality of success.[383] I argue that it is precisely in the practice of 'prolific failure' that Campus in Camps manages to temporarily open up the cracks to confront and challenge the hegemonic narratives and assumptions about life in the camp, and to speculate about the alternative possibilities. In other words, it is through this practice of failure that the alter-institutional initiative successfully activated decolonial formulations

[381] Hilal and Petti, *Permanent Temporariness*, 252.
[382] Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organising Hope*, 26.
[383] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 92.

through which the refugee community was galvanised—whether that is during or after the realisation of the urban spatial interventions.

3.3. Starting in the Middle and Harnessing Failure

As seen throughout this chapter, Campus in Camps deals with space in a political way that is very much about the person and their performative acts. Through its series of interventions, Campus in Camps creates a level of engagement that is more about a personal and communal negotiation of space, rather than dealing directly with the politics of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. In this way, Campus in Camps aims to build political power for a social movement that will resurrect a form of life based on decolonial knowledge and praxis. That is to say, the legacy of alternative collective approaches to the everyday life developed in the camp is precisely what Campus in Camps seeks to recuperate. Fostering alternative insights into camps from the inside, amongst camp inhabitants whose vision of their own situation has been moulded by decades of humanitarian intervention, as well as external colonisation of knowledge and cultural alteration, is Campus in Camps' ultimate aim. Through the collective processes of *unlearning, speculating, reframing, remembering, representing, negotiating, protecting, returning envisioning, story-telling* and *commoning*, the participants "decolonised their minds" from the fixed narratives of what it means to be a refugee. Whether it is through the redefining and reframing

of the crucial concepts for the understanding of the life in the camp—i.e. *Collective Dictionary*—the integration and negotiation of the past and the present through the story-telling and visual representation—i.e. *Pathways*—or the reactivation of common spaces and the creation of recuperative collective practices of sharing and commoning—i.e. *The Square* and the *Concrete Tent*—Campus in Camps provides an educational and artistic model to unlearn the dominant narration, and to reframe and speculate on alternative scenarios of how life could be in the camp. In all these examples, attempts to unlearn dominant forms of knowledge correspond to the creation of new epistemologies emerging from the microhistories, fragmented narratives and experiences in the camp. In this sense, Campus in Camps attempts to function as a counter-laboratory to restore the use of common spaces in the camp and transform the perception of the camp from that of a marginalised space to that of a site of knowledge and political agency.

Furthermore, the founders of Campus in Camps understand decolonisation as "…an ongoing practice of deactivation and reorientation understood both in its presence and its endlessness." And they claim, "[m]ight decolonization then be the counter-apparatus to restore to common use what the colonial order has separated and divided."[384] With this in mind, Campus in Camps provides a platform of cooperation but also utilises confrontation as a form of decolonisation. This can clearly be seen in both the *Pathways* and *The Square* initiatives, where through collective

[384] Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal, and Eyal Weizman, *Architecture After Revolution* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), 18–19.

action both projects challenge the use of common spaces within the camp and question the social conventions revolving around them. In doing so, both initiatives reconnect with the camp as the common space where the enhancement of life and social relations can be possible. Confronting the dominant ideology on what it means to be a refugee and how they should relate to the public space, these initiatives present an alternative scenario where communal practice is deemed as means to "expand the right of return to the common[s]."[385] In the case of the *Concrete Tent*, such a platform is provided by materialising the manifested contradiction of the "permanent temporariness" of the camp and by recognising the camp as a place where social and political re-invention is possible—all this without normalising the political condition of being exiled. Through these creative strategies the participants of Campus in Camps were able to obtain a momentary reactivation of the commons as praxis. Nevertheless, from all the initiatives examined, only *The Square* initiative continues the efforts to stimulate collectivity and communal practice in the camp. I would like to add that if such a project still persists, it is because the refugee Ayat Al Turshan is determined to continue the promotion of this activation of the common square for women within the refugee community. It is worth noting that she does not receive any help or assistance from Hilal and Petti, nor any sort of support from a funding body.[386] Yet, her work can be read as a continuation of the work originated in Campus in Camps and as a successful example of decolonial praxis.

[385] Hilal and Petti, "Reimagining the Common: Rethinking the Refugee Experience."
[386] Al Turshan, Personal interview with participant of Campus in Camps Ayat Al Turshan.

As mentioned before, Campus in Camps was born from the idea of bringing the university campus to the refugee camp. In *Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive,* Achille Mbembe claims,

> Decolonizing the university starts with the de-privatization and rehabilitation of the public space […]. It starts with a redefinition of what is public, *i.e.*, [sic] what pertains to the realm of *the common* and as such, does not belong to anyone in particular because it must be equally shared between equals. […] The decolonization of buildings and of public spaces is inseparable from the *democratization of access.*[387]

Following Mbembe's logic of thought and applying it to the camp context, it is possible to see that the Campus in Camps programme is in fact decolonising knowledge, as it is temporarily returning/reactivating those 'public spaces' back to the realm of the common. The question is, however, how can one talk about decoloniality when the programme itself is not breaking with any structure and, in fact, heavily relies on the funds provided by the GIZ—which are still translated as humanitarian aid? And how to return back to the commons when it is only fifteen refugees who "decolonised their minds" and benefitted from this programme? In addition to this, one should consider that when I asked Campus in Camps' participants about the community's reaction towards such initiatives, they all agreed that there are certain sensitive subjects—taboo topics such as the 'right to return' or the victimised narration—that are engrained in the refugee identity and which the broader community is not willing to

[387] Achille Mbembe, "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive" (2015). Obtained from: https://worldpece.org/content/mbembe-achille-2015-%E2%80%9Cdecolonizing-knowledge-and-question-archive%E2%80%9D-africa-country.

discuss.[388] Trying to talk, think and understand these 'taboo subjects' with the refugee community was one of Campus in Camps' goals. However, as Al-Saifi explained to me, "the community is challenging and some people do not want to open their minds and to discuss certain fixed ideas."[389] Not everybody agreed or understood what Campus in Camps was trying to do. "It is very difficult to make people who is [sic] not involved in Campus in Camps to understand what Campus in Camps is trying to do," as camp resident Qussay Abu Aker asserts. "To break certain fixed ideas, it is not easy. If you want to break such conventions you have to give back some tangible results."[390] So again, if a large part of the refugee community does not agree and/or understand the work created in Campus in Camps, then, how can they talk about return back to the commons?

Perhaps Irit Rogoff's theory of "starting in the middle" can help us to find an answer. In the essay *Starting in the Middle: NGOs and Emergent forms for Cultural Institutions* (2016), Rogoff proposes to ponder NGOs as a model for cultural interventions within crisis situations, as a way to change the rhetoric surrounding such practices, and to understand how to occupy political space without resorting to politics.[391] Rogoff's suggestion to read these artistic platforms through the lends of the NGO model allows us to consider the operational logics at play.[392] As the author explains, the work of an NGO always begins by recognising a problem and by having the ability

[388] Abu Aker, Personal Interview with participant of Campus in Camps Qussay Abu Aker; Al Saifi, Personal interview with participant of Campus in Camps Aysar Al Saifi.
[389] Al Saifi, Personal interview with participant of Campus in Camps Aysar Al Saifi.
[390] Abu Aker, Personal Interview with participant of Campus in Camps Qussay Abu Aker.
[391] Rogoff, "Starting in the Middle."
[392] Rogoff, 467.

to operate somewhere between society and non-aligned coalitions. They are "animated and driven by recognizing problems rather than by the desire to be legitimated," and therefore, their identity is formed by "immersing themselves in a problem."[393] NGOs are not interested in allocating blame to those who created the problem, instead they focus on reforming the site through an "active network of micro-gestures."[394] Rather than working with the entire structure of the conflict and its history, NGOs go along with it and make it operate differently, "they operate in *our* time."[395] For Rogoff, this attitude of working on the problem in a different temporality —the present— is a way of "starting in the middle."[396] Not as a way of dismissing previous knowledge, but rather as a way of contemporising it, "making it a subject of contemporary engagements and imperatives."[397]

Rogoff's proposition helps us to understand the scope and scale in which Hilal and Petti operate. After years of working with refugees through the UNWRA and the university environment, the artistic duo identified an urgency outside the institutional framework and decided to speak directly to that urgency, rather than to the demands of the institutional structure.[398] Locating and articulating these issues within a different logic allowed them to operate within another temporality. As Petti claims, "Our practice is not reactive to dominant forms of power; instead it has a different temporality"[399]. Similar to the NGOs' operational logics, the work of Campus

[393] Rogoff, 467–68.
[394] Rogoff, 468.
[395] Rogoff, 468.
[396] Rogoff, 468.
[397] Rogoff, 468.
[398] Rogoff, 478.
[399] DAAR, "Decolonzing Architecture Art Residency – About."

in Camps "starts in the middle" and in '*our* time'. So, rather than allocating blame and working with the capital-P politics of Palestine and Israel, through the work created in Campus in Camps, Hilal and Petti—alongside the participants of the project—were able to engage on a more personal and proximate level with the problems developed in the social and political fabric of the refugee camp. It is important to clarify that this does not mean they are undermining or dismissing previous knowledge and memories of the camp. On the contrary, by "starting in the middle", Campus in Camps is contemporising and making imperative the narratives and heritage of the camp—i.e. the right of return and collective practices such as *al mashà, Mujaawarah.*

Through the work created within Campus in Camps, Hilal and Petti were able to recognise and look at the issue from alternative directions. In expanding their range of visibility and using challenges—including the scepticism and distrust from the broader refugee community—as prolific failures, the artists generated opportunities to (un)learn and continue to speculate upon future scenarios in the camp. In my opinion, they decided to 'harness failure, navigate through the setbacks and do the work'. Harnessing failure and working through setbacks is about emancipating from the dominant epistemological logics that normalise the refugee condition. But such a task is easier said than done, especially when faced with the myriad of struggles—some daily, some long term—encountered by refugee communities. Those of the Dheisheh refugee camp have lost their lands and homes, seen their social and cultural practices repressed through authoritarian control, and have spent over half a century living in poverty

and struggle. When put into perspective, such concerns far outweigh the significance of engaging with an externally-initiated art project that has limited potential to significantly impact their situation. However, I suspect that one reason the broader Palestinian community does not fully engage with the work of Campus in Camps is because they are reluctant to harness failure and work through setbacks; they do not want be confronted with the idea that they might be buttressing their condition by constantly believing and embodying the hegemonic narratives of victimisation and marginalisation. To paraphrase Mignolo, to delink from the macro-narratives of modernity and its fictions, is one major decolonial task.[400]

Furthermore, after talking to several participants of the Campus in Camps programme, I realised that Petti and Hilal were aware that it was an ephemeral project. However, this was not a view held by the participants in the project, who once the funding was over, wanted to continue working for Campus in Camps, even if they did not receive a stipend. This, nonetheless, did not happen. Why? My suspicion is that despite it striving for agency and autonomy—to return back to the commons—the people involved in the project still relied heavily on the funding, institutional network and guidance of the artists. Without the Petti and Hilal's presence in the camp there is no-one encouraging the Campus in Camps' endeavour to continue. Thus, it is possible to conclude that Campus in Camps fails to maintain permanent forms of activation within the refugee community. The question to be asked, nonetheless, is what is at stake in this failure?

[400] Understand that concepts such as development, progress and modernisation are part of the macro-narratives of modernity. Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, 109.

From an art historical perspective, the initiative's failure to sustain permanent forms of activation is not necessarily a 'bad' thing. On the contrary, the fact that Campus in Camps has the ability to galvanise a community (however temporary and small) without providing a permanent solution suggests that Campus in Camps is nothing more than an experimental art project. As Hilal justifies,

> there are certain things that happen in art that permits [sic] you to think about these things in completely different way [sic]. […] We use the art scene to create utopias that today are impossible in [sic] the ground (the camp). […] Sometimes testing very conflictual and hard grounds need [sic] safe places like art where you can think about anything […] in a very abstract way…[401]

The realm of art allows 'utopian projects' to be transferred into the social critique. And it is precisely the agility and versatility of being able to locate and articulate global urgencies that, in turn, allows projects such as Campus in Camps to 'harness failure, work through the setbacks' and operate through another logic that should be acknowledged.

However, when it comes to failure from the participants' standpoint, the stakes are higher: both because the results of the project have a direct impact in their life, and because there is a considerable chance that they did not see Campus in Camps as a platform for creating 'utopian visions' of their current situation. The importance of artistic projects such as Campus in Camps dwells precisely in the fact that they are able to provide a momentary infrastructure where it is possible to think about alternative

[401] Sandi Hilal, "The Parliament of Bodies: A Century of Camps: Refugee Knowledge and Forms of Sovereignty Beyond the Nation-State" (Documenta 14, Kassel, 2017), http://www.documenta14.de/en/calendar/24162/a-century-of-camps.

scenarios to a particular situation. Projects such as this one work within a crisis situation and rather than aiming to fix it, with their goal being a restructuring of the landscape through an "active network of micro-gestures."[402] In this way, they harness failure, work through setbacks and stay in the present condition of the camp, without falling into the trap of past narratives of victimisation or "the messianic idea of future of salvation."[403] Thus, to "start in the middle" and 'work through setbacks' one must transform the perception of the camp from a marginalised space to a site of knowledge, and draw upon unconventional forms of representation of the camp and the refugees. By using failure as a tool to advance their practice, the alter-institutional initiative presented another way of dealing with the constraints of everyday life in the camp. In doing so, it managed to move away from the dominant narratives of victimisation and marginalisation and open up a space where refugeehood is viewed from a different standpoint. As Abu Aker said to me, "Campus in Camps is not able to change the situation, yet it changes the perception of the situation."[404] In doing so, Campus in Camps enabled a platform where a sense of hope was sparked amongst the refugee participants. The problem, nonetheless, is that the provision of such a space was ultimately temporary, as was hope, and therefore the potential for autonomy disappeared with the programme's abrupt end. Regardless of this, one should acknowledge that the significance of projects such as this one is that it recognises an urgency outside the institutional logic and deems the site—the refugee camp— as

[402] Rogoff, "Public Servants," 468.
[403] Hilal and Petti, *Permanent Temporariness*, 325.
[404] Abu Aker, Personal Interview with participant of Campus in Camps Qussay Abu Aker.

an opportunity to start a conversation beyond the conventional narratives and as a place where ideas for alternative social horizons can be fostered.

Chapter 4: Institute for Human Activities

Introduction

In the book *Provincializing Europe* (2000), Dipesh Chakrabarty explains that the European thought is at once both "indispensable and inadequate" in helping us think through the processes and practices of political modernity in non-Western nations. The author narrates how the European dominance in history as the subject of *all* histories is part of a profound theoretical condition under which historical knowledge is produced in the third world. This "everyday paradox of the third-world" condition, as he calls it, basically stands for the contradiction of non-Western cultures finding European theories eminently useful in understanding and explicating their societies, in spite of their inherent ignorance of them.[405] For him, it is practically impossible to think of 'political modernity'—that is, the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise—without invoking certain categories and concepts deeply embedded in the intellectual European traditions. Notions such as "citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinction between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific

[405] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2000), 16.

rational, and so on all bear the burden of European thought and history,"[406] as he states. These concepts, however, entail an unavoidable universal and secular vision of the human.

Throughout the book, Chakrabarty continues with his logic and explains that the European colonisers of the nineteenth century exhibited contradictory behaviour. On the one hand, they would preach an Enlightenment humanism at the colonised, and on the other, they would deny it in practice.[407] This conflicting attitude is what decolonial theorist Rolando Vázquez understands as "the double negation": the exclusion of the "other"—the colonised—and the negation of such an exclusion.[408] For Chakrabarty, it is precisely this negation in vision and practice that has influential effects not only on the historical grounds of the One-World World, but also on the foundation on which to erect critiques of socially unjust practices—both within and outside Europe.[409] Deeming this an imperial, now global, heritage that affects us all, the author proposes the "provincialisation of Europe". This not as a project of rejecting or discarding European thought, but rather as the way to explore how this vision may be renovated from, and restored for, the margins.[410]

It is important to clarify that the aim of "provincialising Europe" is less about the rejection of modernity than it is about inscribing ambivalence within its narratives, and in fact, it is more about attempts to view the world

[406] Chakrabarty, 4.
[407] Chakrabarty, 4.
[408] For more on the double negation see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1. Vázquez, "Towards a Decolonial Critique of Modernity. Buen Vivir, Relationality and the Task of Listening," 241.
[409] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 4.
[410] Chakrabarty, 16.

from anticolonial and non-Eurocentric perspectives. As expressed before, the European thought has a contradictory relationship with the instance of "political modernity". Thus, it is both "indispensable and inadequate" to think through the various life practices outside Europe. Thus the "provincialisation" of Europe is not just about integrating what has been excluded and changing the content of the conversation, but rather, it is about changing the terms of the conversation.[411] When extrapolating such a rationale to the realm of art, one finds similar issues with the problems of representation that this indispensability and inadequacy consistently creates. In fact, when European artists turn to crisis-ridden and impoverished regions outside Europe, they can hardly escape from the colonial agent role. To challenge this role entails entering into a field of paradox and controversy.

Aiming to understand the different nuances this "provincialisation" of the global political modernity might take within the realm of politically engaged art, this chapter focuses on the case study the Institute for Human Activities created by Dutch artist Renzo Martens. This alter-institutional initiative is based in the Democratic Republic of Congo and was initiated in 2012 from the idea that money circulation around contemporary art tends to stay in the centres of the global art market (Europe and North America), rather than flowing back to sites that occasionally form the subject matter of this art (the margins). The aim of the project is to challenge these dynamics, return profits to peripheral economies, and consequently, create,

[411] Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom."

what the artist terms, "a reverse gentrification effect."[412] In other words, the Institute for Human Activities seeks capital accumulation as a form of artistic intervention. Needless to say, this can be read as an attempt to decentralise or 'provincialise' the modern political infrastructure developed in the Global North throughout time.

At this point it is important to clarify that Martens' cynical and ironic reputation makes the reading of the project extremely challenging. When presenting the project within the mainstream of art, Martens often exposes an ambiguous—and even ironic—posture, making it unclear if he is in fact critically addressing the predicament of many other socially engaged art projects that operate at their limit and expect failure, or if he is actually presenting an ethical position with the aim of bridging the gap between the site of artistic intervention and the site of artistic consumption. As I will elucidate throughout this chapter, I believe that Martens' original intention was to highlight the limits and failures of socially engaged art projects by mirroring their configuration and operational logics. For art historian TJ Demos, this parodic strategy can be read as "a new form of institutional critique […] that is geopolitical and transnational."[413] Yet, one should bear in mind that since its inception, the Institute for Human Activities has grown exponentially and the project has encountered a series of transformations that have changed the project's original aim. In fact, today the initiative has been transformed into a network of organisations working together

412 Stuart Jeffries, "Renzo Martens – the Artist Who Wants to Gentrify the Jungle," *The Guardian*, December 16, 2014, sec. Art and design, http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/dec/16/renzo-martens-gentrify-the-jungle-congo-chocolate-art.
413 Demos, "Toward a New Institutional Critique: A Conversation with Renzo Martens."

towards the creation of a new self-sustainable model of living that combines art, economics, and landscape restoration. In this regard, one could argue that Martens' ultimate goals shifted, leaving any sort of criticality behind.

In order to have a proper reading of the project, the Institute for Human Activities and the multiple transformations it has encountered, first it is necessary to bear in mind Martens' initial involvement with plantation workers' local communities in certain areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo. As such, what follows is a brief account of Martens' mockumentary film *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (2009).

4.1. Episode III: Enjoy Poverty

> *I initiated an emancipation program that aims to teach the poor how to benefit from their biggest resource: poverty.*
>
> Renzo Martens[414]

> Enjoy Poverty *bears important lessons. […] As it unleashes a vicious cycle of profit, objectification, and sympathy, this type of conflict photography perpetuates clichés of Africans as helpless victims mired in misery, and reduces spectators to depoliticized charitable donors.*
>
> T.J. Demos[415]

[414] Renzo Martens, "Introduction," in *In and Out Brussels: Figuring Postcolonial Africa and Europe*, ed. T.J. Demos and Hilde Van Gelder (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012).
[415] T.J. Demos, *Return to the Postcolony. Specters of Colonialism in Contemporary Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 98.

Martens' engagements in the Democratic Republic of Congo began with the shooting of the unbearably cruel mockumentary *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (2009), which reveals a shocking parallel between instrumentalization of state power, international media image-making, the worldwide humanitarian industry, and the art world. The film is part of a planned trilogy of films, including *Episode I*, which was filmed in devastated Chechnya in 2003, and the subsequent movie *Episode II*, which is based on the theme of love, but has not yet been made.[416] *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* provides a reality-check on the vicious nature of the North-South unequal relations and the exploitative image economy that mediates such dynamics. The film unapologetically confronts us, as spectators, with the accountability of the neoliberal structural adjustment policies implemented in the African continent and the Global South since the 1980s, the failure of humanitarian practice and ethical discourse, and the inconsistencies of photojournalism and politically engaged art.[417]

Image 14
Renzo Martens, still from *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty,* 2009
Democratic Republic of Congo

[416] Demos, 98.
[417] Demos, 98.

From the very first scene in the film, Martens chooses to record the visual practices of humanitarian intervention in the post-conflict reconstruction of Congo.[418] The film starts with the depiction of two farmers in Central Congo explaining that it takes them three days to earn half a dollar. The following scene, set in a refugee camp in the Democratic Republic of Congo, depicts the United Nations troops watching as humanitarian workers document their activities by taking pictures while essential goods are being delivered to the local people. Martens' first appearance in the film —as the artist-author but also in the position of an actor—is revealed when a guard stops him for inspection, and he introduces himself as Renzo Martens, "journalist". The camera then focuses on a photojournalist who is taking a picture of a man stripped down to the waist inside his tent. "Fantastic!", the journalist says, checking the image on his camera [Image14]. The artist uses a hand-held camera that follows in a close-up of his face to represent the "subjectivity of a gaze that penetrates the space, staring refugees in the eye," as social scholars Nicola Perugini and Francesco Zucconi have pointed out.[419]

The sequence continues with Martens walking with Congolese plantation workers carrying big chests above their heads and Martens talking to the camera—in English—"You can't give them anything they don't already have. You shouldn't give them anything that they don't already have. What you should do is train them, empower them. There are new opportunities. The world has changed. There are new markets, new

[418] Nicola Perugini and Francesco Zucconi, "Enjoy Poverty: Humanitarianism and the Testimonial Function of Images," *Visual Studies* 32, no. 1 (2017): 27.
[419] Perugini and Zucconi, 26.

products." Shortly afterwards, Martens' character appears questioning an Agence France-Presse (AFP) photographer about his salary, who claims to earn around fifty euros per shot, plus insurance and travel expenses. For Demos, it is precisely through this powerful scene that Martens manages to articulate how "famine and war photography flow into a global image industry running on poverty and violence as fuel."[420] It is worth pointing out that this first scene sequence sets the tone and narrative of the entire film. By using an opening scene that depicts the shocking economic reality of Congolese plantation workers, followed by the portrayal of the vicious cycle of objectification and profit propagated by the media industry, and the artist's monologue-to-camera where he impersonates some sort of neocolonial missionary, Martens is hinting towards an ironic and critical account of the absurdity of current global economic structures.

The next scene shows Martens at the World Bank Conference in Germany, where the governors state that their annual contribution to the Democratic Republic of Congo is 1.8 million US dollars. Martens, who is amongst the press contingent, reasonably asks if this aid could be considered the largest income stream in the country. A question to which the governors reply that unfortunately it is. Martens' reaction to such a response pretends to be one of frustration and disappointment, and consequently, he sarcastically concludes that poverty is in fact the country's largest resource. One should bear in mind that rather than solely targeting the World Bank as the cause for economic inequality, the artist connects a

[420] Demos, *Return to The Postcolony*, 98.

broader array of international actors causing, reinforcing and perpetuating the current economic inequality. Such actors involve multinational corporations extracting natural resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo, international financial institutions that prioritise free trade over social welfare, self-promoting humanitarian and disaster relief organisations, and the sensationalist media industry.[421] In doing so, the film remarks on the macroeconomic structure behind the "disaster relief industry", which rather than alleviating the problem, in fact continues to perpetuate and produce the economic inequality that this industry is supposedly trying to overcome.[422]

Image 15
Renzo Martens, still from *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty,* 2009.
Democratic Republic of Congo

The essence of *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* is that poverty itself is the main resource in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and therefore, it should be the Congolese people who benefit and take advantage of it. The rest of

[421] Demos, 103.
[422] Alex De Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics & The Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (London: Verso, 2012).

the scenes in the film portray Martens' adventurous character taking up the task to 'teach' the local community how to profit from such an ironic circumstance [image 15]. As such, the artist goes to plantation villages where he holds seminars and interviews, explaining general economic principles and suggesting that the local people should abandon misguided hopes and accept the dreadful truth that poverty—via its associated media image making—is indeed the most economically valuable 'resource' in their country. In these scenes, Martens portrays both a colonial saviour and a motivational trainer talking to the local Congolese community. As he questions: "The fundamental question is to whom belongs poverty? If it can be sold, it's important to know who's the boss, the owner of that poverty. […] People come to visit you […] taking pictures, supposedly funding projects."[423]

As the scene continues, the artist assists local photographers to learn the skills of documentary photography. He does this in order for them to be able to capitalise on, and profit from, their own suffering. As images of violence and misery sell all over the world, Martens pretends to help the people of small villages, empowering them to "take control of their own image of oppression and thus perpetuate the images of their own poverty," as curator Nato Thompson highlights.[424] However, as the film reveals, he fails in such an endeavour as the international media industry is not willing to buy the pictures being sold by the Congolese photographers. Once again,

[423] Translated to English from original dialogue in French. Here quoted from Demos, *Return to The Postcolony*, 109.
[424] Nato Thompson, "Ethical Considerations in Public Art," in *Scandalous. A Reader on Art and Ethics*, ed. Nina Montmann, First edition (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 118.

Martens' character pretends to be annoyed and frustrated with such fallout and with the incoherency of the world structure.

Image 16
Renzo Martens, still from *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty,* 2009.
Democratic Republic of Congo

The film culminates with the local people—mainly children—dancing and singing to the rhythm of drum music. They are gathered around a neon sign attached to an improvised wooden structure, which resembles an enormous pop-cultural arte povera of the late 1906s and 70s. The sign is written in English and it reads: "ENJOY POVERTY," with the word "please" blinking in red set between the two words [Image 16]. In the final scene Martens appears, talking to a group of Congolese men where he tells them that: "Experiencing your suffering makes me a better person. You really help me. Thank you."

Departing from the conventional documentary strategy, partly by focusing on the complicity of the photographers in the image economy of exploitation and spectacle, the film reveals the entrenched power structures and interdependence of multinational corporations, the aid

industry and poverty journalism. *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* makes an important connection between, on the one hand, dreadful images of suffering and poverty, and on the other, the international financial mechanisms, such as the World Bank, and humanitarian organisations, such as Doctors without Borders, which unwillingly reproduce that poverty. It is interesting to see that by depicting such images and making such connections, Martens not only makes complicit the Western spectators who benefit from this international arrangement, but also offers the art audience no solution or way out from such complicity.[425] As the artist states in an interview conducted by Demos,

> The power equation between those who consume and those who supply the raw material in those industries is the same, regardless of what specific product is produced. We see how Congolese photographers are driven to produce the very images of poverty that we see every day in newspapers or on TV. We see at what cost these images are made. And we see many Congolese who are willing to pay this cost. They desperately want to be part of our gaze, of our production processes. […] Episode 3 thus reveals at what cost this film is made, and watching it offers no redemption.[426]

Martens' ethnographically inclined film—with its hand-held shaking shots, walking tracking shots and monologue-to-camera—parades a series of devastating images of misery—i.e. malnourished children, corpses and general devastation—in order to reflect how poverty is regularly portrayed before the world's cameras and to what ends. By focusing on Western photojournalists operating in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the film *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* emphasises the economy—produced by the

[425] Demos, "Toward a New Institutional Critique: A Conversation with Renzo Martens."
[426] Renzo Martens in Demos.

international media—associated with images of death and poverty in the region. It is precisely with these tactics that the artist announces the main target of the film: the role of the western image-maker in relation to Congolese contemporary reality of suffering and poverty. It is through these techniques that *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* manages to present "a kind of reverse photojournalism, or reverse documentarism" that is centred on the "documentarian-artist-photojournalist, who is normally hidden in such projects," as Demos states.[427]

Make no mistake, the fact that Martens mockumentary film is also an egocentric endeavour—as noted by the artist—and often creates confusion regarding its real intentions.[428] Throughout the film Martens' character shifts into the role of the concerned artist, humanitarian journalist, and colonial explorer. In portraying himself as the different prototypes of the Western traveller, Martens is in fact assuming his role of the stereotypical white male partaking in colonial clichés of exploitation of poverty. Indeed, Martens, as a contemporary artist, makes little attempt to disguise the forms, the implications and the undisputable ironies of his own neocolonial and neo-evangelical presence. As a matter of fact, he even parodies his own "vanity" on camera, whilst openly expressing the difficulties of "making a difference" in such territory.[429] It is precisely with this strategy that Martens intends to generate uncertainty for the viewers, who get confused by the

[427] T. J. Demos and Hilde Van Gelder, eds., *In and Out of Brussels. Figuring Postcolonial Africa and Europe in the Films of Herman Asselberghs, Sven Augustijnen, Renzo Martens and Els Opsomer* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 8.
[428] Anthony Downey, "An Ethics of Engagement: Collaborative Art Practices and the Return of the Ethnographer," *Third Text* 23, no. 5 (2009): 601.
[429] Paul O'Kane, "Renzo Martens, Episode III," *Third Text* 23, no. 6 (November 2009): 815.

artist's extremely ambiguous position. To my view, Martens implements such a satirical approach as a tool to disrupt harmony, and to provoke and raise critique. For art historian Hilde Van Gelder, this tactic can be read as some sort of meta-commentary or meta-critique of "the popular fairy tale of the African tour."[430]

Unsurprisingly, the controversial film has been received with a lot of anger and critique, and has been accused of being cynical and opportunistic. Indeed, *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* has been called a "potential grotesque proposition," saved by "the get-out clause of 'art'."[431] It has also been accused of being unethical and that in its pursuit of its declared goals—to critique the global economic structures—it ends up being scandalous and exploitative. However, it is precisely in this defamation, abuse and satire, that the film perfectly mirrors the outrageous exploitative relations of power between the Democratic Republic of Congo and the hegemonic West. In this regard, artist and scholar Paul O'Kane asserts that,

> despite the great potential offence this film might cause to well-meaning individuals and organisations hoping to help Africa, we can affirm its contribution as clearly different from that of more confidently positioned specialists. […] We can therefore rescue Martens on the grounds that, in the spirit of a kind of *alter*-avant-garde, he ventures into risky moral territory and returns with a transformed response to a seemingly intractable twenty-first-century conflict. If so, we accept his provocations as gifts while espousing the value of 'art' in whose special service he works.[432]

[430] Demos and Van Gelder, *In and Out of Brussels*, 6.
[431] O'Kane, "Renzo Martens, Episode III," 815.
[432] O'Kane, 815.

Furthermore, one should bear in mind that *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* is not itself geared towards the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo, but rather is directed to the art world, the state-sponsored bureaucracy and the international world of image-making. As curator Nato Thompson points out, "With millions of NGOs operating in Africa, the project is directed at what [Martens] considers to be a content white guilt that ultimately instrumentalizes the poverty of countries to their own gain."[433] In this regard, it is worth mentioning that Martens' film builds on previous analyses of what Colombian filmmakers Luis Opsina and Carlos Mayolo have coined as "*pornomiseria* or poverty porn."[434] In the unpublished text *¿Que es la porno-miseria?* (n.d.), the filmmakers described "pornomiseria" as "a certain type of documentary that superficially appropriated the achievements and methodologies of independent film to the point of deformation. In this way poverty became a shocking theme and a product easily sold, especially abroad, where it is the counterpart to the opulence of consumption."[435] As such, "poverty porn" defines the portrayal of poverty and exploitation as spectacle whilst overlooking its socio-political causes and the image's own implications in a system that commodifies the objectification of others' misery.[436] By using a dark sense of humour and

[433] Thompson, "Ethical Considerations in Public Art," 118.
[434] Michèle Faguet, "Pornomiseria: Or How Not to Make a Documentary Film," *Afterall* 21 (Summer 2009): 5–15.
[435] The unpublished document was written in Spanish and was recently found in the archives of Luis Ospina. As quoted in Michèle Faguet, 14.
[436] Demos, *Return to The Postcolony*, 99. In the 1970s, artists Allan Sekula used the term "pornography of the 'direct' representation of misery" to described such representation. See Allan Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," *Massachusetts Review* 19, no. 4 (Wintwer 1978): 867–69. For more on poverty porn and the instrumentalization of misery see Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003); Martha Rosler, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography)," in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical*

exaggerated images of opulence and poverty, Marten's film invokes precedents of Third World Cinema[437], at the same time that it presents a meta-critique on the logics of macroeconomic institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the international media enterprises—i.e. Agence France Press—and the disaster relief organisations—i.e. United Nations Children's Fund and the European Commission for Humanitarian Aid.

Martens is quite explicit about who this film is actually for, and the fact that the sign 'ENJOY POVERTY, please!' is written in English makes it ever clearer. The film reveals reality, through making its inner policies tangible, yet it offers no redemption.[438] It is unpleasant to watch and that is precisely Martens' intention: to provoke. *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* is a direct provocation to the art world audience, whom to Martens' eyes "want to have it both ways: cheap labor on the one hand, and on the other to be exempt from any confrontation with the results—malnourished and dying children, their parents feeling entirely helpless—on the grounds that the representation of such lives would be immoral," as he bluntly puts it.[439]

What is fascinating about this film is the fact that it copies, in itself, existing modes of production, and unfolds them for the spectator to see and feel. Rather than using artistic intervention as a redemptive and

Histories of Photography, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993); Herbert Blumer, "Social Problems as Collective Behavior," *Social Problems* 18, no. 3 (Winter 1971): 298–306; Roland Bleiker et al., "The Visual Dehumanisation of Refugees," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 4 (December 2013): 398–416.

[437] For example: *The Vampires of Poverty* (1978) by Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo or *Chircales* (1972) by Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva. For more on Third World Cinema see Michèle Faguet, "Pornomiseria: Or How Not to Make a Documentary Film."

[438] Demos, "Toward a New Institutional Critique: A Conversation with Renzo Martens."

[439] Renzo Martens interview with TJ Demos in Demos.

transformative tool, Martens pretends to use art as a platform to critically expose the incommensurable inequalities brought by the "colonial matrix of power", that is to say, the neoliberal and neocolonial system of institutional and racial inequality.[440] The problem with such a strategy, however, is that the artist ends up mimicking that which he aims to critique. The fact that the local Congolese that appear in the film continue to be rather nameless and not central to the film, could be seen as a critique that is simultaneously reproducing the exact dynamics that the film pretends to criticise. This meta-critical strategy could be deemed as anti-ethical in that it uses cruelty and a deliberate display of power—as Martens clearly instrumentalises the nameless subjects of the film—to critique attitudes and actions in the name of an ethical position. For Thompson, this tactic where "a white man, the central character in the film, […] uses the cast as props in his overarching, albeit critical, narrative, structurally falls short of its critical aims." [441]

Likewise, one should be aware of the fact that Martens obtained international fame after this film, and although the film is directly geared towards the mainstream of art and its audience, who despite being uncomfortable with Marten's critique, clearly have embraced it. In fact, *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* has been shown in biennales and exhibitions in many global cities, yet, the profits generated by it never made it to the people who appear in the film. This issue raises serious concerns regarding Martens' actual stance towards the status quo, who despite publicly refuting

[440] For definition of the colonial matrix of power see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.
[441] Thompson, "Ethical Considerations in Public Art," 121.

it, evidently benefits from it. It is precisely this "clever game of reflexivity [that Martens plays that] makes a very dubious proposition that the problems of poverty are, ultimately aesthetic ones," as Thompson points out.[442] In other words, as long as criticality as an artistic attribute is valued more than the potential for delivering social justice, the issue with 'poverty porn' that Martens is purposefully exposing will continue be reinforced and reproduced by the art and media system. As Thompson rightly claims,

> As long as the arts continue to reach out to a limited array of audiences where one can safely assume a consistent level of reception, the works like Martens's will continue to be heralded as important. […] Affirming that humanitarian aid is ultimately corrupt does not challenge the dominant beliefs in a culture that holds criticality as an attribute to appreciate far more than justice.[443]

In a panel discussion on 'poverty pornography', political theorist Achille Mbembe pointed out that the danger with practices such as the one Martens presents, is that they are futile when it comes to responding to the "machine of degradation of Africa," and that it is because of its provocative and scandalous strategy. Furthermore, he suggests, that the general public tends overlook the many local practices that, by creating representations of collective solidarity and political agency, are indeed moving beyond the media spectacle of African misery.[444] The fact that many local artistic practices that might provide more accurate representations of the political plateau of the region never make it to the mainstream of art, points to a form of segregation that is not only economic, but also intellectual and artistic. So, in the end, it can be established that *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* became a

[442] Thompson, 120.
[443] Thompson, 121.
[444] Thompson, "Ethical Considerations in Public Art."

violent film about inequality, and even though Martens tried to make it clear that art is part of the problem, the only thing that the film achieved was to prove that critique itself is not enough. As a matter of fact, after the 'failure' of *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty,* Martens himself stated that "critique […] is sterile,"[445] and thus, he came to the conclusion that artistic critique tends to entrench rather than to reduce inequality.

In this vein, Demos offers an interesting reading where he claims that the Martens' project was purposefully designed to fail all along, and in fact, he believes that it is precisely in the confrontation of such a failure where the film's lesson is found. In his own words,

> When it comes to addressing horrific living conditions, economic flounderings, appalling hunger, and senseless violence in the DRC, art, according to Martens, cannot offer an answer—not even its critical, documentary, or socially engaged forms. Rather the artistic system, of which Marten's own project is exemplary, is shown to be consistent with the very same global arrangements that structure the inequalities of humanitarianism and the media.[446]

After the 'failure' of *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty,* Martens concluded that a critical depiction of the status quo and turning it into an art object to be consumed by a certain privileged global community is not enough to challenge the current state of affairs. "We need radical thinking—not just to quench our thirst for it, but to understand what art can be," as he states.[447] Consequently, the Dutch artist left aside his cynical stance and instead took

[445] Renzo Martens in "CATPC Artists Irene Kanga, Mathieu Kasiama, Mbuku Kimpala, Mao Kinguza, Thomas Leba, Jeremie Mabiala, Mega Mingiedi and Cedrick Tamasala in Coversation with Renzo Martens", Eva Barois de Caevel and Els Roelandt, eds., *CATPC: Congolese Plantation Workers Art League* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 162.
[446] Demos, *Return to The Postcolony*, 109.
[447] Renzo Martens' interview with TJ Demos in Demos, "On the Institute for Human Activities. Renzo Martens in Conversation with T.J. Demos," 137.

on the task of creating a strategy where art could be the vehicle to challenge and redress this situation. Making new efforts at positive impact, Martens' artistic practice moved beyond representation to direct intervention and in the year 2012 he created the Institute for Human Activities. In what follows a description of the multi-faceted project is provided.

4.2. Institute for Human Activities

When considering the roots of capitalism and its global success, the image of a factory might come to mind. However, it was the plantation system that made industrialisation possible, providing the wealth—and the modus operandi—that allowed Europeans to take over the world.[448] Monocultural plantation systems function up to today, and much of the capital generated in such places is invested and used in the Global North—mainly Europe—for infrastructure and industrialisation. Interestingly, however, is the fact that the profits extracted from the plantation have also been used to finance the establishment of art galleries in Europe. For example, the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Liverpool was founded on profits from the sale of palm oil used to make soap; the Tate Gallery in London was established from the sugarcane trade; the Museum Ludwig in Cologne was born from the production of chocolate; the Van Abbemuseum in Einhoven was established from the

[448] J. H. Galloway, *The Sugar Cane Industry: An Historical Geography from Its Origins to 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Philip D. Curtin and Philip DeArmond Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Zimbabwe: Pambazuka Press, 2012).

tobacco industry; the list could go on.[449] The contemporary art world has a long history of exploiting Africa, relying on corporate patrons with interests on the continent. So, these two seemingly contradictory and remote worlds: the white cube—a place devoted to critique, taste and aesthetics—and the plantation—a place where diversity is not allowed and there is a monoculture of plants, people and thinking—are intimately linked. In an attempt to make evident such associations, reverse the neoliberal project on a small scale, and thus, create a new sustainable model that benefits the plantation workers that have long being exploited, Martens has taken to the task of creating the Institute for Human Activities (IHA).

Cofounded by Martens himself and fellow artists Jacob Koster and Delphine Hesters—all white Europeans—as a research project at KASK School of Arts, Ghent, the Institute for Human Activities was initially conceived as a vehicle to produce Martens' art in answer to —or as a consequence of— *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty.*[450] Taking on art's claims for its own criticality, Martens became interested in asking the simple question "Why does critical art always perform itself at the site of art's critical reception rather than at the location that serves as the subject for its criticality?"[451] The intention was to develop a cultural institution-building in a place that has seen plenty of artistic engagement but little development as a result of it. According to Martens, in the conventional operating

[449] Claire Bishop, "Cercle d'Art Des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise," *Artforum*, May 2017, 323–24; Barois de Caevel and Roelandt, *CATPC*, 164.
[450] Barois de Caevel and Roelandt, *CATPC*, 11.
[451] Bartholomew Ryan, "9 Artists: Bartholomew Ryan on Renzo Martens," walkerart.org, https://walkerart.org/magazine/9-artists-bartholomew-ryan-on-renzo-martens (accessed September 26, 2019).

procedures of global contemporary art, artists from the West typically develop critical art projects in non-Western developing countries, in order to bring forms of representation and participation to the marginalised. Nevertheless, the final product of that work is generally presented, circulated, discussed and sold in the institutional network of the developed countries of the Global North. This phenomenon can clearly be seen in the participatory work of Francis Alÿs (i.e. *When Faith Moves Mountains* (2002) and *Don't Cross the Bridge Before you Get to the River* (2008)), Richard Mosse's films and photographs (i.e. *The Enclave* (2013)), or Tino Seghal's 'constructed situations' which are commissioned by Unilever Series at Tate Modern, to mention just a few. In an attempt to challenge this logic, in 2012 the Institute for Human Activities was created as a way to promote community organisation, to stimulate local artistic creativity and to generate a "new transnational artistic model of economic and social re-engineering."[452] In doing so, the project sought to reverse the system where the mainstream of art production, consumption and dissemination floats on an economy that exploits people elsewhere —mainly in the Global South. In this sense, the Institute for Human Activities aims to function as a form of social art engagement and artistic experiment that challenges the system by making it visible, but also presents a plausible solution to deal with the problem.

It is worth noting that the project itself is as ethically provocative as it is conceptually complex. Despite being inspired by the results obtained

[452] T.J. Demos, "Gentrification After Institutional Critique: On Renzo Martens's Institute for Human Activities," *Afterall*, no. 40 (Autum/Winter 2015): 79. http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.40/Gentrification_After_Institutional_Critique.

from his artistic intervention in the film *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty,* the Institute for Human Activities has very different goals. Whereas the film depicts the structural barriers confronting the Congolese workers who are deprived from benefitting economically from the commodified images of their own suffering, the Institute for Human Activities intends to creatively deploy the gentrification process to attract resources to the Democratic Republic of Congo —in the same way that impoverished neighbourhoods are apparently being revitalised by the 'creative industry' in urban areas.[453] As such, the Institute for Human Activities aims to create a direct intervention with local plantation workers in order to bring monetary resources via education and artistic training, further nourishing the community and reinforcing the sense of hope that has begun to take root.

Seeking to acknowledge the economic structures of which art is part of, the Institute for Human Activities' original goal envisioned using capital accumulation as a tool for artistic intervention, "enabling art to fully engage with its dependence on existing economic structures" and making them visible.[454] In other words, the Institute for Human Activities aims to expose economic arrangements to create a transgressive transformation in the hidden parameters that operate within art production. In order to accomplish this, the initial plan included building an art centre, a museum, a residency program, and a school to provide master classes and offer art

[453] For more on the economic impact the "creative class" has on the revitalisation of urban areas see Richard L. Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: Revisited*, 10th anniversary ed (New York, N.Y: Basic Books, 2012).

[454] This quote was taken from the original website in 2014. However, this information is no longer available in the current website. To see original website visit http://web.archive.org/web/20141002105626/http://humanactivities.org/institute where one can see the multiple modifications of the initial project.

training for the plantation workers. In this way, the project would generate a sustainable source of income for the local community through the production of critical art. As Martens explained in a conversation with Demos: "we will try and help them enter into the new immaterial and affective economy."[455] The results were supposed to be shared with audiences in Africa and around the world through lectures, exhibitions and film. However, as far as I am aware of these events have yet not occurred.

Due to the fierce and ongoing debate revolving around the project, the Institute for Human Activities' initial goals shifted significantly since its inception, and now it has turned into a large ensemble of interdisciplinary organisations working in collaboration together in the creation of a self-sustainable ecological model of living. At this point, I would like to mention that efforts to establish a conversation with Martens and the rest of the participants in the project were made, but were regrettably unsuccessful. In fact, after establishing initial contact and requesting an interview with the artist, Martens himself —and consequently the rest of the members involved in the project— went silent and stopped any sort of communication. I initiated contact with Janke Brands via e-mail, who put me in touch with the artist himself. I politely requested an interview with Martens and in response he requested I send him a list of questions. After that, he stopped replying to my emails. Parallel to this I established contact with Elènore Hellio and Cedrick Tamasala via social media. Both were willing to talk to me; however, at the same time Martens cut communication, so did they.

[455] Martens in Demos, "On the Institute for Human Activities. Renzo Martens in Conversation with T.J. Demos," 138.

Which makes me question the transparency of the project. After such results, I contacted Commonland in order to see if I could have some answers. The organisation was extremely helpful and thanks to an interview with Alessandra Caine I obtained valuable information on the next stage and future plans for the Institute for Human Activities. This is an important factor to consider, as when the artist is present in a public forum he claims to present full transparency in regards to the project.

The substantial modifications of the initiative and Martens' ambiguity in regards to the project and its future plans, make the reading a complicated task. So, after a thorough examination of the case study I came to the conclusion that the evolution of the initiative can be understood in three different phases:

1) *Towards a 'New' Institutional Critique and Alternative Economies*: The Institute for Human Activities and its 'reverse gentrification programme';
2) *From 'Comment' to 'Commitment':* The Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise (CATPC) and the production of objects;
3) *Spaces of Hope:* The Lusanga International Research Center for Art and Economic Inequality (LIRCAE) and the 'post-plantation'.

The latter is currently taking place and is being developed with the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) and Commonland respectively. It is important to clarify that these phases are my own interpretation of the

artwork. In what follows a description of each one of these stages is provided.

4.2.1. *Towards a 'New' Institutional Critique and Alternative Economies:* The Institute for Human Activities and its 'reverse gentrification programme' (Phase I)

We're sitting here with about 200 people who work on a former Unilever plantation, and we're building some kind of art center here. We believe that they too have to make [the] transition from the Fordist economy to something beyond that.

Renzo Martens interviewing Richard Florida via satellite connection.[456]

Perhaps in the future, […] Congolese artists will sip cappuccinos in the jungle while discussing, say, critical strategies in contemporary art practice, just as they do in Shoreditch and Brooklyn.

Renzo Martens[457]

Martens created the Institute for Human Activities (2012) aiming to deal with the problem of critical art, which, in his eyes, critiques, undermines and deconstructs political and economic systems without making a real difference to, or bringing about any change at, the place of critique/intervention. Initially, the initiative was conceived as a five-year project that sought to "recalibrate art's critical mandate."[458] Through this

[456] Transcript from Richard Florida's presentation for the "Opening Seminar" of the Institute for Human Activities, June 2012. Here quoted from Jacob Koster, 'Colonialism and the Creative Economy' in d Barois de Caevel and Roelandt, *CATPC*, 278.
[457] Renzo Martens in interview with Stuart Jeffries in Stuart Jeffries, "Renzo Martens – the Artist Who Wants to Gentrify the Jungle," *The Guardian*, December 16, 2014, sec. Art and design, http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/dec/16/renzo-martens-gentrify-the-jungle-congo-chocolate-art (accessed August 9, 2019).
[458] http://web.archive.org/web/20141002105626/http://humanactivities.org/institute

project, Martens attempted to expand the possibilities of gentrification by focusing on the particular issue of postcolonialism and the exploitation of plantation workers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. His proposition was to, quite literally, "gentrify the jungle," as feature writer Stuart Jeffries points out.[459] The project's original intention was to create a 'gentrified' artistic community within the Democratic Republic of Congo that could eliminate the distance between critique and action. Currently, the Institute for Human Activities is composed by a five-member team, which includes Renzo Martens as the artistic director, Janke Brands as the business manager, Anthony Downey as the research associate, Laurens Otto as the associate curator, and David van den Berg as the intern. Today, the Institute for Human Activities has eleven partner organisations, including the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise, Commonland, the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, the Van Abbemuseum, and Barry Callebaut group, and has been sponsored and supported by a series of well-established funding bodies such as the Berlin Biennale, Mondriaan Fund, Prince Claus Fund and the Amsterdam Fund for the Arts, to name just a few.[460]

[459] Jeffries, "Renzo Martens – the Artist Who Wants to Gentrify the Jungle."
[460] The full list of partner organisations: the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise, Commonland, the Office for Metropolitan Architecture, the Van Abbemuseum, Pieter van Huysten Film & TV, VPRO and Intifilms broadcast companies, KASK Hogeschool Gent, the Akademi der Künste der Welt in Cologne, the Witteveen+Bos consultant agency, and the Barry Callebaut group. The full list of sponsors and funding bodies: the 7th Berlin Biennale, the Kunstenfestivaledesarts in Brussels, ABN AMRO Culture Fund, AFK – Amsterdam Fund for the Arts, The Art of Impact, BesteBuren, Doen Foundation, Gieskes-Strijbis Fund, KASK – School of Arts in Ghent, Mondriaan Fund, Outset Netherlands, Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds, Prince Claus Fund, Stichting Educatie en Cultuur, Triodos Foundation, Vlaams ministerie van Cultuur, Media, Jeugd, VLIR-UOS. See "Partners," Institute for Human Activities, http://www.humanactivities.org/en/partners-2/ (accessed September 24, 2019).

The original goal was that the Institute for Human Activities would act as some sort of artistic educational platform with an exhibition space for emerging artists that would attract an international audience, and hence, generate profits that would benefit the local community. This "reverse gentrification programme," as Martens calls it, would provide classes and art workshops for Congolese plantation workers. It would also offer an art residency programme for local and international artists who would be invited to participate in the organised exhibitions and the rest of the artistic events and activities. For Demos, this strategy is a way of "creating and projecting symbolic capital into a non-Western site" as a direct form of economic intervention. As he states, "It's literally using the economic capital that the institute can generate through its symbolic value in order to create a gentrification programme."[461] In other words, the Institute for Human Activities seeks to make capital accumulation the core strategy of its artistic intervention.

Image 17
Institute for Human Activities exhibition at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art during the 7th Berlin Biennale, 2012.
Digital image obtained from:
https://artmuseum.pl/en/archiwum/archiwum-7-berlin-biennale/1862

[461] Demos, "On the Institute for Human Activities. Renzo Martens in Conversation with T.J. Demos," 139.

The idea for the Institute for Human Activities was born in 2010, although it was not until 2012 during the 7th Berlin Biennale that the project was officially inaugurated. For this occasion, the project was presented simultaneously in two parallel venues: in the KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin, Germany, and in a specific settlement in a small village called Boteka near Kinshasa, the capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo. For the German location, the project was presented in the traditional white cube format: a big explanatory panel on the wall followed by a series of photographs that formed a horizontal line on the wall. The pictures were hung at eye-level and they depicted images of the Congolese site where the Institute for Human Activities settlement was built [Image 17].[462] For the venue in Boteka a structure made of bamboo was specifically assembled in order to hold the inaugural ceremony and 'Opening Seminar' of the Institute for Human Activities. This event was located near the Plantations et Huileries du Congo, a territory William Lever—who was later renamed Lord Leverhulme in honour of his wife Elizabeth Hulme—received as concession from the Belgian colonial government in 1911, and which until recently belonged to Unilever multinational consumer goods company.[463] During the two-day event that took place in June 2012, Martens officially launched the Institute's "Reverse Gentrification Programme", which aims to provide monetary resources via education and artistic training, and therefore, bring about a transition to the post-Fordist economy. Through this scheme,

[462] "Institute for Human Activities, Renzo Martens - The 7th Berlin Biennale Archive," Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, https://artmuseum.pl/en/archiwum/archiwum-7-berlin-biennale/1862 (accessed September 24, 2019).
[463] Jules Marchal, *Lord Leverhulme's Ghosts: Colonial Exploitation in the Congo* (London: Verso, 2008).

Martens believes that gentrification can actually be obtained. As he bluntly puts it, "You want art. Why? Because it will gentrify."[464]

Image 18
Congolese plantation workers building the Institute for Human Activities settlement for the 'Opening Seminar' event, 2012. Boteka, Democratic Republic of Congo. Digital image obtained from: https://artmap.com/marcussteinweg/text/lecture-seminar-at-institute-for-human-activities-11-12-june-2012-settlement-800-km-upstream-the-river-congo-d-r-of-congo-presentation-and-screening-of-the-opening-seminar-30-ju

For the 'Opening Seminar', a mix of Congolese and international figures, including art historian TJ Demos, philosopher Marcus Steinweg, architect Eyal Weizman, curator Nina Möntmann, anthropologist Katrien Pype, activist René Ngongo, economist Jérome Mumbanza, and artist Emmanuel Botalatala, were invited to speak [Image 18]. Richard Florida, a

[464] Martens in Demos, "On the Institute for Human Activities. Renzo Martens in Conversation with T.J. Demos." For more on the role art plays in the process of gentrification see Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, "The Fine Art of Gentrification," *October* 31 (1984): 91–111; John Palen and Bruce London, *Gentrification, Displacement, and Neighborhood Revitalization* (SUNY Press, 1984); Sharon Zukin, "Gentrification: Culture and Capital in the Urban Core," *Annual Review of Sociology* 13 (1987): 129–47; Loretta Lees, Tom Slater, and Elvin Wyly, *Gentrification* (London & New York: Routledge, 2008); David Harvey, "The Art of Rent: Globalization, Monopoly and the Commodification of Culture," *Socialist Register* 38 (January 1, 2002). For more on the effects gentrification has in the production of art see Gregory Sholette, "Art After Gentrification," in *Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and The Crisis of Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2016), 127–256.

prominent neoliberal urban theorist, delivered the keynote presentation where he talked about the relevance of the arts to economic development—a theory that he explains thoroughly in his non-fiction book *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002). According to the initiative's official website, two-hundred people from the local community employed at the Unilever plantations attended the inaugural event.[465] The 'Opening Seminar' also formed part of the Institute for Human Activities' international conference series *The Matter of Critique*—referring to the material conditions of critical artistic engagement.[466]

Image 19
René Ngongo and Renzo Martens in conversation with Richard Florida at the 'Opening Seminar' of the Institute for Human Activities in Boteka settlement, 2012. Boteka, Democratic Republic of Congo. Digital image obtained from: http://www.humanactivities.org/en/conferences/

[465] "Opening Seminar," Institute for Human Activities, http://www.humanactivities.org/en/opening-seminar-2012/ (accessed August 8, 2019).
[466] This conference series consist of the 'opening seminar' and four other instalments. The first two sessions of the series took place in 2015 in the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin and Lusanga, Congo, respectively. The third edition, took place in 2016, again in Lusanga. The fourth event was held in the SculptureCenter, New York in 2017. See more in "Conferences," Institute for Human Activities, http://www.humanactivities.org/en/conferences/ (accessed August 14th, 2018).

During Florida's session, which was delivered via Skype, Martens, in an extremely serious manner, suggested that it may be in the interest of plantation workers if they too made the "transition to the creative economy" [Image 19].[467] To which Florida could not agree more, as he explained, "in the development process, investing in artistic and creative infrastructure deliberately and strategically is important to an overarching strategy to achieve higher levels of development and higher standards of living."[468] Florida continued his argument by stating that "[what] we need in this moment of crisis [is] new models of development […]. In Congo you have the opportunity to show that in a place that isn't the wealthiest on the planet, in a place that has struggled, you can place a new model."[469] In the recording of the presentation—which is available online—one can see how Florida superficially supported Martens' "reverse gentrification programme" in so far that the project references Florida's theory. However, it is clear to see that Florida had no awareness of the current political and economic contexts of this region.

It is important to highlight that without having Martens' artistic background—particularly his precedent film *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty*—as a point of reference, one could think that Martens was being naïve and sincerely believed that Florida's theory could actually work in a place like

[467] The production for Florida's presentation via Skype was a difficult task as the Institute for Human Activities had to set up a satellite connection in the middle of the rainforest.
[468] Richard Florida, "Interview with Richard Florida at Research Seminar", video recording of a conversation with Renzo Martens and René Ngongo for the Institute for Human Activities opening seminar, June 2012, Boteka, DRC (uploaded by the IHA on January 2014). See Institute for Human Activities, "Interview with Richard Florida at Research Seminar," Vimeo, 2012, https://vimeo.com/84210906 (accessed September 24th, 2019).
[469] Richard Florida in Institute for Human Activities.

the Democratic Republic of Congo. If we were to disregard Marten's artistic trajectory, then, the art initiative could easily be read as a developmental project created by a European white male aiming to 'save' the Congo through what seems like an utterly absurd proposition, and which rather than alleviating starvation and scarcity, ultimately reinforces the North–South political economic relations that created the problem in the first place. However, given Martens' cynical past, we should regard Florida's participation in the 'Opening Seminar' not as a sincere gesture, but rather as an act of provocation and critique. To put it differently, by bringing a character such as Florida—who supports neoliberal urbanism without any concern for social justice—into the conversation, Martens was in fact using controversy and irony as forms of critique, and subsequently highlighting the unequal economic and social structures reinforced by the capitalist neoliberal logic. So, the reason why Florida—the keynoter—was the only speaker that was not physically present in the venue, could be read as a perverse strategy on Martens' behalf to make sure Florida could speak freely about his theory without understanding the paradox of the situation—especially when considering the very complicated lives of people in this part of the world and the current political climate of the country.

Given its controversial use of the term 'gentrification', the Institute for Human Activities has been heavily criticised and largely discredited. In fact, many have argued that applying such conflicting terminology in a place like the Democratic Republic of Congo could imply an embracement of the very neoliberal logic that the artist claims to be struggling against and trying

to bend into something else.[470] Writer Nora Kovacs, for instance, argues that "[g]entrification is not, and has never been, a means of pulling people out of poverty through urban development. It is the product of the restlessness of a very particular group of individuals, just as limited to an elite class as the 'critical art' that Martens is questioning." And she continues, "For someone who is looking to challenge Westernized artistic perception, Martens' imagined future of cappuccino-sipping Congolese artists is quite a Western vision of an ideal cultural pastime. The degrees of separation—physical, social and economic—between the Congo and somewhere like Shoreditch or Brooklyn are manifold, and the thought of trying to bridge that gap with something like this is inherently unsettling."[471] Notwithstanding criticism, Martens continues to justify his use of a provocative concept by explaining that his ultimate goal for gentrification is not the conventional one. Rather, he aims to shift away from its controversial connotations and utilise the term for progressive purposes. That is to say, Martens' strategy seeks to utilise the institutional structure and economic relations that have

[470] See for instance Thompson, "Ethical Considerations in Public Art"; Nora Kovacs, "Discussing the Matter of Critique with Renzo Martens at KW Institute for Contemporary Art," *Berlin Art Link*, May 26, 2015, http://www.berlinartlink.com/2015/05/26/review-discussing-the-matter-of-critique-with-renzo-martens-at-kw-institute-for-contemporary-art/; Yvette Mulder, "Rethinking 'Critical Art': Reflecting on Renzo Martens' Institute for Human Activities," Museologue, October 11, 2015, http://museologue.com/rethinking-critical-art-reflecting-on-renzo-martens-institute-for-human-activities/; Ania Szremski, "Congolese Plantation Workers Art League," 4Columns, March 27, 2017, http://4columns.org/szremski-ania/congolese-plantation-workers-art-league; Randy Kennedy, "Chocolate Sculpture, With a Bitter Taste of Colonialism – The New York Times," *The New York Times*, February 2, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/02/arts/chocolate-sculpture-with-a-bitter-taste-of-colonialism.html; Chika Okeke-Agulu, "Cercle d'Art Des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise," *Artforum*, May 2017.

[471] Nora Kovacs, "Discussing the Matter of Critique with Renzo Martens at KW Institute for Contemporary Art," *Berlin Art Link*, http://www.berlinartlink.com/2015/05/26/review-discussing-the-matter-of-critique-with-renzo-martens-at-kw-institute-for-contemporary-art/, May 26, 2015.

long benefitted the 'elite few' and instead redirect their potential power towards the 'disenfranchised many'. Demos understands this as an "avant-garde shock tactic" in order to "reverse-engineer the neoliberal project on a micro level."[472] But, despite Martens' intentions, one has to be aware that the idea of generating a gentrifying model in a place like the Democratic Republic of Congo is an extremely ambitious task.

Furthermore, gentrification is generally understood as the process of restoration and renovation of deteriorated urban property by middle class and affluent people, often resulting in the displacement of the lower-income people and the vulnerable, as they can no longer afford to live in the upgraded area. According to urban geographer Neil Smith, the term itself its bound to change as the process evolves and he highlights that gentrification involves "the reinvestment of CAPITAL at the urban centre, which is designed to produce space for a more affluent class of people that currently occupies that space."[473] In fact, within gentrification literature the discourse of colonialism has become pervasive. And while it is wrong to suggest that neighbourhood displacement is the same as the dispossession experienced by indigenous populations under colonialism, or the plight of stateless refugees stripped of their national identity, the impacts of gentrification on vulnerable working-class and minority ethnic groups, reminds us that displacement is a form of socio-spatial discrimination.[474] Urban theorists

[472] Demos, "Gentrification After Institutional Critique: On Renzo Martens' Institute for Human Activities," 80.
[473] Neil Smith, "Gentrification," in *Dictionary of Human Geography*, ed. R.J. Johnston et al. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 294.
[474] Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City.* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996); Smith, "Gentrification"; Neil Smith, "New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy," *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (2002): 427–50;

Rowland Atkinson and Gary Bridge, for example, argue that the process of gentrification is heavily based on wide differences in wealth and power, and subsequently, it resembles earlier waves of colonial and mercantile expansion that exploited national and continental differences in economic development. Subsequently, they deem this urban phenomenon of displacement as a new form of urban colonialism.[475] If we were to read the Institute for Human Activities under the gentrification/colonialism lens, then it is clear to see that Martens' use of the concept continues to perpetuate North–South colonial relations, which raises fraught issues and serious questions about its politics and about the ethics of its NGO-like "development mentality".[476] And even though there is a degree of truth in this argument, I believe it is a one-sided reading that falls short by failing to explore the different nuances and latent qualities of the project.

Moreover, one should be aware that Martens uses critique as his main medium to make transparent the kind of economic and exploitative arrangements that multinational corporations exercise. As a matter of fact, part of the Institute for Human Activities' endeavour is to expose the hidden parameters that operate within art production, targeting artistic and cultural institutions—in particular the Tate Modern for its sponsorship by Unilever. In regards to this, the artist explains that, "[c]orporations like

David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2006); Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*; Palen and London, *Gentrification, Displacement, and Neighborhood Revitalization*; Lees, Slater, and Wyly, *Gentrification*; Adam Elliott-Cooper, Phil Hubbard, and Loretta Lees, "Moving beyond Marcuse: Gentrification, Displacement and the Violence of Un-Homing," *Progress in Human Geography* 20, no. 10 (2019): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132519830511.

475 Rowland Aktinson and Gary Bridge, *Gentrification in a Global Context: The New Urban Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2014).

476 Okeke-Agulu, "Cercle d'Art Des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise."

Unilever typically make claims that they are advancing the project of global modernity by bringing equality, inclusivity, and benefits to areas like rural DRC—whereas when one visits the plantations (which few ever do) one sees that this is far from the case."[477] Evidently it is no coincidence that the Institute for Human Activities' settlement was initially founded in a former Unilever plantation, which today belongs to Feronia Inc. This was clearly another strategy Martens implemented just to provoke.

Intervention and provocation have consequences nonetheless. A year after the Institute for Human Activities was inaugurated in the Boteka settlement, the Canadian palm oil operator Feronia Inc.—the owner of the land the Institute for Human Activities was renting—abruptly blocked public roads, reneged on the workers' contracts and aggressively destroyed the initiative's headquarters. Consequently, the Institute for Human Activities was forced to leave its premises and abandon the work that had been done in collaboration with the local communities of the area. The Institute for Human Activities was then transferred to a secret location near Kinshasa, which remained undisclosed for a large period of time. Today, it is public knowledge that the Institute's premises are located in Lusanga and it holds offices in Amsterdam, Ghent, Brussels, Lusanga and Kinshasa.

It is crucial to clarify that until this moment Martens' project should be understood as a wicked form of parody that expanded from *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty.* As a matter of fact, Martens' plan to gentrify the Congo was no different from that of exporting poverty, as these strategies do not differ

[477] Renzo Martens in Demos, "On the Institute for Human Activities. Renzo Martens in Conversation with T.J. Demos," 146.

from the fact that both are an absurd extension of the neoliberal logic which the artist aims to expose. But perhaps because the local monocultural plantation industry—Feronia and Unilever—treated the initiative as a serious 'threat' for potential changes in the area, Martens saw the genuine possibilities of the project, and consequently, started over-identifying with it. In this regard, art historian and critic Sven Lütticken has claimed that in embracing the "ultimately catastrophic logic of gentrification," Martens is in fact falling into the fatal trap of "overidentification."[478] Would it be possible to say that the industry's reaction was the decisive factor that drove the artist to 'overidentify' and shift the project from a practice of critique to that of engagement? To put it differently, was the eviction event what pushed Martens to find the real effects coming out of the project instead of revealing its failure? I believe it is precisely because of the corporations' reaction that Martens left cynicism aside, and instead, reoriented his endeavour towards over-identification, which in turn enabled the Institute for Human Activities to thrive. In other words, because of the eviction of the land incident, it is probable that Martens realised that the project could affect real change rather than simply produce critique, and consequently, the alter-institutional initiative was transformed from being a critical art project and turn into socially engaged art project. In this sense, it is possible to say that by facing failure—eviction—and recognising the project's possibilities—over-identification—Institute for Human Activities' endeavour shifted from critique to social engagement.

[478] Sven Lütticken, "Let's Fake History," *Texte Zur Kunst* 86 (June 2012): no pagination.

In this process, I argue that Martens planted a seed of hope amongst the Congolese participants, which in turn drove them to create their own organisation: the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise. In regards to the notion of hope, the sociologist Ana Cecilia Dinerstein reminds us that the "art of organising hope" means "to learn how to engage in the politics of affection and, from there, manage setbacks and endure disheartening circumstances."[479]As such, rather than reading the eviction incident as a setback, I propose to understand it as the moment when failure became a constructive tool—prolific failure—that allowed the Institute for Human Activities to be transformed into a sincere and committed initiative. In a way, it could be said that what started as an ironic gesture of critique that reproduced the colonial hierarchical relations between privileged Westerners and disenfranchised Africans, slowly shifted into a sincere institution-building initiative project of engagement. In other words, the Institute for Human Activities moved from 'comment' to 'commitment'. This occurrence takes us to the second stage of the project: the *Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise and the production of objects.*

[479] Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organising Hope*, 26.

4.2.2. *From 'Comment' to 'Commitment': The Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise and the Production of Objects (Phase II)*

> *The hope of rendering tangible the roots of the inequalities that the plantation workers have been and continue to be subjected to gives [sic] them a possibility to better understand those inequalities, and to do so in a way the people responsible, whether directly or indirectly, are informed. The relational and communications capacities that developed between us constitute an opening that tends to render the voices from elsewhere […] more intelligible, to de-exoticize them.*
>
> Elènore Hellio[480]

According to Martens, the Institute for Human Activities initiative has encountered many impediments and obstacles, but the artist himself acknowledges that he has learnt from past mistakes. Since 2014, the Institute for Human Activities has worked in close collaboration with the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise (CATPC). The latter was born from the realisation that the Institute for Human Activities could not succeed without the help of local people: artists, scientists, writers, and the individuals engaged with resident communities and infrastructure—both in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Western Europe. According to Els Roelandt and Eva Barois, "[m]aybe more than Renzo Martens himself many of the people working for the IHA realized that the IHA could only be a success if it grew to be an organization that really touched ground with locals."[481] One should keep in mind that the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise was created as a natural extension of the Institute for

[480] Elènore Hellio, "The Luyalu of the CATPC, a Magnetic Field in Lusanga," in *CATPC*, ed. Eva Barios De Caervel and Els Roelandt (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 60.
[481] Barois de Caevel and Roelandt, *CATPC*, 11.

Human Activities initiative. It was born from the dialogue between the Institute for Human Activities' team members and the former plantation workers who saw the need to form a separate space where they could develop their own creative process and vision, and which was independent from Martens' meta-conceptual project. Correspondingly, the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise was created as a sister organisation.

The Cercle is a grassroots cooperative created for the development of new economic initiatives based on the creation and distribution of critical art. The cooperative is a platform for sculpture and knowledge production, and it aims to improve the economic position of its members and their communities. The Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise is composed of the ecological activist René Ngongo as president, the Congolese artist Cedrick Tamasala as vice-president, an administrative team and a group of eleven former plantation workers now recognised as artists as they continue to receive training and hone their craft.[482] These fledgling artists were selected by three Kinshasa-based artists—Mega Mingiedi, Michel Ekaba and Elèonore Hellio—who are also in charge of organising some of the training workshops, assisting in the production of work, and general administrative tasks.[483] Mingiedi, Ekaba and Hellio were invited by Koster

[482] The participants are Mathieu Kasiama, Mbuku Kimpala, Emery Mohamba, Cendrick Tamasala, Daniel Manenga, Thomas Leba, Djo Bismar, Jeremie Mabiala, Armand Ngudikienda alias 'Meya', Jean Kawata and Irene Kanga.

[483] Mega Mingiedi, Michel Ekaba and Elèonore Hellio have been active in Kinshasa's art scene for quite some time. Whereas Mingiedi's practice engages on issues with the urban space and the "daily survival instinct" that the city develops, Ekaba and Hellio have worked together since 2013 on the project *Kongo Astronauts*, which explores issues of identity and Afrofuturism aesthetics. Hellio (born in Paris) is the only one of the three who is not a Congo native.

and Martens to become founding members of the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise and work with local artists in the making of clay sculptures. The art studio is located in Lusanga village, which was formerly known as Leverville—a colonial town created by William Lever in the early twentieth century. The site is another property associated with the plantations Unilever used to operate in the region, and has twenty hectares of terrain, which are now owned by the Institute for Human Activities.[484] The Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise is currently recruiting new members.

Although inspired by Martens'—now sincere—efforts to create change in the region, since its foundation the Cercle has been working on the development of its own identity and autonomy. According to Hellio, "[t]he CATPC combines the strength and idealism of Renzo Martens, the energy of the trio Mega Mingiedi-Michel Ekeba-Elènore Hellio, and most of all, the very strong commitment of all the active members of the CATPC, who perservered [sic] for two years in the effort to understand to its fullest the complexity of this project and its connection, via the IHA, to the art network worldwide."[485] Martens himself has chosen to keep his distance from the organisation and its members so they can have "free reign" in their creative process.[486]

[484] Barois de Caevel and Roelandt, *CATPC*, 10; Renzo Martens, "Renzo Martens in Conversation with Sacha Bronwasser," in *The Rural*, ed. Myvillages.org, Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art (Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2019), 85.
[485] Hellio, "The Luyalu of the CATPC, a Magnetic Field in Lusanga," 60.
[486] Hellio, 60.

Furthermore, the Institute for Human Activities seeks to change the dynamics of money circulation around contemporary art—which tends to stay in the centres of the global art market—and instead return the profits to peripheral economies—usually the site of intervention. Blending the creative directions of the Institute for Human Activities and the artistic energy of the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise, a new strategy for art production and distribution emerged. Although Martens continues to talk about capital accumulation as artistic intervention, he no longer refers to this strategy as a "reverse gentrification programme", which to my eyes, gives us another hint that Martens has shifted his position from cynical critique to a sincere form of commitment. This also underscores the fact that the artist seems to modify his discourse according to how the project is received by the critics.

Image 20
Jérémie Mabiala (CATPC artist) and *The Art Collector* inside the 'white cube', 2017. Lusanga, Democratic Republic of Congo. Digital image obtained from: https://www.designboom.com/architecture/oma-white-cube-lusanga-lircaei-dr-congo-rem-koolhaas-05-18-2017/gallery/image/g7-125

Image 21
Thomas Leba (CATPC artist), *Poisonous Miracle*, 2015, Installation view of exhibition: Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise at the SculptureCenter, New York, 2017. Digital image obtained from: https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-congolese-plantation-workers-making-living-selling-chocolate-sculptures-art

This collaborative strategy between both organisations consists of the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise artists creating sculptures in clay that is obtained from the Congo River. The pieces are mainly figurative self-portraits that range from table top to life-size scale. Once the pieces are completed, they are 3D scanned and a digital copy is sent to the Institute for Human Activities' office in Amsterdam—with the agreement of the original Congolese artist, of course. Once the copies are received, the pieces are then printed and transformed into chocolate reproductions. This method allows for the reconstruction of the artists' original pieces in Europe and for them to be remade in a material collected by plantation labour [Images 20-21].

Image 22
Installation view of exhibition: Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise at the SculptureCenter, New York, 2017. Digital image obtained from: https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-congolese-plantation-workers-making-living-selling-chocolate-sculptures-art

The sculptures are then exhibited and traded in the European and North American art markets. In fact, the pieces have been shown in a wide range of group and solo exhibitions at spaces such as the Artes Mundi in Cardiff (2014), the KOW Gallery in Berlin (2015), the Galerie Fons Welters and the Van Abbenmuseum in Amsterdam (2015), Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art in the UK (2016), and the SculptureCenter in New York [Image 22]. The sculptures are being sold for 5,000 US dollars and up, and the small portrait heads are sold for 42 US dollars—the production cost is 2 or 3 US dollars, so the profit of 39 US dollars goes back to the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise .[487] The Institute for Human Activities facilitates the sales and the profits are returned directly to the original producers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, helping the makers

[487] Jeffries, "Renzo Martens – the Artist Who Wants to Gentrify the Jungle."

and families to live beyond the basic subsistence provided by their plantation labour, as well as to support community projects in Lusanga, such as developing ecological responsible agroforestry techniques.[488]

Image 23
Cedrick Tamasala (CATPC artist), *How My Grandfather Survived* (with legend that reads: 'Made possible by Barry Callebaut'), 2015. Installation view of exhibition: *A New Settlement* at Fons Welters, Amsterdam, 2015. Digital image obtained from: https://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2015/06/renzo-martens-and-the-institute-for-human-activities-at-fons-welters/

Ironically, the chocolate for the printed sculptures is provided by Callebaut, the Belgian chocolatier that gets its cocoa from West Africa—including from a plantation owned by the Groupe Blattner Elwyn, whose owner briefly appeared in Martens' film when he was buying photographs of his impoverished plantation workers [Image 23].[489] The choice of

[488] Bishop, "Cercle d'Art Des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise," 323.
[489] Demos, "Gentrification After Institutional Critique: On Renzo Martens' Institute for Human Activities," 82.

chocolate as the sculptures' material was subject to much debate. But according to Hellio, it was the the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise artists who were adamant on using the material. As she explains, "for CATPC members, who cultivate and harvest cacao to sell at cheap prices to big companies and who have never tasted chocolate, it is revenge of sorts to be able to imprint their visions upon a product that exhausts and shatters them."[490] Interestingly, with this disturbing gesture the project—which now includes two organisations—is directly entering into dialogue with issues of materiality, instrumentalisation, exploitation, and extraction of resources.[491]

Moreover, one has to understand that with this action Martens wants to underscore the fact that,

> we in the west have been consuming Africa and Africans for centuries […] Not only do we pay, say, Congolese workers pitiful salaries […] to supply us with cacao, rubber, coltan, or diamonds. But also, […] poverty has itself become Africa's leading export product, and one from which Europeans and Americans profit—images of such suffering accumulating cultural capital in the old centres of empire.[492]

This unsettling gesture confronts the Western audience with the fact that their nations contribute to global inequality, and it even allows them to 'buy off' their sense of guilt by purchasing one of the sculptures made by a Congolese former plantation worker. However, this action stays as nothing

[490] Hellio, "The Luyalu of the CATPC, a Magnetic Field in Lusanga" in Barois de Caevel and Roelandt, *CATPC*, 63.
[491] Demos, "Gentrification After Institutional Critique: On Renzo Martens' Institute for Human Activities," 83.
[492] Jeffries, "Renzo Martens – the Artist Who Wants to Gentrify the Jungle."

more than a confrontative gesture to the exploitative economic system, of which we are all part, and offers no way out or alternative economic model.

For Demos, through this intervention the profit–production cycle is reversed as the earnings go back to the source of production, and therefore, "the gentrification process completed," as he claims.[493] But how is this gentrification? Perhaps David Harvey's proposition to recognise 'space' as a new 'keyword' can help to understand how this profit–production cycle can be regarded as a reverse gentrification process. In the article *Space as a Keyword* (2006), Harvey recognises 'space' as "an extraordinarily complicated keyword." He explains that 'space' is a "compound word" which "has multiple determinations such that no one of its particular meanings can properly be understood in isolation from all the others." For him, it is precisely this characteristic that makes the term so rich in possibilities—especially when combined with 'time'. As such he suggests to understand space as a keyword.[494] If we were to apply Harvey's logic to the term 'gentrification', then perhaps, gentrification as a keyword becomes more than a practice rich in possibilities and not just a notion associated with negative connotations. In fact, if we regard gentrification as a keyword, then the term becomes a politico-spatial practice with considerable potential. So, rather than understanding Martens' intervention and his "reverse gentrification programme" in the classical sense of displacement of low-income populations, I suggest that Martens moves beyond the slippery

493 Demos, "On the Institute for Human Activities. Renzo Martens in Conversation with T.J. Demos," 82–83.
494 David Harvey, "Space as a Keyword," in *David Harvey: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 270–93.

conceptual definitions, and instead, he uses the term as a strategy to create a small-scale utopian "space of hope".[495] In other words, rather than a process of gentrifying the Congo, I deem this procedure as an institute-building intervention that strives for community empowerment and economic and ecological self-sustainability.

4.2.2.1. The Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise: An Autonomous Entity?

> *What remained was for us to find tactics that could go hand in hand with a call for some breathing space amidst the neoliberal asphyxiation. For our untamed collective, it was a chance to be at the very spot where the imbrication of the systems of thought resulting from colonization can best be understood. To our eyes, this initiative could not [be] but [...] the 'agency' of everyone involved.*
>
> Elènore Hellio[496]

The Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise was born from the former plantation workers' need to have more independence and freedom, and not to be subsumed under Martens' artistic agenda. This organisation was founded with the hope of opening a new path to take action on the paradoxes of the systems of thought resulting from colonisation. It was created with the aim of obtaining some sort of agency.[497] In the essay *The Luyaly of the CATPC, a Magnetic Field in Lusanga* (2017), Hellio explains,

[495] Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*.
[496] Hellio, "The Luyalu of the CATPC, a Magnetic Field in Lusanga," 60.
[497] Hellio, 60.

> The CATPC was born from one person's vision, and although we subscribed to his dream, and to the positive changes it aims to bring to a region sacrificed at the whim of the West, we did so with a certain vigilance; we were careful not to be simply an illustration of his discourse, or merely the actors in a film whose denouement was out of our hands. It is not easy to capture all the threads and anticipate the expectations of the meta-concept Martens conceived. What is certain is that, rather than limiting ourselves to talking, we tried, together, to influence the events as it then folded and to invert the logic of inequalities wherever it reared its head.[498]

In this sense, it is possible to establish that Martens provided a platform to envision 'positive changes' in the region. In doing so, the artist provided a space where a sense of hope was sparked amongst the Congolese participants, who in turn organised and directed that sense of hope towards the creation of their own autonomous organisation.

It is important to understand, nonetheless, that on paper, the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise is an autonomous entity. It has its own legal structure and representation—and to some extent its own infrastructure.[499] But in reality, the distinction between the two organisations—the Institute for Human Activities and the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise—is more ambiguous. In fact, one should be aware that it was Martens who requested the art objects be self-portrait sculptures. In this way, Martens established quite a "precise and classical" agenda that seemed "almost to stem from the private commission."[500] This, of course, could be read as the neocolonial process

[498] Hellio, 59.
[499] Since 2016, the Cercle d'Art des Travaillerus de Plantation Congolaise has invested all the profits generated from the chocolate sculptures into buying land in the region. The aim is to build the *Lusanga International Research Centre for Art and Economic Inequality* and to work on the self-sustainable economic and ecological project 'the post-plantation.
[500] Hellio, "The Luyalu of the CATPC, a Magnetic Field in Lusanga," 61.

where Martens—an external agent—transforms plantation workers into international artists, as many European curators do—i.e. the 1989 exhibition 'Magiciens de la terre' art the Centre Pompidou or some of the artists represented by André Magnin's gallery. In this sense, it could be said that Martens is actually imposing Western values on Congolese citizens. However, this action should also be regarded as another strategy of mimicry on Martens' behalf where he is deliberately highlighting, and therefore, cynically mocking, the power relations within the Western world of art. This fact points out the very multi-faceted interdependent dynamics within the project, since, on the one hand, 'free reign' is given to the Congolese artist, but on the other, what is to be created is instructed.

In addition to this, one should bear in mind that the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise is not fully autonomous due to linguistic, economic and political barriers that impede the Cercle members' access to international discursive systems; thus, the burden of representation falls on the shoulders of those who have access to such systems. In the end, it is Martens who determines every step of the way for the organisation to have access to the international art world and funding.[501] Subsequently, the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise members are primarily spoken for by Western interlocutors.

The Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise is funded for the most part by the Institute for Human Activities. It is also supported

[501] The Cercle d'Art des Travaillerus de Plantation Congolaise in collaboration with Renzo Martens was nominated for the Visible Project Award in 2017. See "Award 2017–Shortlisted: CATPC," *Visibleproject*, https://www.visibleproject.org/blog/project/catpc-former-unilever-palm-oil-plantation-lusanga-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/ (accessed September 24, 2019).

by DOEN foundation—a Dutch organisation that focuses on sustainable, cultural and social innovation.[502] According to Koster, the Cercle's "much-touted autonomy is in fact a political objective that is not so easily achieved." That is to say, the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise is completely co-opted by the Institute for Human Activites.[503] So, if the Institute for Human Activities—a.k.a. Martens—facilitates the global dissemination of the artworks created by the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise, what is the purpose for the latter organisation to even exist? Perhaps the benefits of the Cercle's existence accrue to Martens and not to the Congolese plantation workers of: 1) symbolic control and value; and 2) economic value. If that is the case, would it be possible to say that the Cercle is functioning as some sort of placebo for its members—and the international world—for them to believe they have control and autonomy of their artistic production? Could this be regarded as a new form of dependency, a form of neo-colonisation through the art world?

These questions point to the complex nuances of the Institute for Human Activities project. If we are to examine this initiative from a decolonial perspective—which I am aware can be problematic given the initiative's neocolonial tendencies—then we cannot fall into the trap of reading it from a single-viewed perspective. So, rather than providing a totalising critique of the project or regarding it in absolutist terms—i.e. gentrification vs. reverse gentrification; colonialism vs. liberation; failure vs.

[502] "CATPC – Institute for Human Activities," http://www.humanactivities.org/en/catpc/(accessed August 15, 2018).
[503] J.A. Koster, "Colonialism and the Creative Economy" in Barois de Caevel and Roelandt, *CATPC*, 296.

success—, as I elaborate in the following sections, I propose to read it as a multi-layered initiative working towards a new model of economic and ecological self-sustainability.

4.2.2.2. Critique is Sterile

After a series of exhibitions in which the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise's chocolate sculptures were shown and four panels of *The Matter of Critique* cycle took place in different cities of the Global North—Cardiff, Berlin, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Warsaw, New York, Sydney, and Copenhagen—Martens realised that "it is hard to take control of the system of artistic critique" and that these mechanisms are "dominated by market forces," as he puts it.[504] The project remained exploitative and Martens confirmed that despite the initiative's efforts, the abusive dynamics in the global commodity chain are still in place. In relation to this, in the lecture *The White Cube as a Vector for Change* presented at De Balie, Amsterdam in 2016, Martens exposed a graphic that depicted the role the Institute for Human Activities and the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise's intervention played in the global 'value chain' [Image 24].

[504] Barois de Caevel and Roelandt, 163.

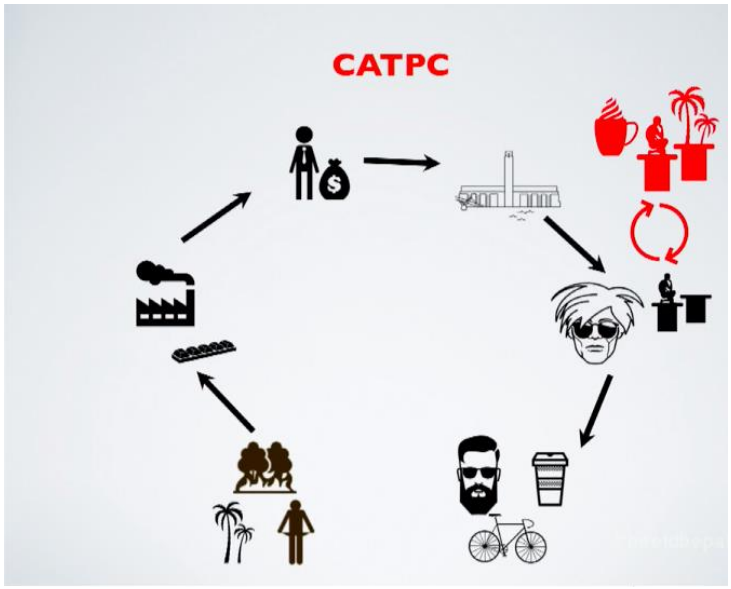

Image 24
Renzo Martens, *Graphic representing the 'value chain' and IHA/CATPC intervention*, 2016. De Baile, Amsterdam. Digital image obtained from: http://www.humanactivities.org/en/iha-blank/the-white-cube-as-a-vector-for-change/

With this graphic, Martens explains that the global economic cycle starts in the monocultural plantation where the raw material—cacao—is obtained, which then goes to the factory to be turned into a consumable product—chocolate bars. The product is then sold in the global market and some of the profits that are obtained end up being used to support cultural institutions—such as the Tate Modern. The museums and art institutions attract a series of people who aim to obtain cultural capital, and consequently, the area around the cultural institutions is improved and more profits from local businesses are obtained. In this graphic, the Institute for Human Activities and the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise's intervention is depicted in red as an adjacent cycle. As Martens continues to elucidate, whilst the attempts to return the profits back to the place of production were successful, the efforts to reverse the global value

chain were unsuccessful. In this sense, he concludes that the intervention ultimately created its own economic cycle.[505] As the artist remarks:

> I think the chocolate sculptures as a societal project is great. But it remains an exploitative project. […] [T]he members of the CATPC basically make money by adding the feelings and ideas of plantation workers to cocoa harvested on other plantation or small farms. So, in a way, the CATPC now functions exactly in the way all other artists in white cubes do […]. [They] just switched places in the abject value chain.[506]

Furthermore, it is interesting to consider the possibility that perhaps Martens designed the project to purposefully fail all along—just as he did in the film *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty.* Structurally, at a global level nothing fundamentally changed. Yet, we cannot disregard the fact that things did change at a personal level for eleven participants, as their lives radically altered from being those of plantation workers to artists whose work is exhibited internationally in the mainstream of art. But, would it be possible to say that the participants have been politicised in a way that inspires social movements to come? Personally, I do not think so. As clearly, the project—deliberately—does not engage with the social power relations and conveniently ignores the current political climate of the country. In this sense, while the project as a whole deconstructs the dialectic of representation and the economic dynamics of control and exploitation, it only does this to a certain extent. By using the existing economic structures,

[505] Renzo Martens, "The White Cube as a Cector for Change," in *Institute for Human Activities* (IDFA Special: Beeldbepalers met Renzo Martens, De Baile, Amsterdam, 2016), http://www.humanactivities.org/en/iha-blank/the-white-cube-as-a-vector-for-change/ (accessed September 25, 2019).
[506] Renzo Martens in "CATPC Artists Irene Kanga, Mathieu Kasiama, Mbuku Kimpala, Mao Kinguza, Thomas Leba, Jeremie Mabiala, Mega Mingiedi and Cedrick Tamasala in Coversation with Renzo Martens" in Barois de Caevel and Roelandt, *CATPC*, 163.

'reversing' their power and thereby making the 'victims' of capitalism benefit from it, Martens' endeavour exposes the global unequal power relations. However, it does not provide insight into how they exist and how to exit them.

Without a doubt, the project is successful in highlighting and mimicking an extremely problematic set of global relations, however, it does not offer any political traction that would inspire the participants—nor the audience for that matter—to mobilise, organise and contribute to unsuspected alliances with social movements that could in turn challenge the current state of affairs. In this sense, I believe the project fails to stimulate any form of politicisation. Yet, despite its political deficits, it is important to acknowledge that the Institute for Human Activities provides a model where a small-scale utopian space of hope is formed. It is also interesting to see that it is precisely this sense of hope that enabled the Congolese participants to thrive alongside the project. Indeed, might it be possible to say that the alter-institutional initiative uses failure and hope as an emancipatory tool to challenge the acute forms of economic disparity in the Democratic Republic of Congo?

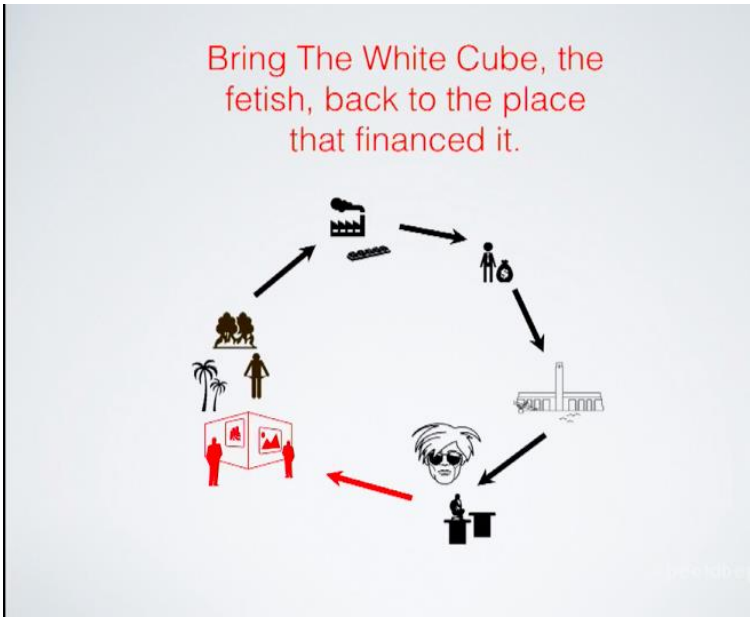

Image 25
Renzo Martens, *Graphic representing the 'repatriation of the white cube'*, 2016. De Baile, Amsterdam. Digital image obtained from: http://www.humanactivities.org/en/iha-blank/the-white-cube-as-a-vector-for-change/

Furthermore, after the fallout experiment of the chocolate sculptures, the Institute for Human Activities—and by extension the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise—realised that challenging the global commodity chain is not about changing the dialectics of representation and intervention within the existing cultural institutions, as such a strategy only reinforces exploitative dynamics. Accordingly, Martens concludes that for art to have real agency and get out of this double bind "it is about changing the white cube's position in the value chain" [image 25].[507] As such, Martens proposes to rethink the relationship between the plantation and art institution, because, to his eyes, "these two institutions have long existed in disavowed symbiosis," as Bishop highlights.[508] Aspiring to connect the plantation knowledge with the global art apparatus and create a new

[507] Martens, "The White Cube as a Vector for Change."
[508] Bishop, "Cercle d'Art Des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise," 323.

commodity chain, the two sister organisations proceeded with a new plan to 'reconnect' the gallery and the plantation: the 'repatriation of the white cube'.

4.2.3. *Spaces of Hope*: The Lusanga International Research Center for Art and Economic Inequality (LIRCAE) and the 'post-plantation' (Phase III)

> *How to make valid and visible any critique, any love, any human emotion and any creativity that happens in the plantation? […] How to make sure it counts?" [For art to have political and economic traction,] it is not enough to put art in the existing white cubes as it is not going to change anything, as this dynamic still generates wealth for the rich and generates very little for the poor.*
>
> Renzo Martens[509]

In 2017, the Institute for Human Activities in collaboration with the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise started working with Rem Koolhaas' influential Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) in order to design a 'white cube' built on the land that now belongs to the Institute for Human Activities in Lusanga. The architecture firm has been working pro-bono on the construction of the site. The *Lusanga International Research Centre for Art and Economic Inequality* (henceforth LIRCAEI) is a conference centre and museum that seeks to attract researchers and tourists and create an inclusive space for scientific, cultural, ecological, and economic exchange

[509] Balie, *Renzo Martens– Beeldbepalers – De Balie x IDFA Special*, min. 47:10.

[Image 25]. This development of such a centre is the final stage of the Institute for Human Activities project.

Image 26
Opening ceremony of the *Repatriation of the White Cube*, April 22, 2017. Lusanga, Democratic Republic of Congo. Digital image obtained from: http://www.humanactivities.org/en/

With the founding of this 'white cube', Martens believes the mechanism through which plantations finance the art world will finally be reversed. According to the artist, the LIRCAEI will attract the much-needed capital and visibility "to invent a new ecological and economic model on site: the post plantation."[510] This strategy could be read as some sort of 'museumification,' which raises serious questions about the commodification of the exotic nature of the plantation. Would it be possible to say, then, that the project's endeavour shifted from 'failure' to the 'museumification' of the plantation as part of its strategy?

[510] "LIRCAEI: The White Cube Has Been Repatriated," http://www.lircaei.art/#introduction (accessed September 3, 2018).

Moreover, one has to bear in mind that even though the Institute for Human Activities project was always initially conceived with the ultimate goal of developing a museum and research centre, after the much-justified critique and failure of the project, Martens realised that culture and the arts are not enough to challenge the status quo. Consequently, the Institute for Human Activities shifted its original plan and now, in collaboration with the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise and the LIRCAEI, the project as a whole is on a mission to create a new sustainable model that combines artistic, socio-economic and environmental concerns. Once again, it seems that 'failure' is being used in a constructive way to thrive. Even though the Institute for Human Activities, the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise and the LIRCAEI are independent organisations, they are also art projects co-established by Renzo Martens.[511]

As its name states, the LIRCAEI has an artistic, socio-economic and ecological mission to fight these inequalities. For activist René Ngongo, culture and the arts are not simply an important dimension of social well-being, "they are also a factor in economic development," as he says.[512] Located on a former Unilever plantation, "the ground zero of global economic inequality," as Martens calls it, the LIRCAEI intends to resolve the division between critical debates and their economic impact, and redress the current underlying inequalities.[513] In order to do so, the LIRCAEI has developed a "white cube programme" that couples artistic production with

511 Barois de Caevel and Roelandt, *CATPC*, 38.
512 René Ngongo, "Towards an Ecological Developement Financed by Works of Art" in Barois de Caevel and Roelandt, 38.
513 "Institute for Human Activities," http://www.humanactivities.org/en/ (accessed August 25, 2018).

experimental permaculture practices. The programme includes an art residency, sculpture workshops, site development, agroforestry techniques, and institutional design.

Parallel to the white cube programme, a plan to start the 'post-plantation' was initiated. The post-plantation consists of experimental community-owned gardens where the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise harvested its first batch of cacao in November 2018.[514] All this was made possible thanks to the partnership of the Dutch organisation Commonland, who since 2018 have worked with the Institute for Human Activities on the development of a new model for landscape restoration for sustainable economic growth.

Commonland is a non-profit organisation that advocates ecosystem restoration through a holistic model that combines "restoring" social, natural and financial capital. It also strives to revitalize local communities by giving back to the people a sense of purpose and a space—both literally and figuratively—of hope. This organisation currently has projects that create market-based solutions for landscape restoration in countries such as Spain, the Netherlands, Australia and South Africa where landscape degradation has led to the loss of biodiversity, productivity, food security and social stability.[515] Under Commonland's scheme *4 Returns Partners*, the Institute for Human Activities—and by extension the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise and the LIRCAEI—will have access to

[514] "White Cube Program - Institute for Human Activities," http://www.humanactivities.org/en/white-cube-program/ (accessed August 13, 2019).
[515] See more in Commonland, "4 Returns Partners," Commonland, https://www.commonland.com/en (accessed September 25, 2019).

a large network of leading financial, governmental, academic and other institutions that operate in the restoration, environmental and food industries. Unfortunately, there is very little public information about the association between the Institute for Human Activities and Commonland. Efforts have been made to contact Martens, the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise members, and Commonland in order to better understand the future strategy of such fusion, but as mentioned earlier in this chapter, such attempts were unsuccessful. Without a clear idea of Martens' intentions, these questions cannot be answered for now.

Despite the lack of information on this new stage, it is clear to see that the Institute for Human Activities project is evolving into a collaborative network working towards cooperative forms of land use that benefit all forms of life. This strategy, however, raises questions about whether the Institute for Human Activities' aim has shifted, from merely challenging structural economic inequality, to the development of a self-sustainable and profitable model based on cooperation and collaboration. Could this new model be striving towards an alternative common existence, one where land and resources are shared collectively? If so, would it be possible to suggest that Martens is leaving aside the aesthetic mediation of the project and instead shifting the target outcome towards the practice of commoning material means—land, profit, resources—and, ultimately, social relations? Or should this also be read as an artistic intervention moving towards a more equitable and autonomous form of living? I would be inclined to say that the latter is in fact occurring. However, the problem with this

affirmation is that Martens' project has overlooked the current political climate of the country, and how can one achieve autonomy without politics?

Although Martens' endeavour seems to have political connotations, the project seems to gloss over the complicated politics in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In fact, the narrative of Martens' project paints the imperial and colonial history of the Congo as the core problem impacting the lives of the Congolese people, when arguably the postcolonial regimes that have ruled the country are at least partially responsible for the much of the current devastation. Until recently, the Democratic Republic of Congo existed under dictatorship. President Joseph Kabil chose to cling to power after his constitutional term expired in December 2016 and ever since the country has been in turmoil.[516] So the question is: how feasible is it to create a new structural model when the politics of the region are intentionally overlooked? How can you seek radical change in the political and economic infrastructure that has negatively and entirely impacted the lives of the Congolese plantation workers without taking into consideration the politics surrounding it?

[516] President Joseph Kabil ruled for 18 years (2001-2019). He chose to cling to power after his constitutional term expired in December 2016 and delayed the presidential elections until December 2018. In January 2019 the opposition leader Felix Tshisekedi became Congo's new president. See more in "Joseph Kabila Takes Power In Congo," CBS News, January 23, 2001, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/joseph-kabila-takes-power-in-congo/; Mel Frykberg, "20 Dead in Congo Unrest as Kabila Clings on to Power," IOL News, December 21, 2016, https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/20-dead-in-congo-unrest-as-kabila-clings-on-to-power-7252926; Vava Tampa, "Congo: A Dictator's Dilemma," Al Jazeera, April 17, 2017, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/04/congo-dictator-dilemma-170416101438674.html; "Kabila's 'Hardline' Choice for DR Congo President," *BBC News*, December 18, 2018, sec. Africa, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46447089; Richard Gonzales and Matthew S. Schwartz, "Surprise Winner Of Congolese Election Is An Opposition Leader," NPR.org, January 9, 2019, https://www.npr.org/2019/01/09/683830171/surprise-winner-of-congolese-election-is-an-opposition-leader.

Moreover, if we compare the Institute for Human Activities' endeavour with the practice of Campus in Camps, then it is clear to see that the former is 'harnessing failure and working through setbacks' in the same way that Campus in Camps does. Unlike the Palestinian alter-institutional initiative, which engages with politics of affection and everyday life, prompted by the Palestine-Israel conflict, and subsequently 'works through the setbacks', it seems that the Institute for Human Activities project does not engage with the politics of the country in any way. Consequently, I would contend that rather than working through the constraints of the place, the alter-institutional initiative is in fact creating a small-scale utopian space that is isolated from the social, political and economic reality of the country.

Consistent with this assertion, sociologist Dinerstein claims that a decolonising project requires:

> the praxis of autonomous organising that not only rejects the state and capital but also defeats internal colonialism and coloniality: 'there cannot be discourse of decolonization, no theory of decolonization, without a decolonizing praxis. [Decolonial] struggles are mediated by a struggle against oppression, violence and legislation that inform the existing form of internal colonialism'. [517]

In examining the Institute for Human Activities, it is clear that the project as a whole is not presenting a decolonising praxis because the structural dynamics of colonialism and coloniality are not challenged and they continue to exist—in some instances these dynamics are actually reinforced. But despite this fact, one has to recognise that the Institute for Human Activities provided a platform that fuelled a sense of hope amongst the Congolese participants, who in turn, organised that hope and directed it

[517] Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organising Hope*, 13.

towards the development of their own autonomous organisation. As such, it is possible to say that the formation of Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise is already a decolonial gesture. At the same time, because the Cercle is not fully autonomous, the mere fact that such an organisation exists, points to the fact that the former plantation workers are striving to build a decolonial path towards decoloniality.

4.3. Critique is 'Sterile' but Failure is Not

Through this analysis one can assert that what started as an artistic project made by a cynical Dutch artist trying to convey the dialectic of representation, intervention and exploitation, has shifted into a more viscerally transformative mission where a specific composition of social relations can be read as the expression of what the notion of the commons could be. That is to say, through the use of prolific failure, the Institute for Human Activities project has shifted from a critique to 'critical art' through the 'reversion' economic structures, to a model of social and environmental sustainability. In this sense, it is possible to say that the project has evolved from comment—ironic critique—to commitment—engagement—and its strategy has shifted from profit recuperation—reverse gentrification—to restoration—social economic and ecological landscape.

The Institute for Human Activities initiative holds the assumption that a new structural model can be established when merging two 'monocultures', one that is about structuring wealth—the plantation—and

another where all kinds of singularities are allowed but without having effect—the white cube. As such, the white cube becomes a gate or a vehicle to fight inequality. It seems that Martens' project is mostly a colonial re-enactment presented to a Western audience in order to show the limits of our current model of emancipatory programs and to shed light on the global neocolonial economy. It aims to be the reflection of more equitable cultural and economic relations, between the global North and South. The issue with this, however, is the fact that the problem is still been approached from a one-sided Western neoliberal perspective. That is to say, just as white Europeans went to Africa and created the plantations for agriculture, it seems to me that Martens' approach has a similar effect, but this time the 'monoculture' and its establishment is sailing under the flag of art.

In their book *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999), Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski demonstrate how from the 1950s onwards capitalism has always looked for the legitimisation of narratives, and in a way, art has been a perfect vehicle for it[518]. Throughout history, art has been some sort of fetish for the capitalist class to legitimise the exploitative practices of plantations. By bringing the white cube—the fetish—to the plantation, Martens' project seems to reproduce the same dynamics and ends up reproducing that which he is so eagerly fighting to change. In other words, Martens aims to validate the knowledge, love and creativity developed in the plantations; however, he is seeking to validate it through the artistic realm, which historically has functioned as the vehicle to legitimise exploitative

[518] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2007).

practices. Consequently, he falls into the trap of commodifying that which he wants to 'liberate'. Accordingly, one should ask: Is this really a new sustainable model of living? And more importantly, how can Martens be so naïve as to think the art world alone can actually provide a solution? Perhaps, this is precisely why the project is shifting and partnering with the Commonland foundation.

Moreover, while the context of Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise members—living in poverty, lacking education and experiencing brutal difficulties—is necessary to understanding the Institute for Human Activities' mission, Martens is much too reiterative of such circumstances, to the point that he ends up exoticising those depravations. In this regard, the editor of *4Columns* website Ania Szremki highlights the fact that this practice "serves to feed a Western fetish for images of atrocious living conditions endured by people living in the so-called Global South (especially African nations)."[519] Thus, this form of representation falls into being an exploitative act, which effectively reduces the members of the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise to the sum of their economic suffering. In this sense, Martens' top-down approach is problematic as it not only seeks to drive home his thesis to a Western audience, but also profits from the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise members' images and living conditions.

It is important to highlight that Martens' intention is for the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise to benefit not just

[519] Ania Szremski, "Congolese Plantation Workers Art League," http://4columns.org/szremski-ania/congolese-plantation-workers-art-league (accessed September 12, 2018).

economically, but also from the critique around these objects. Accordingly, the artist created a series of itinerant panels called *The Matter of Critique.* This strategy, however, benefits Martens immensely. As art historian Claire Bishop observes, "being the focus of attention from eminent critics and academics, generates cultural prestige, and through this perhaps funding, although Martens suggests that the workers also benefit from these debates because their labor now produces surplus value."[520] So one should ask: is critique really sterile or is it only sterile when it comes to changing the commodity production structure?

Furthermore, the Institute for Human Activities adds into the ingredients of its products its own cultural capital. Generating publicity via press releases, conferences and coverage in mainstream media and art publications —such as *The Guardian, The New York Times, CNN*, *e-flux* announcements and *Afterall*— the Institute for Human Activities exploits this publicity for its own self-reproduction, establishing visibility and credibility through association with internationally recognized writers and public intellectuals. Through the organization of exhibitions, public events and conferences, and drawing on Martens' controversial reputation, the Institute for Human Activities not only mixes that cultural capital into the production of chocolate sculptures, but also furthers publicity, which opens the doors for more funding for its own activities and those of the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise. In this sense, Martens' project is doing what it does best: inciting debate.

[520] Bishop, "Cercle d'Art Des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise," 323.

There is an aspect of critical mimicry in Martens' project, as he places himself in the role of the exceptional subject—the white European man—who oversees his workers—the poor black Africans—as the facilitator for their own liberation, thereby re-enacting the very same unequal hierarchic system. This mimicry, nevertheless, risks sliding into repetition. Martens is aware of his role in this process and he agrees that his actions could be read as some sort of exploitative neocolonial action. As he states, "People accuse me of being neocolonial, but the world is neocolonial, and to end it we need to come up with some kind of apparatus. I feel that there's so much inequality in this world I can't just make politically critical art and show it in places of power. It's exactly because I'm a white middle-class artist that I have to do something like this"[521]. Yet, in the end, it is not that simple.

When analysing the project one can clearly see that the stand-alone chocolate sculptures have a secondary role within Martens' project and the networks of economic and cultural capital. Martens' initiative suffers from an aesthetic illegibility and if one removes Martens' inflammatory rhetoric, the whole endeavour functions as a socioeconomic experiment or a new type of NGO. Whatever the next step on Martens' agenda, one thing is for sure: the resulting project has all the usual problems of socially engaged practice.[522] In the end, it ends up being an art initiative that intends to move

[521] Randy Kennedy, "Chocolate Sculpture, With a Bitter Taste of Colonialism – The New York Times," *The New York Times*, February 2, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/02/arts/chocolate-sculpture-with-a-bitter-taste-of-colonialism.html.
[522] See Chapter 1, Sections 1.1 and 1.2.

beyond representation and actually impact the plantation situation; yet, as Bishop wisely puts it, "how is efficacy to be measured?"[523]

It is interesting to see how in this tension between its over-identification with destructive ideologies—i.e. gentrification, neocolonialism—and its plans to improve the local situation, the Institute for Human Activities finds its artistic intervention. Martens admittedly is the first to acknowledge the paradoxical "inclusivity and violence" of his project, which he identifies as part of the institutional critique practice. At the same time, he evidently wants to have a positive impact on the lives of the CATPC members. However, just as he critiques the art world, he also wants to have it both ways. As Bishop questions, "Can ethically troubling overidentification with neocolonial corporate capitalism productively operate in tandem with ethically reassuring social engagement, or do these two contradictory impulses neutralize each other?"[524]

Furthermore, Bishop's statement also underscores the contradictions we find within the practice of 'prolific failure' and hence, the difficulty in establishing parameters to measure the different instances of failure. On the one hand, the Institute for Human Activities project fails to present a decolonial praxis, since it does not challenge the structural dynamics of colonialism and, as such, coloniality continues to exist. On the other hand, through the practice of 'prolific failure'—that is, harnessing critique and working through the setbacks'—the Institute for Human Activities offers a platform where a sense of hope is sparked. And it precisely

[523] Bishop, "Cercle d'Art Des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise," 324.
[524] Bishop, 324.

this hope that drove the former plantation workers to strive for autonomy, which is in itself a decolonial gesture. In addition to this, one should be aware of the fact that the impacts of failing are not experienced in the same way. For Martens, failure represents an opportunity to create controversy and debate. In exchange, this has drawn enough attention to insert the alter-institutional initiative in the midst of the mainstream of art, and to open additional avenues for funding and networking. Yet for the members of Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise—who before participating in the initiative endured conditions of exploitation and extreme poverty, seemingly with very little left to lose—failure served as the spark required to ignite a search for a self-sustainable model of living. As one can appreciate, the Institute for Human Activities is rife with contradictions. To my mind, the fact Martens is forcing these contradictory tendencies to coexist is precisely where the Institute for Human Activities project finds its artistic achievement.

Chapter 5: World of Matter[525]

Introduction

> *Many words are walked in the world. Many worlds are made. Many worlds make us. There are words and worlds that are lies and injustices. There are words and worlds that are truthful and true. In the world of the powerful there is room only for the big and their helpers. In the world we want, everybody fits. The world we want is a world in which many worlds fit.*
>
> "Fourth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle", Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional[526]

The ongoing destruction of our environment by anthropogenic pollution is pushing toward catastrophic circumstances. While predictions seem to worsen each year, none should be a surprise.[527] The year 2016 was glumly declared by scientists as the dawn of the human-influenced age. Humanity's significant impact on Earth's geology and ecosystem is now so profound that we have reached a new geological epoch—the Anthropocene (the age

[525] The material in this chapter has formed the basis of the article "World of Matter. An Eco-aesthetic Approach to the Complex 'Ecologies' of Matter" (2018) and, as such, there are some overlaps between what I am presenting in this portion of the thesis and the article. See Ana Varas Ibarra, "World of Matter. An Eco-Aesthetic Approach to the Complex 'Ecologies' of Matter," *View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture*, no. 22 (2018), http://www.pismowidok.org/en/archive/22-how-to-see-the-antropocene/world-of-matter.

[526] Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), "Cuarta Declaración de La Selva Lacandona," *Http://Enlacezapatista.Ezln.Org.Mx/1996/01/01/Cuarta-Declaracion-de-La-Selva-Lacandona/*, January 1, 1996 (accessed last August 26, 2019). Translation from the original by Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser. Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser, eds., *A World of Many Worlds* (USA: Duke University Press, 2018), 1.

[527] The history of the scientific discovery of climate change began in the 19th century, when scientists first argued that human emissions of greenhouse gases could change the climate. During the 1960s the evidence of the warming effect of carbon dioxide gas became increasingly convincing. And since the 1990s, scientific research on global warming has included multiple disciplines and has expanded to understand the causal relations and links with historic data to grasp the magnitude of damage caused in the environment. See "The Discovery of Global Warming," February 2019, https://history.aip.org/climate/timeline.htm (accessed August 26, 2019); "The United Nations Climate Change Reports," https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/reports.shtml (accessed August 26, 2019).

of humans).[528] The term was coined by scientists Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer to describe the impact of human activity on the planet, which is now so profound that it surpasses other geological forces and will leave a permanent record in the Earth's strata.[529] Geologically speaking, "this is a remarkable episode in the history of the planet," Crutzen and others explain.[530] About 30 to 50 percent of the planet's surface is exploited by mankind:[531] vast expanses of land and ocean have been drilled for oil,

[528] See Damian Carrington, "The Anthropocene Epoch: Scientists Declare Dawn of Human-Influenced Age," *The Guardian*, August 29, 2016, sec. Science, http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/aug/29/declare-anthropocene-epoch-experts-urge-geological-congress-human-impact-earth (accessed August 20, 2017).

[529] Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, "The Anthropocene," *Global Change Newsletter* 41 (n.d.): 17–18; Paul Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind – The Anthropocene," *Nature* 415 (January 2002): 23; Jan Zalasiewicz and et al., "Are We Now Living in the Anthropocene?," *GSA (Geophysical Society of America) Today* 18, no. 2 (2008): 4–8; Jan Zalasiewicz et al., "The Working Group on the Anthropocene: Summary of Evidence and Interim Recommendations," *Anthropocene* 19 (September 1, 2017): 55–60, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ancene.2017.09.001; Robert Macfarlane, "Generation Anthropocene: How Humans Have Altered the Planet for Ever," *The Guardian*, April 1, 2016, sec. Books, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/01/generation-anthropocene-altered-planet-for-ever.
Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin suggest that first use of the word 'anthropocene' was in 1922 when the Russian geologist Aleksei Pavlov used it to name the current "Anthropogenic system (period) or Anthropocene". See Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene," *Nature* 519, no. 7542 (March 11, 2015): 172-73. However, it was Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer who, in 2000, fully developed the concept of the Anthropocene to describe the geological era that follows the Holocene epoch, which has been in existence for the last 11,700 years. See "Welcome to the Anthropocene," anthropocene.info, http://www.anthropocene.info/en/glossary (accessed October 12, 2019). The terminology refers to the shift in Earth's systems due to human activities, which include alterations in the biogeochemical cycles of the atmosphere, hydrosphere (water), and lithosphere (land), causing damaging ecological transformations such as ocean acidification, expansion of ocean dead zones, and increased species extinction. There is an extensive literature on the Anthropocene. For more see Lewis and Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene"; McKenzie Wark, *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene* (London: Verso Books, 2015); Vaclav Smil, *Harvesting the Biosphere: What We Have Taken from Nature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013). Much earlier dates for the start of the Anthropocene are sometimes suggested, but most scientists tend to agree that global anthropogenic effects started in the late 18th century. A cogent study by Will Steffen, Wendy Broadgate, Lisa Deutsch, Owen Gaffney, and Cornelia Ludwig suggests dating the Anthropocene according to the multiple "great accelerations" in Earth system indicators and social change indicators, from 1950 onwards, as set out in Will Steffen et al., "The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration," *The Anthropocene Review* 2, no. 1 (April 1, 2015): 81–98.

[530] Jan Zalasiewicz et al., "The New World of the Anthropocene," *Environmental Science and Technology Viewpoint* 44, no. 7 (2010): 2228–31.

[531] Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind – The Anthropocene."

mountains have been scoured for coal, rainforests have been razed, and the oceans are infested with billions of particles of microplastics.[532] The Anthropocene signifies a new chapter in the history of the planet, where natural and human forces are now determined by each other.[533] As Timothy Morton puts it, "We are no longer able to think of history as exclusively human, for the very reason that we are in the Anthropocene."[534]

Recognising the Anthropocene allows us to understand the ecological crisis of the present day in the context of the distant past and points to the urgency of developing a new understanding of nature itself and the attitude humans should adopt towards it.[535] Whereas corporate media and the entertainment industry present never-ending apocalyptic scenarios where environmental catastrophe is our unavoidable fate,[536] artistic production and discourse has by contrast become more engaged in attempts to find alternative ethical ways to rebalance our relationship with nature. Unlike Land Art of the 1960s and 1970s,[537] which took natural

[532] Susan McMichael, "Generation Anthropocene ~ How Humans Have Altered the Planet for Ever – Starfish Initiatives," Starfish Initiatives, https://starfish-initiatives.org/generation-anthropocene-humans-altered-planet-ever/ (accessed May 17, 2019).
[533] Zalasiewicz et al., "The New World of the Anthropocene."
[534] Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects. Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 5, https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/hyperobjects.
[535] There is an extensive literature on the subject by relevant figures such as Bruno Latour, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Timothy Morton, McKenzie Wark, TJ Demos, Donna Haraway, Jason Moore, Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin, and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, amongst others.
[536] Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (London: Penguin, 2015); Demos, *Decolonizing Nature*, 13.
[537] Understand Land Art or Earth Art as the artistic practice of directly modifying the land and turning it into earthworks. It is the action of 'sculpting' the landscape or making structures in situ using natural materials. This art tendency was part of a wider conceptual art movement in the 1960s and 1970s. The most influential artist in this movement was Robert Smithson with his piece *Spiral Jetty* (1970). Other renowned land art artists include Richard Long, Walter de Maria, Dennis Oppenheim and James Turrell.

landscapes as both means and sites for artistic production, this new wave of eco-aesthetics aims to bring to the foreground the complex 'ecologies'—social, economic, political, discursive, and Earth systems—of global forces that contributed to the transition to the current geological era. The extent to which the current system has degraded both natural and societal ecosystems is investigated through compelling analyses, and creative alternatives for other "forms of environmental sustainability and egalitarian structures of living" are put forth.[538] These artistic approaches reflect upon how we might comprehend the present interchange of human culture and the environment and probe the socio-political and "ecological realities surrounding us as well as those yet to come."[539] As these forms of materiality are emerging, however, it is paramount that the existing disciplinary division between science and the humanities is bridged to generate constructive debate about the solutions required to overcome the impending ecological disaster. Thus, the question remains: how does the environmental crisis—the Anthropocene—enter the discourse of art and what forms of representation does it take?

Consider the case of World of Matter, an international media, art and research collective that investigates the relationship between social, political, environmental and economic spheres as a form of artistic practice. Launched in 2013 as a multimedia platform with an open-access archive, World of Matter connects different files, actors, territories and ideas on the global ecologies of resources, exploitation and circulation. The collective

[538] Demos, *Decolonizing Nature*, 10.
[539] Mabe Bethônico et al., "Introduction to the World of Matter Project," in *World of Matter*, ed. Inke Arns (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 10.

focuses on the development of innovative aesthetic and equitable ethical approaches to the world's resources. By combining environmental humanities and methodical research with ecological and social justice activism, the practice of World of Matter calls for a reconsideration, on a fundamental level, of how we understand and interact with the world of 'things.'[540] The collective conveys this practice through a series of videos, photographs, cartographic analyses and mixed-media installations all publicly available on their website, but also globally exhibited in different institutional spaces.[541] World of Matter comprises core members Mabe Bethônico, Ursula Biemann, Uwe H. Martin, Frauke Huber, Helge Mooshammer, Peter Mörtenböck, Emily Eliza Scott, Paulo Tavares, Lonnie van Brummelen, and Siebren de Haan.[542]

[540] Demos, *Decolonizing Nature*, 200-201. I use 'thing' in the sense of the collection of entities brought together in the "Parliament of Things" that Bruno Latour brought to our attention. See more in Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993).
[541] Demos, *Decolonizing Nature,* 200–201; World of Matter, 'About the Project', World of Matter, http://www.worldofmatter.net/about-project.
[542]All the members of the collective are researchers and most of them are involved in academia one way or the other. Mabe Bethônico is a Brazilian artist researcher with an MA and a PhD in Fine Arts from the Royal College of Art. Ursula Biemann is a Swiss artist, writer and video essayist, based in Zurich. In 2009 she received a doctor honoris causa in Humanities from the Swedish University Umea and the Prix Meret Oppenheim (the national art award of Switzerland). Uwe H. Martin and Frauke Huber are both German artists, independent storytellers, slow journalists, educators and multimedia producers at the Bombay Flying Club. They undertake long-term journalism projects that combine photography with documentary film text and sound. In 2010 Martin and Huber founded Aggreys Dreams, a project supporting education in slums in Mombasa, Kenya. Helge Mooshammer is an Austrian cultural theorist and architect based at Vienna University of Technology and Goldsmiths College, University of London. He is also the director of the Austrian Science Fund research projects *Other Markets* and *Relational Architecture.* Peter Mörtenböck is an Austrian professor of Visual Culture at the Vienna University of Technology and visiting researcher at Goldsmiths College, University of London where he is currently developing the Network Cultures project. Emily Eliza Scott is an American assistant professor of Art History and Environmental Studies at University of Oregon. She is also a core participant in the long-term, collaborative, art-research project Los Angeles Urban Rangers (2004 -). Paulo Tavares is a Brazilian architect and urbanist based in Quito, Ecuador and London. He previously held teaching posts at London Metropolitan University and Goldsmiths College, University of London. Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan are Dutch artists who have collaborated since 2002. Ursula Biemann,

Before getting into detail about the practice of World of Matter, first it is necessary to comprehend the framework within which this alter-institutional initiative operates. Thus, a descriptive account of the Anthropocene and its conceptual implications follows.

5.1. The Anthropocene's Universalising Discourse and Its Critique

If the Anthropocene is already here, the question then becomes, what can we do with it as a conceptual apparatus that may serve to undermine the conditions that it names?

Heather Davis and Zoe Todd[543]

Despite the fact that the Anthropocene has not yet been officially accepted as being the current geological era and the start date has yet to be decided upon, in recent years a burst of political and scholarly discussions, as well as protests from communities experiencing the environmental effects of anthropogenic practices—extractivism, monocultural plantations, etc.—have arisen.[544] Theorists Heather Davis and Zoe Todd accurately assert that

Peter Mörtenböck, and Helge Mooshammer, "From Supply Lines to Resource Ecologies," *Third Text* 27, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 78; Demos, *Decolonizing Nature*, 200.

[543] Heather Davis and Zoe Todd, "On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene," *ACME. An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 16, no. 4 (January 2017): 763.

[544] The Anthropocene Working Group (AWG) compound is a series of scientists that was created in 2009 in order to examine the status and definition of the Anthropocene as a plausible new formal unit of the Geological Time Scale and identify an appropriate date for the start of the proposed epoch. In August 2016 the AWG suggested the adoption of the Anthropocene as a new geological epoch to the International Geological Congress (IGC). Although the AWG has come to an end, approval for official adoption of the term Anthropocene (and its starting date) are still pending as it requires confirmation from three academic bodies. For more see Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy, "Working Group on the 'Anthropocene',", http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/working-groups/anthropocene/ (accessed last August 26, 2019); Phys.org "The Anthropocene Is Here: Scientists,", August 29, 2016, https://phys.org/news/2016-08-anthropocene-

recognising the existence of such an era has political and ethical connotations beyond the limits of the discipline of geology, "for stating that we are living in a geologic epoch determined by the detritus, movement, and actions of humans is itself a political act."[545] And even scientists Andrew Barry and Mark Maslin seem to agree that the Anthropocene is not just the

scientists.html (accessed last August 26, 2019); Zalasiewicz et al., "The Working Group on the Anthropocene." Several dates have been suggested to allocate the initiation of Anthropocene. Scientists Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin, for instance, propose 1610 as the earliest date in the history of material exchanges. In the article *Defining the Anthropocene* (2015), the authors link the commencement of the Anthropocene to European arrival in the Americas and the so-called exchange in flora and fauna. With the European arrival in 1492 and the subsequent colonisation of the Americas, changes in human populations occurred and new ecological formations were created. This "collision of the Old and New World" contributed to a radical shift in the reorganisation of life on the planet without geological precedent. As they explain, the massive genocide of the native communities provoked a population decline (from approximately 54 million people living in the Americas in 1492 to approximately 6 million in the year 1620) and led to a dramatic decline in Antarctic ice cores of CO_2 in the atmosphere. According to Lewis and Maslin, it is precisely this "Orbis Spike", as they call it, and the suite of changes around 1610—where the two hemispheres were connected, trade became global and mass death took place—that marks the beginning of the Anthropocene. Curiously, this date also happens to coincide with Immanuel Wallerstein's thesis, which allocates the start of the "modern world-system" in the "long" sixteenth century (c. 1450–1640). For more see Lewis and Maslin, "Defining the Anthropocene"; David Biello and David Biello, "Mass Deaths in Americas Start New CO2 Epoch," Scientific American, accessed November 13, 2017, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/mass-deaths-in-americas-start-new-co2-epoch/. In contrast, Paul Crutzen locates the Anthropocene origination at the end of the eighteenth century, when capitalist modes of economic and ecological production—in terms of labour and technological innovations—started transforming the world. Crutzen indicates that the transition to the current geologic era occurred around the time of the Industrial Revolution when atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane started to grow globally. This event happens to coincide with the invention of the steam engine in 1784. For more see Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind – The Anthropocene." Finally, another stance suggests that during the long-term post-industrial rise numerous socioeconomic and Earth System changes occurred—massive population increases, carbon emissions, species invasions and extinctions, and the production and discard of metals, concrete and plastics. These variations—referred to as the 'Great Acceleration' and fundamentally driven by human activities — are now inscribed into the geologic strata and are clear indicators of the fundamental shift in the state and functioning of the Earth System. This date also coincides with the start of the nuclear age. For more see Will Steffen et al., "The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration," *The Anthropocene Review* 2, no. 1 (April 1, 2015): 81–98. For critical readings on the dates of the Anthropocene see Heather Davis and Zoe Todd, "On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene," *ACME. An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 16, no. 4 (January 2017): 761–80; Kathryn Yusoff, "White Utopia/Black Inferno: Life on a Geologic Spike," *E-Flux Journal* 97 (February 2019), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/97/252226/white-utopia-black-inferno-life-on-a-geologic-spike/.

[545] Davis and Todd, "On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene," 762.

name for the current geological era but also "a sign of the need for a new regime of global environmental governance."[546]

By now there is an extensive introductory literature on the Anthropocene, and the concept has become part of a growing discourse in the arts, humanities and social sciences.[547] Within this, there is an ongoing discussion involving the concept and its inconsistencies. As many scholars, particularly in the humanities, have pointed out, there is a fundamental contradiction in the Anthropocene thought-structure and the way to tackle it. The prefix 'Anthropos', denotes that *all* humans are equally implicated in the 'activities' that are allegedly responsible for this new geological era.[548]

[546] Andrew Barry, "The Politics of the Anthropocene: A Dialogue," *Geo: Geography and Environment* 3, no. 2 (May 13, 2016). The authors also argued that Crutzen himself recognises that "the existence of the Anthropocene had evident political and ethical implications", as it suggests that humankind should accept its responsibility as "stewards of the earth". See Paul Crutzen and Christian Schwägerl, "Living in the Anthropocene: Toward a New Global Ethos," Yale Environment 360, accessed April 8, 2019, https://e360.yale.edu/features/living_in_the_anthropocene_toward_a_new_global_ethos.

[547] The term has been taken up by a growing number of scholars in human and environmental geography, history, social anthropology, sociology, economics, science, technology studies, philosophy, and environmental humanities, as well as by artists, curators, and journalists. Some of the most notable contributions are: Frank Biermann, *Earth System Governance: World Politics in the Anthropocene* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014); Katherine Gibson, Deborah Bird Rose, and Ruth Fincher, eds., *Manifesto for Living in the Anthropocene* (Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2015); Christian Schwägerl, *The Anthropocene: The Human Era and How It Shapes Our Planet*, trans. Lucy Renner Jones (Santa Fe: Synergetic Press, 2014); Clive Hamilton, Christopher Bonneuil, and François Gemenne, eds., *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis: Rethinking Modernity in a New Epoch* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); Gaia Vince, *Adventures in the Anthropocene: A Journey to the Heart of the Planet We Made* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2014); Simon Dalby, *Security and Environmental Change* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2009); Kathryn Yusoff, "Anthropogenesis: Origins and Endings in the Anthropocene," *Theory, Culture & Society* 33, no. 2 (2015): 3–28; Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (January 1, 2009): 197–222, https://doi.org/10.1086/596640; Paul Dukes, *Minutes to Midnight: History and the Anthropocene Era from 1763* (London: Anthem Press, 2011); Jeffrey Sachs, "Survival in the Anthropocene," BBC Reith Lectures, 2007, http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/rmhttp/radio4/ transcripts/20070418_reith.pdf; Bruno Latour, "The Anthropocene and the Destruction of the Image of the Globe," Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion University of Edinburgh, 2013, www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/humanities-soc-sci/news-events/lectures/gifford-lectures/archive/series-2012-2013/bruno-latour/lecture-four; Bruno Latour, *Reset Modernity!* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), amongst others.

[548] The term 'Anthropocene' is rooted in the ancient Greek word for 'man' or 'human being': *Anthropos*.

However, the 'activities' that are shown in the Anthropocene visualisations—which seldom focus on environmental emergencies and scenes of "slow violence"—are hardly 'human' in the generalising sense of the word, and are in fact mostly the actions of industrial corporations.[549] The fact is that the Anthropocene—as a rhetorical formation with legal, political, cultural and geological strands—frequently functions as a universalising discourse that tends to disavow responsibility for the geological changes it designates; instead, it homogeneously delegates agency to the generic participants in its human activities.[550] Narratives such as these serve to divert attention from the economic class that has long benefited from the financial system responsible for environmental change.[551] Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin explain that the Anthropocene is not simply the result of activities "undertaken by the species *Homo*

[549] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[550]The Anthropocene's universalising logic has a history. Many scholars seem to agree that this account can be traced back to 1972 when the Apollo 17 crew took the first photograph of the Earth from space: *Blue Marble*. See more in Vázquez, "Precedence, Earth and the Anthropocene"; Steward Brand, "Hohlwelt – Interactive Environments – Context/Examples – Stewart Brand," in *Buckminster Fuller Lectures* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2002), http://www.hohlwelt.com/en/interact/context/sbrand.html. This universalising logic goes hand in hand with tactics embedded in a colonial modernist's rhetoric — the main subject of decolonial critique. For more see Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*; Vázquez, "Precedence, Earth and the Anthropocene"; Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*.

[551] In regard to the exposure of the misused of power of corporations and the damage their exploitative practices are causing to the environment and to minority communities, the work of Naomi Klein has been of great importance. In relation to the Anthropocene and its rhetoric, she notices that it carries an "unspoken meaning: the humans are a single type, that human nature can be essentialized to the traits that created this crisis," and that, as a result of this choice, "the systems that certain humans created, and other humans powerfully resisted, are completely off the hook. Capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy – those sorts of systems." Naomi Klein, "Let Them Drown. The Violence of Othering in a Warming World.," *London Review of Books*, June 2, 2016. We are stuck in the current global inertia over climate change because "the actions that would give us the best chance of averting catastrophe—and would benefit the vast majority—are extremely threatening to an elite minority that has a stranglehold over our economy, our political process, and most of our major media outlets." Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 18.

sapiens," but instead, it derives from "a particular nexus of epistemic, technological, social and political economic coalescences" formed in the contemporary reality of "petrocapitalism."[552]

In a similar vein, historian Dipesh Chakrabarty claims that "a critique that is only a critique of capital is not sufficient for addressing questions relating to human history once the crisis of climate change has been acknowledged and the Anthropocene has begun to loom on the horizon of our present. The geologic now of the Anthropocene has become entangled with the now of human history."[553] For this reason, rather than using the obfuscatory term 'Anthropocene', some academics, such as Jason Moore, Andreas Malm and Donna Haraway, are opting for a strategy of "calling violence by its name", and instead refer to the new geological epoch as the 'Capitolocene' (the age of capitalism)—the historical era shaped by endless capital accumulation.[554] Such terminological distinction locates the source of climate change not in the existence of our species, but within intricate and interconnected processes caused by the organisation of modern capitalism on a global scale. It foregrounds how "capitalism evolved within and against nature's web of life" and attributes the environmental crisis to "complex socio-economic, political, and material operations involving classes and commodities, imperialisms and empires, and biotechnology and

[552] Heather M. Davis and Etienne Turpin, eds., *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, vol. Critical Climate Change (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015). Italics are mine.
[553] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (January 1, 2009): 212.
[554] Jason Moore, "The Capitalocene Part I: On the Nature & Origins of Our Ecological Crisis," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 44, no. 3 (March 17, 2017): 549–630; Jason W. Moore, "The Capitalocene Part II: Accumulation by Appropriation and the Centrality of Unpaid Work/Energy," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 45, no. 2 (February 23, 2018): 237–79.

militarism."[555] It is worth noting that the terminological choice is not simply a matter of semantics, but rather of historical accuracy and truth.

The Anthropocene is about the destruction of places and the eradication of refuges for people and other species; it marks severe discontinuities.[556] Thus, we need other names to account for the complexity and multiple dimensionality of this geo-politic and economic formation. Other names such as the Plantationocene (the age of plantations) by Donna Haraway, the Eurocene (the age of Europe) by Jairus Grove, the White Supremacy Scene by Nicholas Mirzoeff or the Chthulucene by Haraway again, have also been proposed as alternatives to the Anthropocene.[557] For matters of practicality, I have decided to stick to the use of the term the Anthropocene, as I want to highlight its paradoxes and contradictions.

One has to understand that the Anthropocene is essentially a political crisis. There are plenty of solutions for sustainable living today, which, if implemented globally, could protect biodiversity and bring about a more equitable and inclusive socioeconomic order.[558] A series of scientists, environmentalists and political activists argue that to deal with the threat of climate change, a systemic shift in the reorganization of social, political

[555] T. J. Demos, *Against the Anthropocene. Visual Culture and Environment Today* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 86.
[556] Donna Haraway, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin', *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (1 May 2015): 159–65.
[557] See more in Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (May 1, 2015): 159–65; Jairus Grove, "Response to Jedediah Purdy," *In Forum: The New Nature, Boston Review*, January 11, 2016, http://bostonreview.net/forum/new-nature/jairus-grove-jairus-grove-response-jedediah-purdy; Nicholas Mirzoeff, "It's Not the Anthropocene, It's the White Supremacy Scene, Or, The Geological Color Line," in *After Extinction*, ed. Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).
[558] "A Plan to Power 100 Percent of the Planet with Renewables," Scientific American, accessed November 12, 2017, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-path-to-sustainable-energy-by-2030/.

and economic life—the 'Great Transition'—is required.[559] But of course, this would require the humbling of the current environmentally destructive corporate-state oligarchy. In this regard, art historian TJ Demos claims that,

> we cannot address climate justice adequately without also targeting the corruption of democratic practice by corporate lobbying, or the underfunding and failure of public transportation systems, or indigenous rights violations by industrial extractivism, or police violence and the militarization of borders. For these areas all link up in one way or another as interconnected strands of political ecology.[560]

So, whatever term one chooses to adopt, the fact is that the issue with the Anthropocene cannot be addressed adequately without confronting "the corporate control of life," as activist Vandana Shiva claims.[561]

The Anthropocene is a continuation of practices of conquest, dispossession and exploitation of other worlds—human and non-human.[562] Geographer Kathryn Yusoff is right when she claims that the Anthropocene began with the annihilation of relational worlds and with the prompting of the 'Global-World-Space', that is, "the conceit of a global spatiality constructed through uneven geographies of experience and exploitation in order to maintain the privilege of its vision."[563] Factually, human-kind has treated nature—non-human worlds—as something to use, exploit,

[559] "What Is the Great Transition?," http://www.greattransition.org/about/what-is-the-great-transition (accessed last March 15, 2018); "The Great Transition," http://neweconomics.org/2009/10/the-great-transition/ (accessed last March 15, 2018); Klein, *This Changes Everything*.
[560] Demos, *Decolonizing Nature*, 12.
[561] Vandana Shiva, *The Corporate Control of Life*, dOCUMENTA (13):100 Notes – 100 Thoughts, no. 12 (Ostfilderne: Hatje Cantz, 2011). As quoted in Demos, 15.
[562] Davis and Todd, "On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene."
[563] Kathryn Yusoff, "Epochal Aesthetics: Affectual Infrastructures of the Anthropocene," *E-Flux Architecture* Accumulation (March 29, 2017), https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/accumulation/121847/epochal-aesthetics-affectual-infrastructures-of-the-anthropocene/. In the article *White Utopia/Black Inferno* (2019), Yusoff provides a similar definition of the Global-World-Structure: "an understanding of the world as a global entity that is open to the conquest of the entirety of its spatialized and subjective relations." See Yusoff, "White Utopia/Black Inferno."

commercialise and colonise. Three centuries have passed since the birth of the Cartesian concept of 'mastery of nature'—so indispensable in the technological crisis of this century—and yet, our attitude of human-centred exceptionalism seems to have gotten worse. Despite the growing waves of social and political realignment and support for a shift towards ecological perspectives, it is clear to see that the colonisation of nature continues today apace.

Proposals that would make it possible to deal with the current planetary crisis are many and diverse. Unfortunately, many of these proposals are based on practices that continue to reinforce the systems of exploitation, dispossession and domination that created the problems in the first place. These practices—i.e. carbon markets, green technology, geoengineering and extractivism[564]—exert the idea of *terra nullius*,[565] as they continue to actively create scenarios for the tangible expansion of the One-World World by rendering 'empty' the spaces that they occupy, and thus, "making absent the worlds that make those places," as Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser point out.[566] Tying the Anthropocene to its

564 These practices include geoengineering and extractivism. Geoengineering might result in disruption of seasonal weather patterns leading to widespread flooding and/or drought, harming food supply by reducing the amount of sunlight or rainfall that reaches crops, or it could permanently damage the ozone layer and alter carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, which could have nasty effects like ocean acidification and the death of coral, shellfish and plankton, amongst others. For more see Biemann, Mörtenböck, and Mooshammer, "From Supply Lines to Resource Ecologies," January 1, 2013, 76. Here, extractivism refers to the accelerated extraction of natural resources to satisfy global demand. It is pitched by governments and corporations as an opportunity to develop backward regions and provide economic growth. For more see Maristella Svampa, "Commodities Consensus: Neoextractivism and Enclosure of the Commons in Latin America," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 114, no. 1 (2015): 65–82; de la Cadena and Blaser, "The Uncommons: An Introduction."

565 *Terra nullius* comes from the Latin expression 'nobody's land'. It is sometimes used in international law to justify claims that territory may be obtained by a state's occupation of it.

566 de la Cadena and Blaser, *A World of Many Worlds*, 3.

colonial relation reflects not just the impacts of human life on Earth but also the effects of a particular system geared towards "the consumption of life, the consumption of human and non-human life, the consumption of Earth."[567] Thus, to recognise the Anthropocene as explicitly linked to forms of colonisation allows us to understand the logics that now govern our world and to comprehend them as the result of a series of decisions that have their origins and reverberations in the Western model of civilisation—also understood as the project of modernity.[568]

In the article *Thinking-Feeling with the Earth: Territorial Struggles and the Ontological Dimension of the Epistemologies of the South* (2016), decolonial scholar Arturo Escobar gloomily recognises that "[w]e are facing modern problems for which there are no longer modern solutions."[569] To deal with the environmental crisis we can no longer rely on a One-World World vision or a set of world-building practices based on dispossession, exploitation and extraction. To look towards the root of the problem requires being able to recognise the deeper logic at work in what Irmgard Emmelhainz has called the "colonial brokenness", which is not only tied to all the discourses and practices that enable intersubjective, asymmetrical power relations, but also to modernity's logic of domination and extraction.[570] As central attempts to deal with climate change—or more broadly the Anthropocene—are frequently indifferent to those worlds that

[567] Vázquez, "Precedence, Earth and the Anthropocene," 82.
[568] For more on the issue of modernity, see chapter 2.
[569] Arturo Escobar, "Thinking-Feeling with the Earth: Territorial Struggles and the Ontological Dimension of the Epistemologies of the South," *AIBR: Revista de Anthropología Iberoamericana* 11, no. 1 (April 2016): 15.
[570] Emmelhaiz, "Decolonial Love."

have been silenced and/or destroyed by the One-World World vision, we must question whether it is possible to live ethically. How can we live an ethical life when the current structures of world-building are entrenched in processes of exploitation of other worlds and extraction from the 'natural world'? How can we move beyond this state of oblivion and stop our complicity with global injustice, exploitation and dispossession? Our times demand that we pay attention to what is being asked. Aiming to understand the crucial role art plays in regards to these questions, the following section presents a descriptive analysis of three specific examples of the practice of World of Matter.

5.2. World of Matter

We need to cultivate a bit of anthropomorphism—the idea that human agency has some echoes in non-human nature—to counter the narcissism of humans in charge of the world.

Jane Bennet[571]

Born out of research into the deep imbrications of the social, technological, intellectual, artistic and natural spheres, the collaborative art initiative World of Matter involves visual practitioners, ecological researchers, social justice activists, and environmental humanities scholars in conducting long-

[571] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, First edition (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2010), p.xvi.

term research on "material geographies."[572] Specialists are brought together to draw on different methodologies to examine and analyse zones of geopolitical-ecological turmoil.[573] The results are translated into audio-visual media, mixed-media installations, texts and cartographies. The collective deems these materials to be valuable tools for research, activism, pedagogical practices, and to raise general public awareness on the different uses of, and exploitative attitudes towards, primary materials and the implications such actions have on local communities.[574]

As a reflection of their commitment to transparency, all contributors to World of Matter have pledged to share material from their current work in an open-access archive.[575] Accordingly, the digital platform offers users myriad potential entry points and navigational trajectories, "resisting any overarching structure."[576] Users have the option to explore and study the projects in a cognitive way, yet the links between places and projects can be seen in "the overview and current media trail" option.[577] Through a compilation of short videos and documents that can be reconfigured and intertwined with one another, the website creates new insights into relations between apparently distinct resources and locations. For instance, a video clip of the Nigerian Delta oil states can be connected with a visual document about illicit gold mining in the Amazon or Egyptian land-use

572 Nigel Clark, Doreen B. Massey, and Philip Sarre, eds., *Material Geographies: A World in the Making*, First edition (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008).
573 Bethônico et al., "Introduction to the World of Matter Project," 11.
574 Biemann, Mörtenböck, and Mooshammer, "From Supply Lines to Resource Ecologies," 76. .
575 World of Matter, "About the Project."
576 Biemann, Mörtenböck, and Mooshammer, 77.
577 For more see http://www.worldofmatter.net/overview

politics.[578] Thus, a variety of readings are presented about global connectivity among these sites. As Mabe Bethônico and others express,

> Humans have exhausted virtually all known resource deposits on the planet [...]. Large-scale mining is penetrating ever deeper layers, multinational land grabs are advancing to remote corners and the race is on for the neo-colonial division of the seabed. [...] With growing consciousness about global environmental limits, there is urgent need for new discourses and modes of representation that shift resource-related debates from a market-driven domain to open platforms for engaged and decentralized public discourse.[579]

Conceived in this way, World of Matter produces research that finds new approaches to finite resources and explores proposals for creative sustainable alternatives. It is pertinent to clarify that a significant strand of the collective's long-term endeavour is to invite wider public participation in the production of resource knowledge and to destabilise and reframe qualities of aesthetics. As such, the group operates between institutions, disciplines, and non-academic fields, as well as between areas of visual and spatial culture, urbanism, cultural research, photojournalism, art, activism, publishing, curating, and education.[580] It is important to highlight, however, that the online multimedia platform is only presented in English and has no option to consult it in a different language—with the exception of some of the video-clips, which depict a variety of people speaking in their native tongue and have English subtitles. The online multimedia platform was sponsored by the Zurich University for the Arts and the George

[578] World of Matter, "About the Project."
[579] Bethônico et al., "Introduction to the World of Matter Project," 11.
[580] An important strand of their long-term endeavour is to invite wider public participation in the production of resource knowledge and to destabilise and reframe qualities of aesthetics. As such, the group operates between institutions, disciplines, and non-academic fields, as well as between areas of visual and spatial culture, urbanism, cultural research, photojournalism, art, activism, publishing, curating and education. World of Matter, "About the Project"; Arns, *World of Matter*.

Foundation.[581] It was recently sold to the collection of the Haus der elektronischen Künste in Basel, Switzerland. But despite this fact, the open-access archive will remain as public domain.[582]

World of Matter's approach is critically experimental, which involves ethnographic methodologies, field research and self-reflexive knowledge production. According to architects Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer, World of Matter was created as a response to "…a more ecological world-view through a collection of visual material on resource matters, arguing that any discursive shift necessitates and depends upon a different perspective on human–earth relations."[583] In this sense, World of Matter's perspective calls for a reconsideration of how we—humans—understand and interact with the world of things. As such, the initiative's aim is to present a new mode of thinking that engages with a new imaginary of the world. As members of the collective ask: "How to engage when humans and non-humans are equal actants in a shared world? What forms of action take into account the fact that our knowledge of the world has limits?"[584] "How can we then conceive of an alternative engagement with the realities of the earth that recognises the entanglement of human life without reclaiming further privileges of superiority?"[585]

The ambition of World of Matter's collaborative effort is not to mimic "a false mastery of the structure of contemporary resource ecologies," but

581 World of Matter, "About the Project."
582 "Personal Communication with Ursula Biemann," March 24, 2019.
583 Peter Mörtenböck et al., "World of Matter," *Architectural Theory Review* 20, no. 1 (2015): 122.
584 Bethônico et al., "Introduction to the World of Matter Project," 11.
585 Mörtenböck et al., "World of Matter," 126.

rather to reconsider "the relationships between discursive practices and the material world."[586] Accordingly, the collective suggests a variety of possible readings regarding the complex networks of the socio-political and economic dimensions of the use of land in the global field. With particular attention to areas in the Global South, World of Matter analyses destructive industrialisation and its domination of areas. In this regard, the collective's endeavour is thus attentive to what scholar Rob Nixon describes as an "environmentalism of the poor and the slow violence"[587] inflicted on a range of agents, amongst others, women miners in Brazil in Bethônico's *Mineral Invisibility*; farmers in Egypt, India and Brazil in Biemann's *Egyptian Chemistry* and *Deep Weather*, Martin's *White Gold,* and Huber and Martin's *LandRush*; or indigenous communities and non-human life-forms in the Amazon in Tavares' *Non-human Rights*. For Nixon, slow violence is that which occurs gradually and out of sight, "a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, and attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all."[588] So, through a proliferation of films, text-based displays, photo-essays, cartographic analyses, and sculptural and mixed-media installations, World of Matter has sought to "make visible" the slow and devastating force of capitalist globalisation.[589]

[586] Biemann, Mörtenböck, and Mooshammer, "From Supply Lines to Resource Ecologies," 76.
[587] For more see Nixon.
[588] Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 2.
[589] World of Matter, "About the Project."

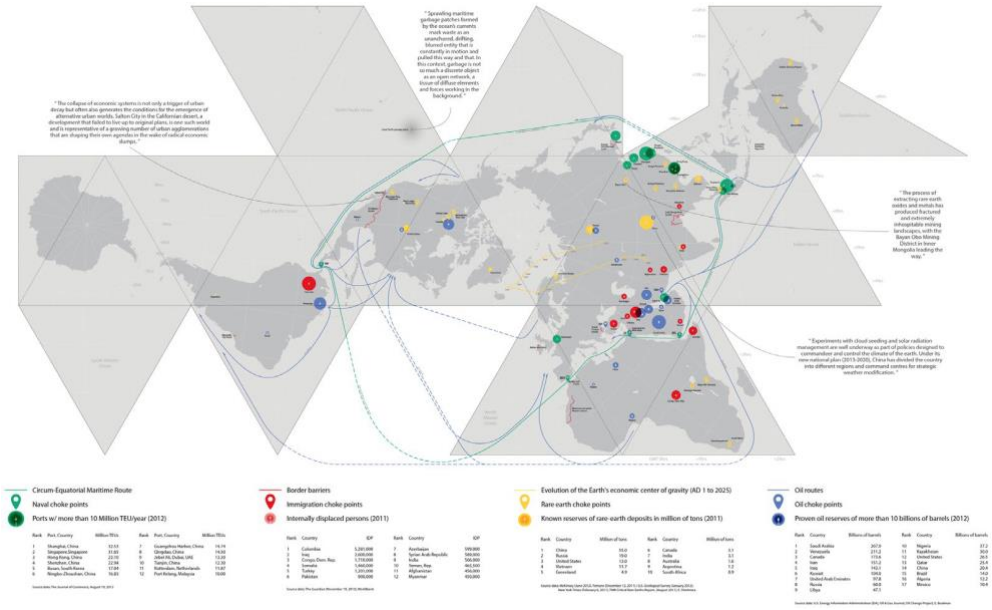

Image 27
Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer, *World of Matter*, 2014.
Detail of wall cartography exhibited at HMKV Dortmund (2014), James Gallery New York (2014), and Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery Montreal (2015). Digital image obtained from: personal correspondence with Peter Mörtenböck

Many of World of Matter's projects draw connections between seemingly unrelated sites to highlight the unequal relations between them and to intervene in the conditions at hand. As such, they align with other eco-aesthetic practices that display the operations of globalization in order to open up and imagine other more just multispecies forms of world-making.[590] These networks are evidenced across their cartographic work, which links together concrete sites, materialities and histories of globally dispersed places that have seen dramatic transformations of their landscapes. [Image 27].

With regard to the latter, one should bear in mind that many scholars seem to agree that the Anthropocene's universalising logic can be traced back to 1972 when the Apollo 17 crew took the first photograph of the Earth

[590] See TJ Demos, "Another World, and Another...:Notes on Uneven Geographies," in *Uneven Geographies* (Nottingham: Nottingham Contemporary, 2010), 15–18.

from space: *Blue Marble*. According to decolonial sociologist Rolando Vázquez, "this photograph accomplishes the renaissance [sic] geographers' dream of reducing the earth to an object of representation; it is a moment in which the anthropocentric gaze achieves, as it were, its historical completion, the absurdity of its totality." The Earth as a unified object was turned into an object of representation and incorporated into the Cartesian subject-object division. This separation of humans from the rest of nature suddenly appeared as self-evident definitive reality.[591] *Blue Marble,* however, also answered calls for a unifying "world perspective" that could bring "earthlings" together visually, and thus, socio-politically, as voiced by Stewart Brand.[592] I argue that it is precisely this unifying world perspective that the practice of World of Matter aims to underscore, and therefore, critique. That is to say, through its cartographic work the alter-institutional initiative seeks to understand how these intersections shape contemporary global politics.[593] By presenting the entanglement between different strands in the management of resource distribution and control, the cartography of World of Matter (2014) not only highlights the unequal effects of the One-World world vision, but it also critiques it. As anthropologist Anna Tsing reminds us,

> we are surrounded by many world-making projects, human and not human. World-making projects emerge from practical activities of making lives; in the process these projects alter our planet. To see them, in the shadow of the Anthropocene's 'anthropo-', we must reorient our attention. Many preindustrial livelihoods, from foraging to stealing, persist today, and new ones […] emerge, but we neglect

591 Vázquez, "Precedence, Earth and the Anthropocene," 80.
592 Brand, "Hohlwelt – Interactive Environments – Context/Examples – Stewart Brand."
593 Mörtenböck et al., "World of Matter," 124.

> them because they are not a part of [modernity's notion of] progress.[594]

Furthermore, by tracing the threads that connect extractive industries, research and development, and agribusiness around the world, the collective provides a critical and aesthetic approach to questions of ecology, new materialism, and nature-cultures.[595] This approach is deeply connected to the decolonial principles of ecological imagination and ethical relationality.[596] Debating this material in a series of symposia, exhibitions and publications, and widening participation in the production of resource knowledge "to employ the destabilizing and reframing qualities of aesthetics" is also one of World of Matter's central concerns.[597] To have a better understanding of how these complex entwinements are translated into visual material, a descriptive analysis of three different projects of the practice of World of Matter is provided. It is important to clarify that although all of these research projects are available in the online platform, they all have a materialised version for exhibition spaces, which contributes an additional dimension to the projects that cannot be contained and measured in the interconnected narratives online.

[594] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 21–22.
[595] Basia Irland et al., *Elemental: An Arts and Ecology Reader* (UK: Gaia Project Press, 2016), 110.
[596] For ethical relationality see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.
[597] Biemann, Mörtenböck, and Mooshammer, "From Supply Lines to Resource Ecologies," 76.

5.2.1. Investigating Material Geographies

5.2.1.1. LandRush

Paying close attention to the large-scale agribusiness in Brazil's Mato Grosso and farming developments and land rights in Gambela, Ethiopia, artists Huber and Martin present *LandRush* (2011—ongoing). Through a series of documentary films, photographs, interactive apps and art installations, *LandRush* explores: the socio-environmental impacts of large-scale commercial farms on rural economies and land rights; the expansion of renewable fuels; land reallocation; and questions about the future of modern agriculture—monoculture—around the world.[598] The project is divided into a series of subthemes. At this point it is important to clarify that whilst on the website of World of Matter only two subthemes are presented, *LandRush — Frontier Land* and *LandRush — The Farm,* on the project's official website three subthemes are shown: *The Farm, The Road*, and *Family Affairs,* with the three additional upcoming subthemes *Dry West — California Drought, Full Circle*, and *Dry West — American Nile*. One has to understand that *LandRush* is an ongoing project that "grows organically chapter by chapter in a constant cycle of research, production and presentation." These sections tell stories that are constantly fluctuating, and therefore, the project as a whole is ever-changing or evolving. "Each chapter is a complete story for the moment, but can be revisited once situations

[598] Currently the artists are researching the multiyear drought in California's Central Valley, organic farming and land use politics in Eastern Germany, and water policies in the Colorado watershed. See more in "LandRush – Global Agriculture and the Future of Food," http://landrushproject.com/ (accessed August 26, 2019).

change. This open process *LandRush* is and stays in a constant Beta […] where the story-telling transfers from the context of journalism into the space of art" as Huber and Martin explain. This open-ended format allows the project to navigate a variety of contexts and gradually proliferate its visual material.[599] *LandRush* is sponsored by a variety of production grants and funding bodies including the Institue für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa), the Stiftung Kulturwerk of the Vg-Bild-Kunst, the Filmwerkstatt Kiel der Filmförderung Hamburg-Schleswig-Holstein GmbH, the Greenpeace Photo Award, the ntezwerk recherche/Olin grant, the Kulturelle Filmförderung Mecklenburg-Vorpommern grant, and the Punkt Award for Science Journalism.[600] Given that this dissertation focuses on the practice of World of Matter, I will only pay attention to the two subthemes *LandRush — Frontier Land* (Mato Grosso, Brazil) and *LandRush — The Farm* (Gambela, Ethopia).

[599] On the project's official website there is a section called *LandRush iPad-App* where the user can see that three subthemes have been created (*The Farm, The Road*, and *Family Affairs*) and three upcoming subthemes (*Dry West – California Drought, Full Circle*, and *Dry West – American Nile*). See more at "About LandRush," LandRush, http://landrushproject.com/lrhome_02-2/ (accessed August 26, 2019).
[600] See more in"LandRush Funding," LandRush, http://landrushproject.com/funding/ (accessed August 26, 2019).

Image 28
Uwe H. Martin and Frauke Huber, *LandRush — The Road,* Brazil, 2011–ongoing.
Mato Grosso, Brazil. Digital image obtained from: personal correspondence with Uwe H. Martin and Frauke Huber

Image 29
Uwe H. Martin and Frauke Huber, *LandRush — The Road,* Brazil, 2011–ongoing.
Mato Grosso, Brazil. Digital image obtained from: personal correspondence with Uwe H. Martin and Frauke Huber

Revealing how agricultural developments come with no limits and pollute traditional farming lands with agrotoxics and transgenics (Genetically Modified Organisms) in Brazil, *LandRush — Frontier Land*,

forecasts a dark future of the already depleted clean-water supplies being polluted by these farming practices, which results in social conflicts [Images 28-29].[601] The footage presents a series of interviews with different actants—indigenous activists, farmers, CEOs of multinational companies, colonial settlers—and a sequence of high-resolution images exposing agricultural practices where pesticides and chemicals are being sprayed on cotton farms, soybeans are moved by massive agricultural machinery, and local family-based farms strive against the industrial global market. "It's a glimpse into the future of agriculture," the artists claim, "corn is turned into ethanol, and the remains are fed to cattle, chickens, and pigs whose excrements [sic] generate electricity, fertilizers and carbon credits. In another closed loop, cotton delivers cloth, but also biodiesel and protein-high power feed, eliminating the need to feed the animals soy, which is exported for cash instead. The ongoing cycle is supposed to guarantee ever-increasing earnings."[602] *LandRush — Frontier Land* not only depicts how Mato Grosso leads the way in the consumption of pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, and defoliation agents, but also presents a critical reading of the social and environmental damage being caused by large-scale agro-investments in local economies.

Placing Brazil in an international comparative perspective, the videos also track farming developments in Ethiopia (*LandRush — The Farm*), where the use of chemical pesticides by commercial farms has fouled

[601] T. J. Demos, "Decolonizing Nature: Making the World Matter," in *World of Matter*, ed. Inke Arns (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 16.
[602] Uwe H. Martin and Frauke Huber, "Of Seed and Land," in *World of Matter*, ed. Inke Arns (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 133.

traditional farming lands, thus predicting the depletion of clean water supplies [Images 30-31]. Through the use of ethnographic models and documentary practices, the project explicates how outsourcing food production is becoming a global trend. "Farmland is today's hottest investment, triggering a genuine land rush."[603] While for the local rural population self-sustainability comes first, the city of Gambela depends on the production of surplus food in the countryside. Ethiopian farmers have been pushed aside by ambitious large-scale foreign investors, supporting the country's move to high-tech farming and corporate enclosure of land. *LandRush — The Farm* depicts how international land investments in Ethiopia are altering the social and environmental fabric of the Gambela region.[604]

Image 30
Uwe H. Martin and Frauke Huber, *LandRush — The Farm,* Ethiopia, 2011–ongoing.
Gambela, Ethopia. Digital image obtained from: personal correspondence with Uwe H. Martin and Frauke Huber

[603] "LandRush – The Farm," World of Matter, https://www.worldofmatter.net/landrush-farm (accessed May 17, 2019).
[604] "LandRush," http://landrushproject.com/landrush-app/ (accessed May 17, 2019).

Image 31
Uwe H. Martin and Frauke Huber, *LandRush — The Farm,* Ethiopia, 2011–ongoing.
Gambela, Ethopia. Digital image obtained from: personal correspondence with Uwe H. Martin and Frauke Huber

LandRush portrays transversal connections between the complex ecologies of two seemingly isolated communities, which are continuously being exposed to slow violence stimulated by the colonial economic system of rich nations. It connects contrasting geographies that are experiencing similar threats of industrialisation and neocolonial land grabbing, which are not only damaging regional ecosystems, but also threatening the survival of traditionally self-sufficient communities. These associations are presented, nonetheless, in a very subtle way. In this sense, *LandRush* leaves it open for spectators to form independent interpretations and political views on 'how the world matters', and to consider how it could be treated differently. Focus is given to the appropriation and mastery of nature through industrial practice, and the findings of the project are depicted in a poetic

and aesthetically appealing way.[605] Notwithstanding the evidence of destruction and exploitation of land, the outstanding composition of the images portrays nature in a nostalgic and evocative way. In this way, *LandRush* evokes contrasting feelings of both yearning and devastation.

LandRush makes valuable use of decolonial approaches of *connecting*, *networking*, *sharing*, and *relationality* to reveal the complex reality of access to, and management of, natural resources in two seemingly unrelated places. That is to say, by exposing the colonial and exploitative world-building practices being imposed in those specific communities, the artists are making visible the colonial brokenness shared by two distinctive worlds. In this way, *LandRush* is enacting the principle of ethical relationality where different struggles in fact connect and intersect, offering an ecological perspective that evidences the correlation of a series of apparently independent factors. It is important to bear in mind, however, that despite establishing a dialogue with the local communities and other important actants, the project does not focus on activating people or intervening in the current situation. Rather, the artists' endeavours dwell on creating "passive activations" by establishing dialogue and debate within the institutional frame. In this sense, it is possible to say that *LandRush*'s ultimate goal is not to change the depicted situation. Instead, it aims to shift our understanding of detrimental industrial practices and of human's relationships with nature. *LandRush* is not about offering alternative solutions to the problem, but rather it is about *listening* and presenting a

[605] T. J. Demos, "Decolonizing Nature: Making the World Matter," in *World of Matter*, ed. Inke Arns (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 16.

relational reading of the colonial brokenness, which can in turn, raise awareness and incite debate.

5.2.1.2. Mineral Invisibility

Paying particular attention to modalities, histories of social inequality, and conflicts around the world that mark uneven developments under neoliberalism, World of Matter's methodology resonates with a 'social ecology' approach. Through critical research of serious ecological dislocations,[606] social ecology methodologies seek to explain the correlation between the exploitation of people, inequality within human relations, and environmental destruction, coming to the conclusion that "addressing and rectifying forms of social violence and inequality" is necessary.[607] Yet, to deal with issues of such violence and inequality, it is crucial to first understand them. Herein lies the importance of the collective's research and representation of the lives of those "often invisible, and kept so at times by corporate and governmental design" as Demos highlights.[608]

An example of this can be seen in Bethônico's *Mineral Invisibility* (2008–ongoing), which stages a dialogue between historic illustrations, archival material and Bethônico's own documentary footage of iron ore

[606] The exploration of economic, ethnic, cultural and gender conflicts caused by energy, extraction, mining, agricultural, and transport industries.
[607] Demos, *Decolonizing Nature*, 20. For more on social ecology see Murray Bookchin, "What Is Social Ecology?," in *Social Ecology and Communalism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006), 19–52.
[608] Demos, "Decolonizing Nature: Making the World Matter," 21.

mining in Brazilian towns in Minas Gerais.[609] The project focuses on life in the mining industry, in particular, the conditions of women workers in the operational areas of large mines in Brazil. As it is explained throughout the material within the project, regions where mining is prevalent often experience significant reductions in air and water quality, which has a direct impact on the livelihoods and health of the nearby populations. However, despite all the implications for safety and local destruction, mining is the economic engine of the towns, even if it is for a limited period of time—up to the exhaustion of the land. Yet, what happens in the mines remains hidden from the majority of local citizens.[610] In general, it is not possible to see the mines from the public roads and highways, as they are purposely hidden behind trees and bushes.[611] Under the guise of 'industrial secrets', access to the mines is strongly controlled and records of mining history are scarce. The few records that are made publicly available are often out of context "perpetuating invisibility and abstraction," as Bethônico explicates.[612] In spite of the fact that mining is engraved in the collective imagination of the region, such activity remains invisible and inaccessible to the general public. For the artist, this lack of information results in some sort of "collective amnesia."[613] *Mineral Invisibility* examines the silencing and image control related to mining practices [Images 32-33].

[609] Mabe Bethônico, "Mineral Invisibility," Mabe Bethônico website and portfolio, 2019, https://www.mabebethonico.online (accessed July 15).
[610] Biemann, Mörtenböck, and Mooshammer, "From Supply Lines to Resource Ecologies," 83.
[611] Mabe Benthônico, "Mineral Invisibility," World of Matter, http://www.worldofmatter.net/mineral-invisibility (accessed March 13, 2018).
[612] Mabe Benthônico, "Mineral Invisibility."
[613] Mabe Benthônico, ed., *Provisões: Uma Conferência Visual [World of Matter]* (Belo Horizonte: Instituto Cidades Criativas, 2013), 76.

Image 32
Mabe Bethônico, *Mineral Invisibility,* 2008–ongoing.
Minas Gerais, Brazil. Digital image obtained from: personal correspondence with Mabe Bethônico

Highlighting the lack of imagery and information on mining in Brazil, *Mineral Invisibility* raises questions about the lack of public awareness of the reality of the mines, work undertaken by labourers, landscapes, machines, and the scale of extraction and its ecological and social impacts. In an effort to raise critical awareness and to foster discussion on the environmental impact of the mining industry and on the need for workers' rights and gender equality, *Mineral Invisibility* brings together documentary films, photographic material, publications, essays and posters to "…give visibility to this context of mining in both its historical and contemporary manifestations."[614] Unlike *LandRush*, which falls into the trap of

[614] Biemann, Mörtenböck, and Mooshammer, "From Supply Lines to Resource Ecologies," 85.

aestheticizing environmental destruction, *Mineral Invisibility* presents unflattering images of the mine—i.e. security, equipment, environment, how workers are transported and nourished. Parallel to the visual images, the project presents a series of written materials reflecting on the historical ties between slavery and mining in Brazil.[615] In this way, Bethônico is not just exposing the reality of life in the mines, but is also critically addressing the safety and working conditions of the mining industry. *Mineral Invisibility* is an invitation to reflect upon the correlation between the exploitation of people, the environment, and the lack of collective engagement in West Brazil. One should bear in mind that by presenting a relational reading and bringing to light the multiple impacts of industrial mining, *Mineral Invisibility* is in fact gesturing to the decolonial strategies of *remembering*, *reclaiming*, *story-telling*, *restoring*, *reframing*, *negotiating*, *sharing*, and *democratising* information. But of course, this stays as a gesture as the practice of World of Matter is not an interventionist practice.

[615] Bethônico, "Mineral Invisibility."

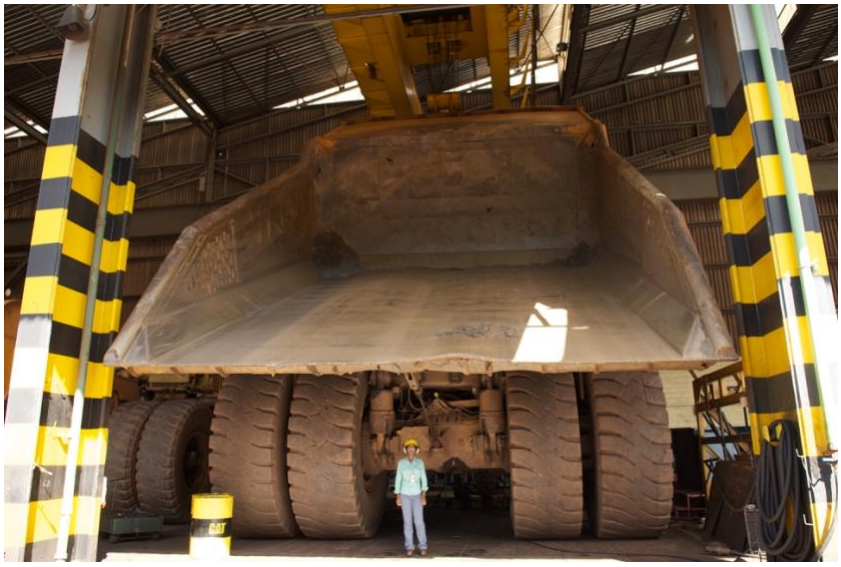

Image 33
Mabe Bethônico, *Mineral Invisibility,* 2008–ongoing.
Minas Gerais, Brazil. Digital image obtained from: personal correspondence with Mabe Bethônico

Furthermore, it is fundamental to recognise that the aim of *Mineral Invisibility* is not to produce new visual content on the subject of the mines, but rather is about raising awareness, circulating information, and lending visibility to mining in its historical manifestation.[616] Bethônico's efforts to distribute these new archives of documentation and information can be seen in her proposal for a parallel project called the *Museum of Public Concerns* (2013), a mobile digital photographic archive which would travel around the city of Belo Horizonte and the interior of Minas Gerais. The *Museum of Public Concerns* aims to serve as a platform for discussion amongst academics and provide a public forum for consultation and engagement.[617] Due to a lack of funding, this itinerant module of the project

[616] Benthônico, *Provisões: Uma Conferência Visual [World of Matter]*, 231.
[617] Bethônico was shortlisted for the Visible Project Award in 2013 for the *Museum of Public Concerns*, an extension of the research project *Mineral Invisibility*. For more see "Award 2013- Shortlisted: Museum of Public Concerns," visibleproject, https://www.visibleproject.org/blog/project/museum-of-public-concerns/ (accessed September 24, 2019).

has not been realised and instead the archive that comprises the *Museum of Public Concerns* is occasionally present in the institutional frame—lectures, exhibitions and/or publications.[618] The information gathered in both *Mineral Invisibility* and the *Museum of Public Concerns* is available in English and Portuguese.

5.2.1.3. Egyptian Chemistry

Seeking to investigate modes of collective composition that extend beyond human agents alone, World of Matter explores nature's realm beyond the "conventional anthropocentric gazes, as well as its comingling with culture and technology."[619] A case in point is Ursula Biemann's *Egyptian Chemistry* (2012), which explores how the complex interactions between humans, nature and technology intersect to form the hybrid ecologies of Egypt.[620] In the essay related to the project, the artist describes the Nile river as an "aquatic narrative [that tells] multiple plots involving organic, social and technological actors […] The question is how we can conceive of a reality indifferent to humans."[621] Based on videographic documents of land, and water samples taken from different sites along the Nile river, *Egyptian Chemistry* probes the changes generated by environmental and hydraulic

618 "Personal Communication with Mabe Bethônico," July 15, 2019.
619 Demos, *Decolonizing Nature*, 217.
620 The project *Egyptian Chemistry* is divided in three subsections: *Agro-Science, Ecologies* and *Land Reforms.* Biemann, Mörtenböck, and Mooshammer, "From Supply Lines to Resource Ecologies," 78.
621 Ursula Biemann, "Egyptian Chemistry," in *Provisões: Uma Conferência Visual [World of Matter]*, ed. Mabe Benthônico (Belo Horizonte: Instituto Cidades Criativas/ICC, 2013), 31–35.

engineering [Images 34-35]. The material version of the project consists of a complex five-channel video installation, although in the online version the user only has access to three channels. The scope of this dissertation focuses on the three channels available in the open-access archive.

Image 34
Ursula Biemann, Video still from *Egyptian Chemistry,* 2012.
Nile Delta, Egypt. Digital image obtained from personal correspondence with Ursula Biemann

Depicting the Nile river as a hybrid system[622] that interacts within three different spheres (agro-sciences, ecologies, and land reforms), the project conveys how water is central to life in Egypt. Comprising a series of short essays, interviews and documentary videos, each section explores the different "…bio-political-chemical compositions that are currently in formation" and enquires about the possible effects these will have on "future constellations of biological, chemical and political life."[623] Using

[622]The relation to 'hybrids'—the construction of systems that mix politics, science, technology, and nature—has been theorised in Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*.
[623] Ursula Biemann, "Geochemistry and Other Planetary Perspectives" in Davis and Turpin, *Art in the Anthropocene*, 118.

metachemistry as a link between the chemical and human agents, *Egyptian Chemistry* questions how the consistent material transformations of water relayed into political consequences.[624] In this way, the project not only exposes how altered water chemistry transforms soil quality and entire agro-ecologies, but also how it interacts with land management, urbanisation processes and food supply chains.[625]

Image 35
Ursula Biemann, Video still from *Egyptian Chemistry,* 2012.
Nile Delta, Egypt. Digital image obtained
from personal correspondence with Ursula Biemann

Additionally, *Egyptian Chemistry* exposes how the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) steered the Egyptian government towards a shift in economic policy by promoting an export-based, agro-industrial economy supported by large-scale monoculture farming practices.[626] The project shows how local food production was depleted, leading to food scarcity, urbanisation, unemployment, and social conflict —

[624] Arns, *World of Matter*, 7.
[625] Biemann, Mörtenböck, and Mooshammer, "From Supply Lines to Resource Ecologies," 79.
[626] Demos, "Decolonizing Nature: Making the World Matter," 21.

a familiar cycle under neoliberal governance.[627] In her footage, Biemann depicts an intricate chain of relations, or a "cooperative of things," that encompasses a grouping of hydraulic politics, social revolution introduced by neoliberal policies, and changes in natural processes of fish migration and water chemistry.[628] "Yet all of these components, neither line up in a casual chain of reactions, nor are they subject solely to an economic paradigm,"[629] as Biemann explains.

Bringing findings from multiple sources, *Egyptian Chemistry* assembles these "elementary fragments into the broader global narration,"[630] that is to say, it presents an observation of "a material constellation—a way of being—in which humans merely play one part among many."[631] The latter resonates with what Jane Bennett identifies as 'assemblages', meaning a group of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. For Bennett, the elements of assemblages, while encompassing humans and their social, legal, and linguistic constructions, also include some very active and powerful non-human elements: electrons, trees, wind, fire, electromagnetic fields.[632] In a similar vein, Tsing identifies assemblages as open-ended gatherings wherein diverse species can influence each other's existence. As she explains, "the question of how the varied species in a species assemblage influence each other—if at all—is never settled:

627 The consequences of the neoliberal cycle are also mapped in Paulo Taveres' *Non-Human Rights,* Martin's *White Gold,* and Martin and Huber's *LandRush.*
628 Biemann, Mörtenböck, and Mooshammer, "From Supply Lines to Resource Ecologies," 83; Demos, "Decolonizing Nature: Making the World Matter," 21.
629 Biemann, Mörtenböck, and Mooshammer, "From Supply Lines to Resource Ecologies," 79.
630 Ursula Biemann, "On the Metachemistry of Oil and Water," in *World of Matter*, ed. Inke Arns (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 41.
631 Biemann, 37.
632 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

some thwart (or eat) each other; others work together to make life possible; still others just happen to find themselves in the same place. […] Assemblages drag political economy inside them, and not just for humans."[633]

The concept of assemblages is helpful to get around the utilitarian-anthropocentric perspective through which elements like water and soil are usually viewed, and instead understand them as part of an 'ecological community', which is precisely the viewpoint that *Egyptian Chemistry* seeks to depict. This is clearly seen in Biemann's annotated footage where the artist presents a newfound attentiveness to matter and its power. In her words, "[n]ot everything comes into being through human intention, and we need to examine the ways in which human and non-human realities emerge together in a variety of formations."[634]

Egyptian Chemistry outlines a network of relations comprising water politics, hydroelectric schemes, fish ecologies, nitrate industries, geoengineering, use of land and socio-political revolution (the Arab Spring)—each affected by neoliberal policy. By making visible the "political ecology of that networked causality, dispersed agency, and multiple effects within and beyond the human," *Egyptian Chemistry* is presenting a re-reading of the dynamic relations between vision, nature, water, productivity, energy, revolution, and image-making.[635] In other words, *Egyptian Chemistry* pays close attention to water in order to bring to light

633 Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, 22–23.
634 Biemann, "On the Metachemistry of Oil and Water," 43.
635 Demos, *Decolonizing Nature*, 220.

those species assemblages we are part of, and to show how human agency is just one part of that material constellation. In undermining the utilitarian-anthropocentric perspective, *Egyptian Chemistry* engages with methodologies of new materialism, speculative realism philosophy, and chemistry, and reveals an "aesthetic sensitivity to the agency of objects" entangled with human systems in unexpected ways.[636] In doing so, *Egyptian Chemistry* presents a vision of the world oriented towards a more democratic and just constitution of a human and non-human (un)commons. In this sense, it is possible to determine that *Egyptian Chemistry* is in fact striving to illustrate the process of *uncommoning* matter.[637]

5.3. No Tangible Solutions

Not only do human beings not form a separate imperium unto themselves; they do not even command the imperium, nature, of which they are a part.

Nancy Levene on *Spinoza*[638]

Did you hear?
It is the sound of your world collapsing.
It is the sound of our world resurging.
The day that was day was night.
And night will be the day that will be day.

"Communique of the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee",
Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional[639]

[636] Demos, "Decolonizing Nature: Making the World Matter," 21.
[637] For a definition of *uncommoning* see Chapter 2, Section, 2.3.2.
[638] Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza.* Trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992), p.67 here quoted from Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 2.
[639] Original reads: "¿Escucharon? Es el sonido de sum undo derrumbándose. Es el del nuestro resurgiendo. El día que fue el día, era noche. Y noche será el día que será el día."

It is crucial to bear in mind that in all of the projects World of Matter creates, nature is never idealised and separated from human activity. Unlike many eco-artistic projects, World of Matter does not present nature as an object to be instrumentalised or financially speculated upon. Rather, the collective's approach sees human agency as one of many partners generating a given situation and outlines a network of relations. By distributing agency beyond strictly conceived anthropocentric causality, World of Matter's projects manage to convey the complexity of geopolitics and how human systems bear an unintentional agency upon nature. According to the members of the group, their intention is not to create more facts and data recollection, it is not about debunking existing assumptions towards nature. Rather, their aim is "to offer an arena in which to assemble and, in the words of Latour, 'care'."[640] World of Matter evidences a collective commitment to investigate and make visible industrial modernity's colonisation, which extends beyond human agents alone.

Whilst each artwork has its own individual aesthetic and methodology, all of the projects still share a common set of principles. Most notable are: the multiple methodologies, including ethnography, field research and experimental documentary video; the combination of interviews with diverse subjects, socio-political analysis and historical

"Communique of the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee – General Command of the Zapatista National Liberation Army. Mexico. December 21, 2012," *Enlace Zapatista*, January 2, 2013, http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2013/01/02/communique-of-the-clandestine-indigenous-revolutionary-committee-general-command-of-the-zapatista-national-liberation-army-mexico/(accessed September 23, 2019).

[640] Bethônico et al., "Introduction to the World of Matter Project," 11.

research—often presented with explanatory titles, or as a voice-overs—alongside environmental footage; and philosophical speculative thinking, which is usually exposed through annotated film.[641] These are crucial components in their proposal, which seeks to reconsider the relationship between material and discourse and to create a more democratic and critical debate on the environmental crisis. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the collective does not present a fully integrated single narrative, but rather an array of distinct files, fragmented human and non-human testimonies, and photographic and video archives that are still works in progress.[642] For Brian Holmes, it is precisely in this strategy where the collective finds its strength, as it allows for its members to deconstruct the world into a "…real complexity, so that 'the crackling noise of the forming and breaking of molecular bonds can be heard at all times'."[643]

Furthermore, it is interesting to see how by presenting footage of the corporate exploitation of natural resources and people, World of Matter aims to bridge the specialist division and probe the political significance of environmental developments. In this sense, the collective refuses to fall into the trap of the Anthropocene discourse of proposing solutions to climate change that endorse the neoliberal market. Moving beyond the visualisation of economics alone and instead presenting the environmental dynamics

[641]This tendency resonates with philosophies of object-oriented ontology and new materialism. The members of World of Matter creatively engaged with the writing of theorists such as Michel Serres, Bruno Latour, Graham Harman, and Karen Barad, and connected to climate-justice activists such as Vandana Shiva and formations such as the Landless Workers' Movements in Brazil. For more see Arns, *World of Matter*.
[642] Brian Holmes, "'Something That Has to Do with Life Itself: World of Matter and the Radical Imaginary'," Review of the show World of Matter at CUNY Graduate Center, New York, 2014, http://events.worldofmatter.net/publications/something-that-has-to-do-with-life-itselfworld-of-matter-and-the-radical-imaginary/(accessed March 19, 2019).
[643] Holmes.

that are at play, World of Matter's practice reiterates that it is urgent to create an alternative form of "ecological capital" that can definancialise nature. This approach correlates to "a new ecological understanding with a new political economy—a political ecology that posits the environment's sustainability as a source of intrinsic value,"[644] as Demos observes. Simply put, by presenting a critical engagement with the concrete set of policies and attitudes carried by corporate capitalism, World of Matter strives towards a more inclusive multispecies understanding and use of natural resources. Exploring new ways to conceptualise and materialise an inclusive field of collectivisation—a new "cooperative of things"[645]—the collective's practice surpasses the assumptions of anthropocentrism and fosters the already existing forms of human–non-human *(un)commons.*[646]

In his article *After Nature* (1999), Arturo Escobar defines political ecology as "the study of the manifold articulations of history and biology and the cultural mediations through which such articulations are necessarily established."[647] World of Matter's globalised research methodology represents an expanded platform with which it addresses a fundamental element of political ecology. In tracing the specific local articulations of globalising dynamics, the collective exposes the way in which globalisation functions as a scale-making activity, and as an apparatus that can farm, harvest, circulate raw materials, and mine ores in

644 Demos, *Decolonizing Nature*, 228.
645 Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer, "A World of Matter," in *World of Matter*, ed. Inke Arns (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 168.
646 For notion of the (un)commons see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2.
647 Arturo Escobar, "After Nature: Steps to an Antiessentialist Political Ecology," *Current Anthropology* 40, no. 1 (1999): 3.

disparate countries.[648] The results are materialised in critical and aesthetic strategies to render the intricate ecologies of the contemporary world, in an effort to imagine the globe differently, as a place of commonality for ecological imaginaries. Avoiding the reduction of nature to inert matter, World of Matter proposes a recalibration of the entanglements between human and non-human materials, to accept the mingling and bring to the foreground an ecological mode of thinking in which human and non-human matter are equal actants.[649] As Mörtenböck and Mooshammer explain, "[t]he point here is to expand the imaginary of possibilities" and to start thinking about the "cooperative of things", not to discriminate between the ecologies of things and the manifold human relations that develop around them.[650] In this sense, World of Matter's endeavour is about recognising what Arturo Escobar deems as "plurality of natures"—capitalist and noncapitalist, modern and unmodern—in which both the social and the biological have central, yet not essential, roles to play.[651]

In the opening statements of the chapter, the Anthropocene was discussed in order to underscore how the current ecological condition is directly linked to systems of thought that arose from the Enlightenment and the world-building practices based on domination, dispossession, exploitation and extraction—that is, practices of colonialism. The planetary scale of environmental destruction induced by anthropogenic forces poses problems for everyone. The moment of the realisation of the annihilation of

[648] Irland et al., *Elemental*, 111.
[649] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 115.
[650] Biemann, Mörtenböck, and Mooshammer, "From Supply Lines to Resource Ecologies," 83.
[651] Escobar, "After Nature," 3.

the Earth—our current historical moment—can be one when people reconsider the fact that the world—their world—could end. But it can also be one when we question our own location and complicity in the power structure that fabricated this given situation; because in the end, we are all guilty of something. So, rather than thinking of it as a problem with no tangible solutions, the Anthropocene can be deemed as an opportunity where the conditions for dialogue towards the reconstruction and reconstitution of worlds can be formulated. It is precisely here where World of Matter inserts its practice. Moving away from the anthropocentric One-World World vision and instead presenting a relational stance, the practice of World of Matter conceives the existence of a world made of many worlds.

In undoing and rearticulating the relationship with the shared world, the collective's practice bears witness to a different kind of materialism, a non-anthropocentric materialism that fosters a blueprint for other forms of collaboration between human and non-human actants. The project presents thought-provoking insight into the way natural resources are considered and handled, and provides innovative aesthetic and ethical considerations that challenge the accepted status quo that matter is mainly for human consumption. In the article *Something that Has to Do with Life Itself: World of Matter and the Radical Imaginary* (2014), Brian Holmes bluntly states, "It's high time to make a break with our own normalized ways of creating and propagating world-pictures. Don't imagine the apocalypse, that's old hat. Just bring your radical imagination to focus on the end of global

capitalism."[652] I believe this is precisely what World of Matter's endeavour is trying to do. Rather than presenting alternative worlds and solutions that would save 'us' from the catastrophic future that is in store, World of Matter exerts the ideas of knowledge as a sustainable resource, forging 'ecological' modes of knowledge-making and pointing towards the vital connection between human and non-human *(un)commons* as a shared good.

It is important to highlight that the practice of World of Matter remains problem-addressing rather than problem-solving, as the collective does not provide tangible solutions to the dominant models of world-building. Unlike other artistic projects whose goal is to 'fix' the problem and consequently the endeavour resembles that of an NGO—i.e. Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination 'Laboffi', Rirkrit Tiravanija's project The Land—World of Matter's practice solely presents alternative readings on how to understand humans' place in the world. It is precisely because its endeavour is solely problem-addressing that World of Matter finds its aesthetic strength. In presenting a newfound "attentiveness to matter and its power,"[653] World of Matter is not pretending that its artistic endeavour can solve the problem of human exploitation of natural resources or matter. Rather, its practice can function as a source of inspiration for a greater sense of the extent to which all things—human and non-human—are "kin" in an inextricable network of relations.[654] In this way, World of Matter opens up the cracks where it is possible to envision other ways of living in this shared

[652] Holmes, "'Something That Has to Do with Life Itself: World of Matter and the Radical Imaginary'."
[653] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 13.
[654] For more on 'kin' see Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*.

world. In this sense, it can be said that the practice of World of Matter opens up a space where a sense of hope for more pluriversal forms of living can be envisioned. As Bennett accurately puts it, "…in a knotted world of vibrant matter, to harm one section of the web may very well be to harm oneself. Such an enlightened or expanded notion of self-interest *is good for humans.*"[655]

Additionally, World of Matter's international scope helps its members to conceive global modes of social organisation, linking social movements, network activism and communities in the search of alternative "resource ecologies."[656] By offering a platform for individuals to develop critical thought regarding socio-political and ecological issues, World of Matter intends to contribute to a free production of shared knowledge that remains open, collective, and widely accessible, pitched against colonial corporate-governmental surveillance and proprietary control of the internet.[657] But, exactly how inclusive, accessible and comprehensible are these informative aesthetic projects? How easy is it for the non-academic or art scholar public to stumble upon World of Matter's projects, whether it is through the internet, a debate, a presentation or exhibition? Ultimately, this is where the collective's modus operandi stumbles, as the project is usually presented within an institutional structure and the artworks are surrounded by a complex theoretical framework that is sometimes difficult to follow. It would, thus, be interesting to see how many of the users visiting

655 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 13.
656 See Mörtenböck and Mooshammer, "A World of Matter," 164–74.
657 Emily Eliza Scott, "Wandering Subjects: Ecological Knowledge Commons," in *World of Matter*, ed. Inke Arns (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 175.

World of Matter's website come from a scholarly background, how many of them are non-English speakers, and if such information fuels a sense of hope or politicise them in any way.[658] If we ought to read the practice of World of Matter within the scope of 'failure', I would say that the inaccessibility to this information, so key to their message, is where the project is most fundamentally flawed.

Finally, it is worth noting that by pairing up the planetary threat with an opportunity to reconsider the underlying assumptions about, and responses to, human and non-human relationships, World of Matter presents an opportunity in which we can envision the possibility for collectives, collaborations and assemblages that rethink, confront, demystify, and destabilise the hegemonic state of affairs. I believe it is through this vision that the alter-institutional initiative sparks a sense of hope amongst different publics and audiences that have access to the collective's practice—whether that is through the online multimedia platform, the exhibitions or the publications. As De la Cadena and Blaser accurately put it, "Paradoxically, the end of the world as we know it may mean the end of its being made through destruction: facing destruction at an unprecedented rate, the collectives that colonialism—in its earliest and latest versions—doomed to extinction emerge to publicly denounce the principles of their destruction, which may coincide with the assumptions

[658] In personal communication with Ursula Biemann, she stated that an average of 5,000 unique users visit the website every month. She believes there are regular users that come from an Art/Anthropocene background, as art historian TJ Demos has written about World of Matter in his books. However, the collective has no information about the users other than the geographical area from where they access the website. The main countries retrieving information from the site are: USA, UK, Sweden, Germany, Brazil and Canada. "Personal Communication with Ursula Biemann," March 24, 2019.

that made a one-world world."[659] I believe it is precisely this "end" of the One-World World what the practice of World of Matter aims to underscore.

[659] de la Cadena and Blaser, *A World of Many Worlds*, 16.

Final Reflections

The overarching objective of this thesis was to understand the role art plays in the collective awakening against global injustice. With the spread of global resistance to the dominant homogenising neoliberal system, a series of non-violent leaderless movements have arisen in the past decade. Simultaneously, we have witnessed a proliferation in politically engaged art practice, which represents a backlash against issues of representation and an attempt to disclose ethical alternatives to structural inequalities. This specific tendency, called alter-institutional practice, is addressing the deeply rooted structural inequalities, from socio-economic class struggle, through resource exploitation and environmental devastation, to land eviction, dispossession, racial discrimination, and so on and so forth. Accordingly, this thesis sought to address the question of whether alter-institutional initiatives can serve as a platform to envision and create alternative forms of self-sustainable living based on cooperation, solidarity, multispecies justice, and mutual learning and respect.

In order to find the answers to such a question the methodological decision to conduct a comparative analysis of three alter-institutional initiatives (Campus in Camps, the Institute for Human Activities, and World of Matter) was made. Through this process, I was able to identify the similarities and disparities between case studies and to further my understanding of the modus operandi of alter-institutional initiatives. I also discovered that although executed in different ways, the three case studies implement similar strategies of liberation that can be clustered under the

category of decolonial methodologies. By utilising decolonial approaches, these initiatives aim to create positive social transformation that might contribute to overcoming the global state of oblivion. These tactics range from actions of revitalising, reclaiming, reframing, representing, and restoring, to speculative gestures, processes of unlearning the dominant knowledge, and reconstituting the (under)commons, amongst other things.

The second methodological decision of framing such strategies within the decolonial lens enabled a more relational reading of the initiatives with respect to their complicity within the colonial matrix of power. It also allowed for a more thorough examination of the complex nuances of each individual project, providing insight into their positionality with regards to their structural and community contexts. I found decolonial theory extremely valuable to explain how the implementation of modern technologies shape colonial structures, inequalities, and resistance strategies. Using a decolonial framework to examine for alter-institutional practices allowed me to recognise the deeper logic at work, which is tied to all the narratives and practices forming intersubjective, asymmetrical power relations. Likewise, it facilitated the reading on how alter-institutional initiatives challenge and respond to the status quo, and how their strategies can advance other forms of thinking, knowing, being and living in specific places of social turmoil.

As seen throughout, alter-institutional initiatives have the capacity to offer a platform to critically address, demystify, deconstruct, and uncover preconceived ideas and attitudes regarding issues of refugeehood, citizenship, commonality, marginalisation, victimisation, poverty,

anthropocentric viewpoints towards nature, resource exploitation, etc. Indeed, alter-institutional practices allows one to speculate, imagine and envision other ways of being in the world. However, despite their efforts, these schemes are not always successful and what they ultimately offer is a momentary or temporary relief. Due to the fact that these initiatives continue to rely heavily on external funding, most of the projects have no continuity, and therefore, the artistic interventions terminate once they stop receiving monetary support. Even though the alter-institutional initiatives continue to exist as self-organised models, their interventions are limited in time and restricted to the economic aid they receive. Furthermore, one should bear in mind that most of the financial support these schemes obtain comes from funding bodies located in the Global North, a fact which in itself is quite problematic, especially when talking about the implementation of decolonial approaches as an antagonistic response to the status quo. Accordingly, it can be established that these organisational models are not self-sustainable and, in the grand scheme of things, alter-institutional initiatives do not present feasible alternatives that could indeed challenge and/or transform structural inequalities, as they continue to be complicit in them. So, how can we talk about a decolonising process within alter-institutional initiatives when these art projects continue to depend on the economic system perpetuating the status quo?

This issue is remarkably evident in the case study Campus in Camps, which ended its programme unexpectedly after the project's main funding body—the GIZ—decided to abruptly terminate its economic support. After the apparent success of the two-year programme, directors and co-

founders, Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, decided to launched a second course. However, due to the lack of financial support, the consecutive programme lasted only six months. Despite this occurrence, as we saw, Hilal and Petti continue to promote Campus in Camps in the mainstream world of art and pitch it as something that continues to be active. However, after conducting a series of semi-structured interviews and informal conversations in the Dheisheh refugee camp in Palestine, I soon discovered that this is not the case. Notwithstanding the participants' efforts to continue the project—particularly in the case of the refugees Ayat Turshan and Qussay Abu Ake—the fact is that Campus in Camps has gradually faded out, and all that is now left is the recollections and remembrances of the communal dynamics activated through the initiative's endeavour.

In the particular case of the Institute for Human Activities, an interesting dynamic is presented. Since the beginning of the project, economic dependence was a fundamental component and, as a matter of fact, the initiative would have not been able to last without it. Nevertheless, it is precisely because of this reliance, that the project has evolved into a cluster of organisations working together towards the development of a self-sustainable model of living. Although the alter-institutional initiative—along with its sister organisation—continues to depend on external funding from numerous cultural organisations and academic partners, it seems that in its latest phase the project has slowly shifted into the development of some sort of self-sustainable model based on social, natural and economic restoration. Since its inception, the project has set itself extremely ambitious goals, however, it is interesting to see that the artist Renzo

Martens became aware that art cannot provide a viable solution on its own. Consequently, the Institute for Human Activities' direction gradually changed from being a problem-addressing to a problem-solving scheme, and the project has now become instrumental in stimulating the community of plantation workers to achieve greater artistic and economic growth. Furthermore, I argue that unless the initiative moves away from artistic practice and indeed dissolves into the vortex of a social movement, there is a big chance that the project—as an artistic project—will not succeed as it will become another social development endeavour. The reason for this claim is that the Institute for Human Activities, as it stands today, does not engage with the political climate of the country, and therefore, it seems that the project is heading towards some sort of utopian community detached from the country's reality.

Economic dependability is also found in the case of World of Matter, although, given its ambiguous modus operandi, which oscillates between individual and collective work, such dependency is not as obvious. The initiative comprises ten core members, who are spread around the world, and an online multimedia platform, which is the initiative's conductive thread. World of Matter is presented as a unit, yet, the website is the sole component that is indeed a collective work. As a matter of fact, the online multimedia platform is the only project that has been sponsored as part of the collective work. The rest of the projects are independently created. Each member works separately on the creation of their specific artworks and projects are funded separately through a series of research and production grants, applied for by each cultural practitioner individually. Furthermore,

the website was recently sold to the collection of the Haus der elektronischen Künste in Basel, Switzerland. In spite of the multimedia platform now belonging to a private collection, its open-access archive will remain in the public domain, and as long as it continues to be consulted by online users, the website will stay active. This can be read as an effective strategy on the initiative's behalf as the collective project is permanently activated and the debate it incites is continuous; all this without actually requiring a constant flow of monetary resources. But regardless of this achievement, I argue that the project as an alter-institutional organisational model remains non-sustainable because it continues to rely on external funding for the development of the individual art projects, as well as for the educational and exhibition schemes.

It is important to clarify that World of Matter is different from the rest of the alter-institutional initiatives that have been analysed in this thesis for three reasons. The first is the fact that unlike Campus in Camps and the Institute for Human Activities, which insert their practice in one specific location and community—such as the Palestinian refugee camps and Congolese monocultural plantations—the practice of World of Matter is spread throughout different locations of the Global South. Second, most of the members of World of Matter perform some sort of investigative and journalistic practice where they establish contact with the particular local communities; however, unlike Campus in Camps and the Institute for Human Activities, the practice of World of Matter does not perform any sort of *in situ* intervention. Instead, its practice is more anthropological, or perhaps put slightly differently, it falls into the category of social ecology.

Its art dwells on witnessing and listening, in order to present and make visible those networks of relations. Third, World of Matter is a collective project where the individual cultural practitioners work separately on the creation of specific projects. Even though the artworks converge and enter into dialogue with one another in the exhibition space and in the online multimedia platform, there is no correlation between the projects. Despite this, I still regard World of Matter as an alter-institutional initiative because its practice is trying to represent a gateway between the human and the non-human worlds, and its website provides a platform to speculate on, and envision, alternative forms of cohabiting on Earth.

Moreover, in the opening statements of this dissertation, the Zapatista movement was presented as an exemplary alternative model of autonomous forms of governance and self-sustainability. Using the Zapatista organisation as guidance, and after conducting this thorough analysis, one could argue that the alter-institutional organisational model does not present viable strategies through which autonomous forms of organising and living based on cooperation, diversity, equity and democracy can be obtained. In this sense, it could be said that the three initiatives fail to provide long-lasting alternatives where autonomy can be obtained. Nevertheless, I would like to present a counter position to the latter argument. Although alter-institutional practices do not provide a self-sustainable organisational model to alternative ways of living, these initiatives can in fact offer the potential for hope that can consequently lead to autonomy, sometimes through the use of prolific failure—that is, the action of shifting away from the thwarted attempt to achieve the initiative's

original plan, by harnessing failure, and adapting/modifying the project's goal, so that it can continue to work towards decoloniality. To support this argument, Ana Cecilia Dinerstein's theory 'the art of organising hope' will be of help.

In the book *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organising Hope* (2015), the sociologist Dinerstein claims that autonomous struggles are about hope rather than the fight against power. For her, autonomy is "about realising something that is *not yet*—by trying, exploring, rehearsing, anticipating different—better—worlds. Without hope, there is no politics."[660] Autonomous struggles are characterised by a search for a new, dignified way of life and the driving force of this quest is nothing else but hope. As such, she suggests we name the movements that search for alternative ways of living as 'hope movements'. In her words, "By trial and error ('asking we walk') and by reflecting democratically on the meaning of their collective actions, hope movements confront the state and capital, challenge existing matrices of power and socio-political horizons, fills spaces and/or render alternative forms of cooperative and dignified work, democracy, land, indigenous autonomy education, relation with nature and politics."[661] In developing this idea, Dinerstein argues that in the act of organising autonomous movements, many failures will come along the way, but in this process, hope becomes a crucial component, and as a

[660] Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organising Hope*, 23.
[661] Dinerstein, 2. The fundamental idea behind the Zapatista phrase 'asking we walk' is that there is no pre-established programme or road to follow, there is only a way forward and the path is made by walking on it; and they walk by asking questions. Translated from original 'preguntando caminamos' in John Holloway, "Zapatismo," July 30, 2011, http://www.johnholloway.com.mx/2011/07/30/zapatismo/.

matter of fact it becomes a necessity. As she claims, "the possibility that autonomous movements are disappointed at some point is, however, a necessity in the art of organising hope, for hope is about uncertainty; it is 'surrounded by dangers'."[662] In this sense, it can be established that hope is a powerful tool of resistance that, when properly directed can mobilise, organise, and catalyse social movements, which in turn can create real structural transformations. That is to say, hope can lead to potentially autonomous forms of living. As indigenous community activist Raúl Gatica states about autonomy, "it's not a theory but a practice in development."[663]

With this in mind, I argue that the three analysed case studies provide a space where a sense of hope was sparked. In Chapter 3, I suggested that the practice of Campus in Camps generated a network of decolonial micro-gestures through which the perception of the camp shifted, from that of a marginalised space to that of a site of knowledge and political agency. Through a series of decolonial approaches, the alter-institutional initiative was able to temporarily reactivate practices of collectivity that were once part of Palestinian everyday life. This was only possible as Hilal and Petti did not paralyse under the region's constraints and instead took up the risk of failing. By challenging the structural and social restraints, the artists put in motion the practice of "prolific failure" that enabled them to harness failure, work through the setbacks and continue to advance in their artistic endeavour. Furthermore, according to Dinerstein, the art of organising hope is "the art of using knowledge

[662] Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organising Hope*, 227.
[663] Raúl Gatica as quoted in Notes from Nowhere, *We Are Everywhere. The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism* (London & New York: Verso, 2003), 110.

creatively and politically to weave dreams out of misery, against the odds, amidst brutal state violence, endemic poverty, desperate hunger and social devastation. It means to learn how to engage in the politics of affection and, from there, manage setbacks and endure disheartening circumstances."[664] I argue this is precisely what Campus in Camps is doing. Rather than dealing with the politics of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, the alter-institutional initiative was in fact engaging with the politics of affection and everyday life in a more direct way. In doing so, Campus in Camps not only recuperated and revitalised forms of collective praxis, but also planted the seed of hope within the participants. In the midst of occupation and colonisation, the practice of Campus in Camps created a small-scale utopian space of hope. A space where it was possible to address socio-political transformation and engage with the current reality whilst envisioning alternative ways of life in the camp based on collectivity and resistance.[665]

By using failure as a tool to advance in their practice, Hilal and Petti presented another way of dealing with the constraints of everyday life in the camp. In doing so, they intrinsically move away from the dominant narratives of victimisation and marginalisation and open up a space where refugeehood is viewed from a different standpoint. I argue that the alter-institutional initiative facilitated a platform where a sense of hope was sparked amongst the refugee participants. However, the problem is that the provision of such a space was ultimately temporary, as was hope, and

[664] Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organising Hope*, 26.
[665] David Harvey conceptualises spaces of hope as small-scale utopian spaces where to address socio-political transformation and envision alternative ways of living. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*.

therefore the potential for autonomy disappeared with the programme's abrupt end. Although there were some efforts to give continuity to the communal dynamics—i.e. *al masha*, *Mujaawarah*—that were recuperated and reactivated through Campus in Camps' endeavour, as we saw, the participants were not able to fight against the perpetual cycle of victimhood, marginalisation and humanitarian aid reliance. It seems to me that the shackles of coloniality are too strong to break and, unfortunately, any potential for hope and autonomy was crushed with the termination of the project. So, in the end, it can be established that although the seed of hope was planted through Campus in Camps' intervention, it is ultimately the refugee community who must nourish and utilise that sense of hope as a 'weapon of resistance' and as a driving force to strive towards non-reliant forms of living in the camp.

In Chapter 4, I investigated the Institute for Human Activities project that seeks to return economic profits to a community of plantation workers in Lusanga, Congo, and fosters local economic diversification. By conceptualising the multi-faceted project into three phases and exposing its progression in detail, I suggested that this alter-institutional initiative uses critique, and subsequently failure, as a constructive tool to advance in its endeavour. I argue that this strategy enabled the Institute for Human Activities to advance its artistic practice and mould it into a fusion of overidentification, institutional critique, socially engaged art, and art practice in the search for alternative economies. In my view, this openness to critique and the initiative's flexibility to adapt to unforeseen circumstances has permitted the project to evolve into a network of

organisations working together in the pursuit of a self-sustainable model of living which, as it stands today, combines art, economics and ecological landscape restoration. I believe that it is precisely in this experimentation—trying, exploring, failing and trying again—that the Institute for Human Activities has been able to create a small-scale utopian space of hope.

Similar to the alter-institutional organisation Campus in Camps, the Institute for Human Activities offered a platform where a sense of hope amongst the Congolese participants was generated. As we saw, in the case of Campus in Camps, hope was momentarily used in the pursuit of alternative forms of life in the camp based on cooperation and collectivity, however, any sign of hope vanished once the project terminated. By contrast, in the case of the Institute for Human Activities it seems that it is the former plantation workers who used hope as an essential component in their search for autonomy within the project. That is to say, hope was the driving force behind the organisation and formation of the Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise. Although the Cercle remains only semi-autonomous—since it still relies on the Institute for Human Activities and external funding—it can be said that hope, together with critique and failure, inspired the Congolese participants to thrive alongside the project. In this sense, I argue that the Institute for Human Activities project uses hope as an emancipatory tool in the search for an alternative form of living based on ecological and economic self-sustainability.

By allowing each individual project to fail, learning from its mistakes and trying again, I suggest that both Campus in Camps and the Institute for Human Activities planted the seed of hope within the participant

communities. Hence, it can be established that both these alter-institutional initiatives offer the possibility of hope through the practice of prolific failure. It is important to highlight that although both alter-institutional initiatives offer a platform where hope is generated, the success and longevity of the space of hope, and therefore, the potential for autonomy, ultimately depends on the participants. More specifically, how they mobilise, organise and catalyse this sense of hope. To put it differently, alter-institutional practice offers the potential for hope, however, it is down to the communities to nourish and cherish that seed, allowing it to grow and flourish into truly autonomous social movements. Furthermore, it is interesting to see that even though both alter-institutional initiatives provided a space where a sense of hope was sparked, the ripple effects differ between projects. The reason for this occurrence, I believe, has to do with the specific socio-political context within which these practices operate. On the one hand, the Congolese plantation workers endured conditions of exploitation followed by extreme poverty and seemed to have nothing left to lose. As a consequence, they sought to maximise the potential of the project in an attempt to establish economic self-sustainability. On the other hand, it seems that the Palestinian refugees, who also face marginalisation and dehumanising conditions, cannot escape from the fear of normalising the life in the camp and consequently jeopardising the 'right of return'. And even though, Hilal and Petti claim that the refugee participants indeed decolonised their minds and moved away from the paralysing mindsets and dominant narratives, it seems to me that there are too many factors—i.e. losing the right of return, normalisation of camp

living, humanitarian aid reliance— that cripple any potential for turning the mobilisation of hope into a real form of decolonisation. In this sense, it can be established that in the case of Campus in Camps, hope came with external intervention, however, that sense of hope faded out when the intervention was finalised. In the case of the Institute for Human Activities, by contrast, hope was, and remains, the driving force of the project.

In the particular case of World of Matter, the provision of spaces of hope is harder to conceive. Due to the fact that World of Matter's practice focuses more on observation rather than intervention, the social component within the artworks is almost inexistent, and therefore, the formation of spaces of hope within a particular community is less obvious. In this sense, it can be established that World of Matter presents a problem-addressing, rather than problem-solving, endeavour. But, despite the lack of direct social intervention, the alter-institutional initiative moves away from the narrow anthropocentric 'One-World World' vision and offers a more relational and inclusive understanding of the use of natural resources, which in turn can lead to alternative forms of living in this shared world. I consider the ecological world-view put forward by the initiative as precisely what is necessary to establish belief in the possibility of an ethical life and help nurture a sense of hope in just forms of living. As such, I argue that even though there is no direct intervention, World of Matter sparks a sense of hope amongst the wide range of audiences that consult the collective's website and visit the different public forums where World of Matter presents its work—i.e. exhibitions, book presentations, conferences. I believe that it is through these public platforms that the initiative invites us

to rethink and reconsider our own complicity in the global ecologies of resource exploitation and circulation, and can inspire a politicisation amongst unexpected audiences. I argue it is precisely this incentive for politicisation that can foster a sense of hope, which in turn can lead to the organisation, mobilisation and catalysation of social movements seeking environmental justice and multispecies living.

In summary, it can be concluded that in the case of Campus in Camps and World of Matter, these alter-institutional initiatives do not offer tangible solutions to the problems they address, and therefore, their practice tends to be problem-addressing rather than problem-solving. This is not the case for the Institute for Human Activities. However, this is only possible because the initiative has shifted from simply being an art project and has now morphed into a social development scheme. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that alter-institutional practices can offer a platform where a sense of hope can be sparked, but ultimately it depends on the participant community on how they use it and what to do with that hope. Personally, I believe this is where the projects find their aesthetic strength. It is within these spaces of hope that other forms of knowing, sensing and being are brought to the surface. It is precisely these sensibilities that can yield a vision of coexistence that does not require making other worlds invalid or extinct. Furthermore, I argue that these spaces of hope can inspire a politicisation amongst participants and unexpected audiences, which can, in turn, result in the formation of social movements that lead to possibilities of the otherwise.

Throughout this thesis, it was established that despite not providing concrete solutions to overcome structural inequalities, alter-institutional initiatives play an important role in the creation of small-scale utopian spaces where a sense of hope can be recuperated, the sense of hope that the Zapatistas urged the repressed peoples of the world to use as a weapon of resistance. In conducting this research, my aim was to further our understanding of the modus operandi of alter-institutional practice. After conducting this comparative analysis, it can be established that alter-institutional practices: 1) use failure as a constructive tool to advance in their endeavour; 2) offer the potential where a sense of hope can be sparked; 3) present a platform to speculate on, and envision, ethical alternative forms of living; and 4) struggle to offer any tangible solutions to the problems they address, without departing from simply being an art project. I concentrated on three case studies of alter-institutional initiatives, but as one can appreciate a myriad of questions arose from this research that remain unanswered. Alter-institutional practice is a developing artistic phenomenon, which means, a further and broader examination is urgently needed. Whilst some scholars have written about different case studies within alter-institutional practice—i.e. Sven Lüttticken, Ekaterina Degot, TJ Demos, Marco Baravalle—yet, this thesis is the first critical account that analyses alter-institutional practice through a decolonial lens. As such, further research directions would entail expanding the scope of research to a wider range of case studies. Also, it would be interesting to develop a comparative analysis between different practices in the Global North and the Global South. I hope that with this dissertation, I was able to reveal the

potential of alter-institutional practices to advance the artistic endeavour, whilst at the same time contributing to the development of propositional expressions, which through interdisciplinary approaches, not only envision new ways to cultivate multispecies justice and equality, but also work towards its realization.

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