

Disorienting the Threshold:  
Interface, Nonbinary  
Theorizing and  
Fictionalized Performance

by  
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## Declaration of Committee

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## **This is not an abstract because this is not a thesis, but an offering**

Interface as a set of cognitive relations or process, is deeply performative. As a set of phenomenological, material-discursive entanglements with the world, interface is an experience which grips us, both body and mind. This project has at once, concerned itself with the kind of extension our current interface mythologies afford, and how we ought to dwell, do, teach, learn, be through this space.

As filters for knowledge, interface have the ability to expand or contract our understandings of the world. In its contemporary colonial form, interface prefigures agency through an illusion of control, that in the wake of global pandemics, rising sea levels, polarized publics, and pollutant information landscapes, is ruptured. So accustomed to its prefigured plans and narratives, this sudden disjointedness from a cultural and existential center provides an unprecedented ontological opening. This project offers a lensing of how we might reorient ourselves toward knowledge, to expand our capacity for care, understanding and personal, political and environmental relations, by engaging the space in-between, the rupture.

Through the offerings of pre- and decolonial, indigenous, nonbinary, and non-western philosophy and thought this project has sought to lay out a decolonial engagement with the colonial wound. Through the fictional aesthetic of Gloria Anzaldúa's reading of the Aztec myth Coyolxāuhqui and her seven stages of *conocimiento*, I confront the resonances of *ego conquiero* within myself through creative writing practice—through fiction and poetics as method. I engage the body, lived experience—to interface something like, decoloniality within academic research practice. I begin from the position that in order to decolonize interface, be it screen or institutionalized practice, begins with decolonizing identity: it begins with recognizing the colonizer harbored within ourselves.

By incorporating story from indigenous, queer, and other non binary writers and scholars, into this work, I also seek to trouble the authority typically afforded to academic authorship. All of my words have been shaped by the voices I incorporate here and have shed light on the concepts I seek to engage in this project. Rather than presenting an individual narrative, severed from their influence, I offer them in their original forms, alongside my own fictionalized practice, inviting you to share in the experience, the sight, their perspectives have provided my own. My intent is to offer you a similar opportunity; to find yourself within whatever patterns take shape in accordance with the text and your own process of self-actualization.

Hence, this is not an abstract, but an invitation. To step into or encounter a different kind of research practice. One that troubles boundaries, colonial regimes of authority, and walks-asking: what are we resisting? What must we confront or let go; what fear, pain and grief must we pass through—in order to become more accountable to our settler-colonial inheritance? And how might the language for creativity offer us a language for healing, for rising?

**Keywords:** interface; decoloniality; nonbinary theorizing; creative practice;  
speculative fiction; disorientation

## Gratitude: Thank you

All of this work was marked by Indigenous Lakota leadership at Standing Rock, Oceti Sakowin Camp in November of 2016.

One of the criticisms that is often, rightfully, expressed with regards to allies of Indigenous led (and other BIPOC) movements, and in particular echoed during my experience at Standing Rock is the lack of sustained, informed, and accountable participation and support. It is all too easy for settler or non-indigenous persons to show up for an action divorced from the context of struggle with which they are supporting. Outraged but often ignorant, leadership heeded at multiple daily meetings to visitors: be mindful of your ability to leave and forget all about what is happening here. You will leave the camp and return to your home, to running water and electricity; to daily routines and home environments clean of disturbance or threats of violence and incarceration; you will go back to ‘normal’ life largely unimpacted by the reverberating effects of the encampment. Indigenous peoples at the camp have no such luxury. They are beholden to the fallout of these efforts, in whatever form it might take, and only they will be held responsible. So, act accordingly, become accountable to this difference, take what you learn home with you to your communities.

Conducting this research on Coast Salish territory is a privilege and a responsibility. As a graduate student I need to be accountable to this space and a settler cultural inheritance. So. This is my direct action. I am here to bring this home. My time here will not be wasted perpetuating colonial standards and agendas but working to dismantle them: my efforts here at SFU have always been marked by commitments to community and solidarity<sup>1</sup>--in finding a way to honor and live the lessons Oceti Sakowin offered me.

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<sup>1</sup> Tiger Swan, the ETP contracted mercenary group hired to carry out military-style counterterrorism measures was quoted as reporting of the Water Protector movement: “we can expect to see a continued spread of anti-DAPL diaspora” (Estes, 2017, p198), and indeed, Nepantleras, *we are the beginning*. Standing Rock catalyzed a generation of activists and solidarity movements against colonial governments, it “changed the conversation about Indigenous- specific issues, [and] also forged a broad alliance that is poised to have tremendous impact on a wide spectrum of contemporary fights for social justice in the Americas.” (Estes, 2017, p175)

May I continue to walk-asking in the pursuit of justice and dignity, in the name of good, in the fight for equality, self-determination, and just shared world relations.

This project would have been 0% possible without the mentorship of my committee:

---

Frédéric Lesage: thank you for continuously creating the space for me to flourish.

You are an exceptional educator that I feel beyond privileged to have worked with. Your mentorship has been nothing short of transformative. You are the kind of educator who elevates and alters the caliber of academic institutions. It has truly been a pleasure and a gift to work with you. Thank you for every bit of your time and guidance—and for all your votes of confidence when I was “disoriented” and uncertain. It has made all the difference.

Additionally, this work has been greatly impacted by work conducted with the Digital Democracies Group and Wendy Hui Kyong Chun:

I am so very grateful for the opportunity to engage in meaningful and vitally important research provided by the DDI and Wendy Chun. It has been inspiring, empowering, and life changing work that I can only hope to continue to carry forward into my own career and community. Wendy: You are catalyzing an entirely different generation of scholars and researchers, and indeed, critical paradigm of thought. Working with you has been an honor and a privilege—thank you.

I have gratitude for the encouragement and support of:

---

my late grandmother, my mother and my sister.

You live in every word that fills these pages. Here is to legacies of womxn: mothers, daughters, sisters.

Dr. Michael Forman

May this be a testament to your foresight and judgement, my friend. Thank you for your confidence, your mentorship and encouragement.

My friendships

Tiara Dole Hoppes, Kory Hoppes, Narem and Levon Karakayoun, Kurstin Stowe, Stephanie Mehr-Hickson, Mike Moral, Isabel Gentili, Asura Enkhbayar, Véronique Émond Sioufi, Matt Canute, Zora Feren, Kim O'Donnell, Sofia Han, Julia Scott Lenz, Carina Albrecht, Kenji Johnson, Taha Keyvani, Peter Zurrbier, and Facu.

& Jaxon

Whose companionship and adamant snout have been the sole reason I survived any of this.

And lastly to my nepantla generation:

---

My family, my peers, my kin

We are the way forward. We are what we are yearning for, and “what they lack in courage, we must have in conviction<sup>2</sup>”, so, Nepantleras, *let us begin*.

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<sup>2</sup> From, Janaya Future Khan, Sunday Sermon's with family 10/5/2020:  
[https://www.instagram.com/tv/CF7zH55hpBb/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/tv/CF7zH55hpBb/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

## Table of Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Declaration of Committee.....  | ii        |
| This is not an abstract because this is not a thesis, but an offering.....   | iii       |
| Gratitude: Thank you .....   | v         |
| Table of Contents .....  | viii      |
| List of Figures .....  | x         |
| An Acknowledgement; foreword.....  | xi        |
| Prelude .....  | xxiii     |
| Interface .....  | xxiii     |
| <b>The Fever: Mirrors, Maps, Sameness, the imperialism of liberal representational models .....</b>                                      | <b>1</b>  |
| Othering Machines and Cartesian Cuts .....   | 6         |
| Historical Programming:.....   | 7         |
| Participation and Interactivity: master/slave servitudes of the small-s sovereign. .   | 10        |
| Data and Proxies: eugenic roots imperial face trace.....   | 12        |
| Networked Homophily: warping relationality, Othering difference .....  | 19        |
| The Institutionalization of the Imperial Shutter: science is a fiction; history is a technology.....                                     | 22        |
| Moving Beyond the Symptoms: prelude to the wound .....   | 23        |
| <b>The Wound: On the Coloniality of the Cartesian-Colonial habit: European philosophy and <i>ego eogito conquiro</i> .....</b>           | <b>35</b> |
| Ego Conquiro.....  | 42        |
| The Non-Ethics of War.....   | 44        |
| Restoring the Gift: the decolonial turn .....  | 48        |
| <b>Rituals for Healing: Queer performance, decoloniality and fiction, fissures, and cracks .....</b>                                     | <b>55</b> |
| Methods Part I: nonbinary theorizing and fictionalized performance.....  | 57        |
| Queer Performativity: refusing the body as sub-human cultural sign .....   | 62        |
| Orientation as an Ideological Project.....   | 64        |
| Disorienting in Order to Diffract: patterns of difference and relational responsibility.....   | 65        |
| Methods Part II: Disorienting the Threshold, decolonizing the self, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa and writing from within the crack ..... | 71        |
| Methods Part III: Becoming Blackfish .....   | 81        |
| Preamble: .....  | 81        |
| On Anzaldúa, Coyolxauhqui, and Supernaturalism.....  | 84        |
| On Autofiction .....   | 86        |
| On Epistemic Location: .....   | 87        |



|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Blackfish Rising Fictions:.....   | 88         |
| <b>Closing Meditation: Manifesting the Bridge, Blackfish, art and coalition building<br/>through creative performance .....</b> | <b>94</b>  |
| <b>The Gifts of Failure.....</b>  | <b>103</b> |
| <b>Bibliography .....</b>   | <b>107</b> |
| <b>Appendix. Critical Reflections on Decoloniality .....</b>  | <b>118</b> |
| Potholes in the road toward decolonization (for people in low-intensity struggle).....  | 118        |
| Hyper-self-reflexivity questions .....  | 118        |

## List of Figures

|            |   |    |
|------------|---|----|
| Figure 1:  | From, Bullethead.....                       | 12 |
| Figure 2:  | From, Bullethead.....                       | 26 |
| Figure 3:  | From, Bullethead.....                       | 34 |
| Figure 4:  | from, Not a Woman but a Shaman.....         | 40 |
| Figure 5:  | From, Not a Woman but a Shaman.....         | 48 |
| Figure 6:  | From, Not a woman but a Shaman.....         | 54 |
| Figure 7:  | Subtext on Gender in Bullethead .....       | 62 |
| Figure 8:  | From, Manic Millennial (Z).....             | 69 |
| Figure 9:  | From, Not a Woman but a Shaman.....         | 81 |
| Figure 10: | From, Readme.txt.....                       | 88 |
| Figure 11: | From, Blackfish Rising .....                | 89 |
| Figure 12: | From, Manic Millennial (Z).....             | 90 |
| Figure 13: | From, Bullethead.....                       | 91 |
| Figure 14: | From, Flight of the Portuguese Sparrow..... | 92 |
| Figure 15: | From, Not a Woman but a Shaman.....         | 93 |

## **An Acknowledgement; foreword**

I want to begin by centering both bodily and intellectual presence within the space this text was written. This work took place on the unceded territories of the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̓xwú7mesh (Squamish), s̓q̓əciyaʔl̓ təməx<sup>w</sup> (Katzie), k<sup>w</sup>ik<sup>w</sup>əł̓əm (Kwikwetlem), səliwətəl (Tsleil-Waututh), qiqéyt (Qayqayt), Semiahmoo, and s̓cəwaθən (Tsawwassen) nations. As a settler who over the last three years has been deeply cared for by this land, who was loved on in times of need by the trees, the mountains, the waters in ways that leave me at a loss for words, to these nations, to these peoples, I want to express not only my gratitude but my love for you. As defenders of the land Indigenous leadership and Indigenous youth across turtle island have continued to hold the line against colonial regimes of power, greed and environmental destruction.

We as students, faculty, researchers, staff, of a colonial institution atop stolen land, as purveyors of knowledge and scientific practice; that has been leveraged to justify things like biological racism and sexism, dispossession, residential schools, and segregation, and as occupants of a position of extreme privilege and power: we must become accountable to this violence. We are not absolved from the wrongdoings of these pursuits. It's our job to dismantle the regimes that perpetuate them. We need to show up for the communities we share this space with. We need to show up for future generations and for our collective health.

Land acknowledgements are not an excuse to disengage our bodies from this space, but a call to bring ourselves into it.

To honor it. To become intimate with the ways Indigenous sovereignty also means a commitment to Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous culture and Indigenous futures. It means we work the insights of this knowledge, and the responsibility to this colonial inheritance into our practices. It means we no longer relegate Black and Indigenous knowledge into niches in the academy, segregated under the veil of specialization, distanced and disassociated from the moral center of its praxis. But rather rigorously and

honorably engage with the implications of these insights for reality and embodied practice.

Because the thing is, the culture here destroys you. The hierarchal structure of the academy has its reasons but it comes with a certain dehumanization and violence: a pitting of humans needs against competitive structures of productivity, precarity, and scarcity. The bodily dispositions and postures it fosters are cognitively and emotionally limiting. If we don't recognize this culture as a byproduct of its colonial underpinnings even changes to curriculum content won't fully resolve its violence.

Because you see, *this habit inscribes colonial relations upon everything*. One of the main experiences that came with graduate school was depression. Was complete and utter mental and emotional depletion. We can explain this away as a symptom of capitalism, but this dismissal, this denial of our experience as students as suffering emotionally, economically, physically and spiritually under the demands of academic culture is just another means of evading responsibility and endorsing coloniality's formatting of modern education, identity, and relations. It is just another means of silencing oppression.

This culture reproduces and extends the estrangement of those most oppressed by this system and teaches us to embody its principles. Its conditioning breathing at the backs of our necks, it renders our peers as competition, and filters our learning through a politics of possession. All around us we recognize the repercussions of colonial logic, and we do everything we can as young people to push back, to not buckle beneath its pressure, to not adopt its practices.

But we are drowning, suffocating in all of the ways we have been forced to swallow it.

Our inheritance: a 400-year daddy fueled massacre; a legacy of violence, destruction, and domination. its original trauma made again and again and again across the world until we've basically destroyed all we hold most in common; till we've destroyed the very humanity within ourselves.

So we must ask ourselves, in all our acknowledgement and paternal gesturing; in all our avoidance of our own internalized colonial ills: how have we come to foreclose, to impose limits on our own capacity for empathy, for love, for knowledge? For giving and caring for each other and ourselves.

The reality is we all need to sit within this moment and allow its ugliness and trauma to stretch us beyond what is comfortable. We have to do things we have been told we cannot do or influenced, coerced, or forced to set aside or neglect. We have to leave behind ways of life and ways of learning that are harm inducing and destructive to our collective health. We have to sit with the discomfort we have trained ourselves to avoid, resist, or suppress. Because a significant amount of the work we need to do as settlers rests on our capacity to become intimate with the harm we do. Because this isn't some external imposition of force isolated within the power of the state—the colonial habit is deeply personal. This harm is one done to ourselves and at the detriment of our potential. And the truth is in its current organization, the university is in no way shape or form hospitable to processing this shared cultural trauma—and we have centuries worth of work to do.

It won't happen if we continue to foster environments that are incompatible with the contours of human experience. It won't happen if we don't create spaces for working through, not around, this kind of existential grief and pain. To deny the urgency of this need, to insist on suppressing or cementing over it, will only result in the continuation of violence and the extension of patterns of harm. Institutional orthodoxy is premised on whiteness. It is premised on colonialism. Our identities and our society are interfaced by this history at every level. And its privileges are nothing if not violently naïve about the illusion of things like safety or security and destructive in what relations it endorses and upholds by design.

*And history is calling on us to know each other differently.* To be differently. The colonial interface is not inevitable, we can dismantle it. But in order to understand ourselves as the interface for change, we must first begin to cultivate creative practices for bringing the world and others, into our-self. This means a return to bodies and the

human condition. This means becoming intimate with resonances of ego conquiro within ourselves and developing robust practices for reprogramming its postures and dispositions. So, I have very much been looking forward to sharing this with you, as rather than speak about or at this call, this project has sought to *be* this work, to practice it.

Our orientations toward knowledge and knowledge making, that which interfaces our experience within the world; which “bends time and illusions of self”; the visceral and yet imperceptible; the invisibly visible, but felt—is where and how we begin, to verse, to move, to learn, to do and be *differently*. This project has concerned itself with the way representational politics bracket away experiences of difference and de-couple epistemology, how we know, from ontology, what we do and practice. It has concerned itself with the relationship between form and content. The space in between processes and people, of enactment.

One of the things I hope this offering provides, is a means of critically and creatively becoming accountable to our colonial inheritance. Our ability to position and understand ourselves, within this system is the first step to healing and discontinuing practices within the institution that extend its violence. We harbor and enact the colonial habit. We live inside its narrative. Its resonances mark our being, our bodies, our minds. It pollutes and delimits who we think we are and what kinds of world we can see, enact, and imagine.

So, this project has walked-asking: what are we resisting? And what limitations are these resistances imposing? What must we confront or let go; what fear, pain and grief must we pass through in order to become more accountable to our settler-colonial inheritance? How do we begin to interface something like decoloniality? And how might the language of creativity offer us a language for healing, for reconfiguring horizons, for expanding our relations and our imaginations, for rising?

I took a lot of risks with this project. It is my hope that I mediated these risks with enough care, humility, and love throughout. I hold myself open, ready to bear the responsibility of these risks because it is necessary; because change demands risk and growth can be deeply uncomfortable. And, because being a human in the society we live in is

complicated. Its unsettling and destabilizing because we have reached this point in our technological development where we can no longer obscure the fallacy of singular historical narratives, we can point and wail and rage over the violence of inequality, greed, and production. But when the infrastructures and imaginaries we are implicated in enforce this logic against our will through obscured automated processes we hardly recognize ourselves as enacting them.

This was really what drew me to the concept of interface and the notion of performativity or enactment. Because of the ways I could feel interface reaching into my subjecthood and reformatting everyday life in ways that were deeply unsettling and discomforting. So, this project began from an interest in how we might design interface, access, and translate information; communicate differently. If interface technologies are premised on a colonial imaginary that is polarizing, violent and oppressive, if they format and reproduce this by design what other imaginaries or aesthetics ought we turn to disrupt or deposition its narrative? More fundamentally, if we are to understand ourselves as implicated by coloniality, as coerced into its performance, what can we learn from the ways of being and experiences of difference that coloniality denies or absents?

## Disorienting the Threshold, Diffracting Difference

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This project became concerned with how we address the harm of the colonial habit as settlers through several concepts that produce relations more hospitable to decolonial relations of difference. My methods for exploring: a theory of disorientation provided by queer phenomenology and the notion of diffracted difference provided by quantum theories of entanglement. Through the work of Sarah Ahmed (2006) and Karen Barad respectively (2007).

Disorientation is super interesting because we tend to be averse to it. It frustrates and rattles us. Shakes and ruptures our routine, sense of direction. Certainly, we can all relate to the ways COVID-19 has had this effect on us. The way it has stripped us a sense of ‘normalcy’ and produced a gaping unknown that we all have had to contend with. But the

pandemic also offered us a moment of pause and stillness. To think through what we habitually participate in. The combination of these effects has caused many of us to look down for the first time to realize the ground we thought was there never really existed. I think this is why we're also seeing an uptick in conspiracy or new religion. Desperate to reground, for meaning, for a story, for something we can attach ourselves to. We have sort of come to this edge of knowing, edge of a world that we were pretty sure was all there was to exist within and so we reach back out for it out of habit. But safety and security are only an illusion. There was never ground. That was a fiction. Just a habit. Not definitive rules or positions. To live is to change, not remain the same. So, the discomfort we have felt, is disorientation. As a kind of suspendedness, and as we have seen, disorientation can produce both freedom and madness. Disorientation in this sense also allows us to let go of control and be present. To reject the violence, the impositions of reality that once dictated our presence.

What this work showed me, was that disorientation when interfaced through creative practices, is a perspective shift that invites curiosity and allows us to not only see reality differently, but enact upon it in ways we wouldn't otherwise, to ask questions; fumble into the darker more obscure corners of our minds, stretching our hands along the walls of our consciousness. It teaches us to hold ourselves open to sensation, positive and negative. It fine tunes our senses. Disorientation when didactively engaged and sustained through something like fictionalized performance or writing practice, helps us pick up on the resonances we miss when we are habituated into "normative" currents of colonial forces.

And diffraction? Diffraction is about affectedness.

We can conceptualize this through a sense of the body as containing an infinite and every-changing degree of difference. This difference is connected to your inherited position or orientation within social reality but is also enacted through your everyday behaviors, daily exchanges, and habits. We produce an affect upon the world from the second we wake up every day. This can be understood in one sense from things like our consumer choices, but more pointedly and profoundly I like to position this as how we move through, encounter, and enact upon the 'every day'. So, whether we smile at our



bus driver or rush into the office meeting breathless; whether we shared a laugh with the barista who made our coffee or remained immersed in our own thoughts and minds during the transaction. How we choose to greet or not greet strangers we pass during our commute, how we receive or don't receive others (both human and nonhuman) as we move through space are all quantum levels of affection that shape and dictate how we experience the world.

As you move through space your difference diffracts upon the world. You affect everything and likewise all else affects upon you differentially. So, diffraction is about the entangled and relational patterns of difference, it is about interconnected affectedness. It figures the self as a multiplicity. It positions us as actors within a shared ecosystem as already shot through with each other through our necessary interdependence. When we can understand subjectivity, ourselves, being human, as necessarily tied to being accountable to the entangled materializations we are a part of in the world, this helps us begin to unlearn and reconfigure our position within colonial systems. As well as, understand the implications of whether we do or don't do in-difference. It's about reciprocity and accountability in ever changing contexts and conditions.

The colonial matrix of power is only able to understand large scale differences, to reduce complexity. But we are so much more than this. Infinitely more. When we find concerted kinds of affectedness we facilitate form, habit<sup>3</sup>. So, diffraction is our own bodily performance as we move through space and the ways it resonates or imposes, opens or delimits space for ourselves and others. It is always reciprocal; the fundamental act of giving to one another we are perpetually implicated in. How we orient ourselves to each other and the world dictates our individual *and* collective identity formation; as we mark the world, the world marks us.

I applied diffraction and disorientation through fiction.

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<sup>3</sup> What I describe in the 'not a woman but a shaman' fiction as a wave or historical conditions.

One of the things fiction allowed me to do was make the link between what interface systems do and what kinds of logic and values are embedded within them. But also, it brought a means of bringing the world, the experiences of difference, into myself. A means of enacting diffractedness. As a settler and a white person, I do not and will not ever have a full understanding of the depths of coloniality's violence and harm because my body does not carry those memories or encounter the world through that experience of difference. So, I cannot and will not speak from or for that experience.

But reading and writing literature and story that puts us in the position of those most oppressed and affected by colonial systems de-orients us from reality in way that is educatively valuable: it takes us up out of our habituated positions and privilege to help us develop adequate understandings of the social world we live in; it better equips us to relate to, work with, and support one another; to become accountable to the marks we leave upon matter and each other. It helps us develop plural ways of being and relating within the world that can expand our capacity to feel; to imagine; to understand our-self and the ways our liberation and future worlds, are tied up and within each other.

I chose autofiction due to the way interface of the 21st century proliferate and manipulate the self through emotionally charged and deeply personal network and data practices. Social media requires us, willingly and unknowingly, to write-ourselves into these digital spaces. This expression, or gesture of life-writing, is predetermined and formatted for us. We subject ourselves, against our better interests, to the embodied effects of "living" within these digital spaces. Formatted as human capital within the colonial interface, we are measured, modulated, segregated, enraged, captured, "normalized", "cleaned", sold, and redistributed once again. This process habituates our bodies to act in accordance with the screen's demands, to think in accordance with its hierarchy of principles. Autofiction allows me to both grapple with the internalized effects of this interface process, as well as, take back authorship, reformat, and reconfigure—rewrite—this experience.

Additionally, everything about life systems on earth tells us that we demand a set of relations much more complex than what is offered by current colonial or imperial fictions. So, in this sense, for this project, fiction is only as good as the worlds it opens

up, not reproduces. It because of this that the narrative aesthetic I chose to work through for this is:

### Gloria Anzaldúa's reading of the Aztec myth Coyolxauhqui.

Anzaldúa's work begins from the position that writing is a transformative process. It changes you. It grapples directly with space and identity. Anzaldúa meant for her work to provide as a means for other women of color to give story to who they are within political structures and how they affect their bodies. Importantly, I draw on this model not to align my struggle with or appropriate Anzaldúa's—nor anyone else's. But specifically due to the way her frameworks and pedagogy also offer a means for me to contend with the resonances of *ego conquiro* within myself, a means of contending with both individual and collective shadows as they present in my experience of difference. It allowed me to speak story; to touch others with the reality I was encountering which was, intimate, unsettling, disorienting and deeply didactic.

Anzaldúa's reading of Coyolxauhqui, is ultimately about identity formation and transformation and embracing change and creativity as fundamental. It performs diffraction as ongoing stage of positioning and de-positioning of the self. This process is demanding, difficult, and never fully accomplished. So, I took these two concepts of disorientation and diffraction and read them through an Anzaldúan autofiction, through the Coyolxauhqui imperative or path of *conocimiento* which Anzaldúa describes in her work in *Light in the Dark*.

Anzaldúa asserts that the seven stages on the path of *conocimiento* are never fully completed but perpetually enacted. They also overlap and often occur simultaneously. It is not a resolution but an iteratively unfolding space for healing and transforming. A process by which a dismembered body becomes re-membered. It is the rupture that destroys us, splinters reality and leaves us suspended above the pieces, but it's also the act of creatively and intentionally putting those pieces back together.

The Blackfish Rising fictions that accompany this text are reflections of the various stages of this Coyolxauhqui imperative, this path to *conocimiento*.

This journey in the text is guided by what I've called the Blackfish rising.

Because this process is not linear, stages of *conocimiento* are messy and overlapping back and forths of confronting shadows and imaginatively rewriting. The ability to stay open, to listen deeply, to move between forms and states, requires a certain acceptance of complexity and contradiction. An acceptance of change as both death and creation. *Nepantlera*'s understand that only by accepting ourselves as interface for change, as entangled relational movement and creative inertia, only then can we come into our power.

Holding space in this transition, this threshold is difficult. Its rattling. Its uncomfortable. But accepting the complexity, understanding the necessity of companions, of support, of a sense of connectedness that helps us travel through these stages helps us to embrace the multiplicities we contain within ourselves. Blackfish in this text are just such threshold beings and spirits. They are the *nepantlera*'s or walkers between worlds ruptured and splayed out before us in stages one and two of the path to *conocimiento*.

Stage One is the rupture or *arrebato*, what depositions us out our habitual orientations in the world, jerks us out of the habit, explodes the template. Stage Two is *la nepantla*: the libidinal space where we are in-between who we were before we encountered this rupture in perspective and what comes after. It's the point with which we are staring down at our fractured bodies and culture, our splintered reality, but not yet called into action.

*Nepantla* is an iterative state experienced in-between all stages, it is the most recurring state on the path of *conocimiento*.

This is what I describe in *Manic millennials*: the disillusion and disorientation brought about by growing up amidst the contradiction of a globalized promise and threat as *nepantla* youth. Specifically, it attempts to highlight the dynamics of a cognitive development marked by the emergence of the world wide web and internet mediated communication: the explosion of social relations and societal shifts interface ripped across the world—but also the ways we internalize the struggle against the invasion of our private worlds and reification of experience. It draws attention to how these changes

stimulated a wave of global civil uprisings (led by youth and students) that indicate a persistent wailing, an intuitive yearning and reaching for a different kind of world.

In Stage Three or Bullethead I move from nepantla to desconocimiento. The consciousness of darkness, the underworld, the depression, if nepantla is disorientation, desconocimientos is the regressive and self-preserving impulse to reground. It is the shadow beast within ourselves that lures or lulls us into isolatory feelings of guilt, shame, depression or despair, in order to avoid responsibility. But Shadows have things to teach us, discomfort is a message: poetics, creative enactment, teaches us how to be receptive.

Bullethead is about contending with ignorance, shadows, fear, and the coloniality of selfhood and difference—in its close it is a highlighting of how myth both frees us and cages us. *Subtext* in this section unfolds contemplations on race, gender, and diffracted difference (where history= past/present/future). I weave stories of Mexican ancestors and friendships through the hardening of the Mexico/US border and US Imperialism through my experiences of the privileges and assimilatory demands of colonial whiteness.

Stage Four and Five take place in Flight of the Portuguese Sparrow. This stage is the call to action; the experience that catalyzes transformation. It's also the stage where we start putting Coyolxauhqui together. We don't necessarily reconcile so much as reconfigure our relationality to knowledge. Here too, FPS is about deep, dark pain. The kind that makes us avoid eye contact. That's hard for us to look at. The kind that is a result of complete annihilation of humanity, of giving. So deep it triggers our defense and fight or flight responses. We hide from this pain we see in others because to look, to make eye contact with these wounds, would require us to bear witness to the resonances of this pain within ourselves.

FPS is also a meditation on the experience of change brought about by love in this context; and contending with the way coloniality impedes on all of our most intimate relationships and experiences, polluting and delimiting our capacity to care for and give to one another and ourselves. It centers the idea that coloniality perverts one of the most fundamental relations to being within and of the world: giving.

Not a Woman but a Shaman is about becoming the bridge, healing, and developing languages for cultural regeneration and social change through returning to natural systems. It sketches an understanding of “our-self” or collective-identity through narratives that speak of trees, water, and waves. It is a meditation on recognizing ourselves as the water, not the wave; or, understanding our natural capacity for love and transformation. Most importantly it ties this state to our ability to recognize the significance of our own performances in the world, and dreaming as a collective task we must engage in order to change.

Stage 6 and 7 is this final story but also this entire work and the conversation and insights it offers those who encounter and engage with it. One of the outcomes of this project is how it has provided me a liberating relationship to language that is vitally necessary for both dismantling oppressive orientations and reviving and reconfiguring affectedness. It created the space for me to engage discomfort and better understand its resistances; and suggests we find equilibrium through motion, through enactment, through stepping into unknowns and embracing discomfort as a fundamental to relations of diffraction.

This project suggests a literacy we are desperately in need of is one that returns us to the human condition; a radical pedagogy centered on critical intimacy and emotional intelligence; one that provides us a means of attending to existential poverty; to the rupture and to the transition. An offering, it was meant to be an experience with and through others:

So, I hope you consider this an invitation, to step into the shadows; stay with the trouble; to reach through the wound to connect; to completely rupture and reconfigure your senses. May this offering help you too identify ego conquiso's resonances.

## Prelude

### CONTACT:

I PRESS MY FINGERS AGAINST IT. FEEL THE COOL INDIFFERENCE. NOT QUITE FLEXIBILITY NOT QUITE RESISTANCE.

I SLIDE MY HAND ACROSS THE SURFACE, FEELING FOR CRACKS AND IMPERFECTIONS. ALIVE BENEATH MY PALM THIS SUPERFICIAL DISAFFECTION. OBSCURED FROM SENSATION, SAVED FROM INSURRECTION. YOU CAN LOOK BUT DON'T TOUCH, DON'T FEEL, WE HAVEN'T TIME FOR INTERCONNECTEDNESS.

IF I LAY MY HAND JUST RIGHT AGAINST THE WALLS OF EXPERIENCE, I CAN FEEL THE VIBRATIONS OF OTHERS, ARTIFICIALLY ESTRANGED AND DELETERIOUS. A FUNNY THING, THE WAYS WE ARE TAUGHT TO UNFEEL THE HUMAN IMPRINT. CAREFULLY ATOMIZED REALITY, MEDIATED EXISTENCE. I OVER OTHER, DETACHMENT'S PRECONDITION.

STANDING AT THE THRESHOLD, PRESSING AGAINST THE SURFACE. SEARCHING FOR CONTACT, RECIPROCAL PURPOSE.

### Interface

This research emerged from an interest in the way “interface” of the 21st century have come to structure communication and experience and how we might design interface, as a communication tool, differently. The problem with this framing, as I quickly learned, is that the interface I was concerned with is less a distinct object and more an assemblage of historical socio-technical processes.

The definitions of interface are twofold and force the term's application into either abstract concepts of engagement or loosely described computational processes. As a noun, interface can be described as point of interaction between two or more, subjects, systems, or groups. In computing interface is a device or program, an effect, that allows for human-computer interaction. In the abstract interface is interaction, connection, translation, communication—or what some scholars have called an effect, process, or set of cognitive relations or aesthetic regimes (Bratton, 2015 p229; Drucker, 2014 p157-158; Galloway, 2012 p31-33)

Web applications like Facebook, news and information sites like Wikipedia, search engines like Google, and streaming content sites like YouTube or Spotify all deploy application programming interfaces (API's) that are driven by software and hardware programming languages; algorithms, network principles and data classification systems; and HCI engineering and design protocols. Each of which house their own instances of interface within an application's programmed purpose. In short, interface is never just a screen, it is always an enacted multi-textual and multi-authored phenomenon manifest by a multitude of social actors and interests at various points within experienced and obfuscated processes.

Interface also pervade and intrude upon us in less obvious ways, the structure of say, a research thesis, as well, is a form of interface. A process of translating information. The SFU institution, indeed the School of Communication, are each their own layer of interface, their own filter for knowledge. Identity too, is a knowledge filter. Where again interface proliferate, as the available modes of being and associative cultural objects and subjects within a society construct the parameters for identity and as such, for knowing.

Subsequently, much of what we do, how we communicate, read, see, and experience our everyday realities has become increasingly mediated by the ever-abstracted systems of representation offered by various forms of interface technologies. Thus, interface act as powerful disclosing agents for collective knowledge and social relations. These technologies, be they material or discursive, are value laden and entangled with social and cultural programs of a given subject/world; projecting particular figurations of human subjectivity and ontological horizons. We live within and through these components. They habituate our bodies and demand particular performances of us for engagement.

Due to the way interface act as points of integration into larger more complex, socio-technic systems of society, who we are within these political structures become important sites of study and intervention. This research has unfolded alongside what some have called unprecedented or 'biblical' cultural and global developments. The United States 2016 election, the UK's abrupt exit from the European Union, the rise of extremist



political groups, ever advancing environmental catastrophes, a resurgence of identity politics, ongoing protests for environmental and racial injustice, and a global pandemic have all occurred during the course of this project. Likewise, an explosion of scholarly interest and critique emerged in reference to the internet and its subsequent role in the aforementioned socio-political ruptures.

Rigorous analysis have been made with regards to the way the data and network practices that underlie internet experience exacerbate inequalities and oppression by the contributions of Safiya Umoja Noble (2018), Virginia Eubanks (2018), Ruha Benjamin (2019) danah boyd and Kim Crawford (2012), and Cathy O’Neil (2017); as well, Nick Srnicek (2016), Tarleton Gillespie (2018), Taina Bucher (2018), and Sarah T Roberts (2019) have all pointed to the power of platform technologies to alter (and impede) public discourse and cultural production. Scholars like Angela Nagle (2017), Yochai Benkler (2018), Rebecca Lewis (2018), Whitney Phillips (2018) and Siva Vaidhyanathan (2018) have shown how this media landscape has been coopted by political extremists and undermined democracy. All of this work, manifest within the whirlwind of the last 4 years, has rightfully and crucially highlighted how the libertarian dreams of Silicon Valley have produced a spiraling socio-political nightmare.

This project builds off these insights collectively and departs from their constructivist and deconstructivist approaches, as well as, moves away from scholarly tendencies to map, dissect, critique or pathologize, the effects of interface technologies. While these insights and approaches are vitally important if we are to learn anything from our contemporary moment, it is that what is being demanded of us is a dynamic and profound shift that cannot be grappled with by the adjustment of mere methodological or epistemological standpoints; not by way of mere inclusions of additional “data”; through solely the inclusion of female, queer or Black and Indigenous voices—for they have always already been present and wailing. Crucially, this work recognizes that though biblical times for some, for others with arguably longer living relations and ancestral memory, the apocalypse has long already been upon us. Life has already been, for upwards of six centuries, a living death. Thus, this project asserts that what is being demanded of us is a fundamental shift in how we orient ourselves toward knowledge and knowledge-making

in light of, indeed, in motion with, these voices. Read: the problem before us isn't one of information but ontology.

Interface blurs the lines of reality, imposing particular configurations of human subjectivity and agency, warping our sense of collectivity and interconnectedness. To study such a phenomenon outside of it is to disengage from and under examine these lived and embodied effects completely. Nobody exists outside of the effects of globally networked society; indeed, we encounter and live out its repercussions daily. Thus, from the outset, this project has concerned itself with just this gap in research. Committing to a certain refusal to separate theory from practice, and most certainly a refusal to separate identity from scholarship, it instead engages practices of thinking with and from within imaginaries antithetical to representational models: namely, through nonbinary theorizing and decolonial commitments.

First, drawing on the work of Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2008, 2011, 2017, 2021), Tara McPherson (2018), Ruha Benjamin (2019), Simone Browne (2015), Virginia Eubanks (2018), Sharene Razack (2015), Ariella Azoulay (2019) and Karen Barad (2007) in *The Fever: Mirrors, Maps, and Sameness: The Representational Model*, it shows how the development of computational systems has emerged out of a liberal representationalist model of thought, predicated on a master/slave dynamic that subjugates difference and is dependent upon segregated and discriminatory practices mimetic, in theory and practice, to colonial regimes of imperialism and gendered and racialized Otherness. Such deep roots within a colonial system of knowledge and habit of being reveal how mirrors, maps, and sameness, baked in processes by which we come to understand our world and each-other, are the byproduct of “New World” agendas that relegate (and as such, depoliticizes) present/future violence to the past and foreclose our ability to respond to our historical inheritance.

The violence and destruction of the rigid ubiquity of such “universal” systems plagues nearly every sector of our world: be it by information silo and communicative echo chamber, institutionalized research framework and metrics for “success,” modulatory disciplinary rhetoric and citation politics, or democratic or other collectively held public

imaginaries for togetherness—the imperialism of these systems in all their enunciative authority presents a fictitious “everybody”; “people; or “subject” that brackets away and effectively sanctions the experience of others’, both their violence and potentialities (Azoulay, 2019 p5). Thus, this work seeks to deliberate undo and trouble the stories behind such ontological habitus by disrupting its givenness at all three aforementioned levels.

Second, due to the way interface in its present form, forecloses imaginaries and ontological horizons, estranges identity from being—fixing what is actually a performative multiplicity, and filters the self through a both metaphorical and technically prescriptive screen—it has no means of engaging difference as a self-collective relation. It prefigures agency through an illusion of control that in the wake of global pandemics, rising sea levels, polarized publics, and pollutant information landscapes, is laid bare. So accustomed to its prefigured plans and narratives this sudden disjointedness from a cultural and existential center provides an unprecedented ontological opening. Thus, I engage directly the space in-between, the rupture, brought about by this moment and the offerings of pre- and decolonial, indigenous, nonbinary, and non-western philosophy and thought

It situates its approach through the theoretical landscape offered by, in *The Wound*, Emmanuel Levinas (1990; 1989), Enrique Dussel (1993), Anibal Quijano (2007), Franz Fanon (1986), Maldonado-Torres (2007; 2016), Walter Dignolo (2001; 2013), and Jose Salvidar (2007); and in *Rituals for Healing*: Judith Butler (1988, 1990;1997) Karen Barad (2007), Sarah Ahmed (2006), Audre Lorde (1984), and Gloria Anzaldúa (2014); here also, it aligns its mission with the work of Vanessa Andreotti and those practicing at the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective. My creative practice in *Blackfish Rising* has also been influenced by the Sunday Sermons of Janaya Future Khan<sup>4</sup> and is inspired by the work of artists such as Dani E’Emilia, and the writings and poetry of Leanne Betasomasake Simpson, Alicia Elliot, Ocean Vuong, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Rita Wong and Fred Wah. The collective presence and conocimiento offered by these

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<sup>4</sup> Khan is a Black Lives Matter ambassador, storyteller and activist from LA.

individuals have laid the foundation for my autofictive and poetics-based methods in *Blackfish Rising*.

Rather unapologetically, I make traversing this project via institutionalized norms and expectations<sup>5</sup> tedious. I have found the normalized research thesis structure limiting, suffocating, and incompatible in many ways to commitments to social justice and cultural change. Should the format and presentation of this research aggravate or otherwise trouble the reader rest assured this is very much the point. I am not asking your permission to transgress formalities, I am directly condemning and subverting their assumed (read: undoubtedly marked) neutrality. I deliberately reject the authority of authorship and problematics of objective translations of research processes by quite literally taking audiences with me through the entire bodily writing process.

I do not divorce my experience from my research, but rather make every effort of weaving the specificities of it into the work itself as means of more intimately understanding the layered and entangled performativity of difference. I do not separate emotion, spirituality, or identity from my work, as doing so would only serve to extend

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<sup>5</sup> Readers may find the length of this MA thesis to surpass institutionalized requirements and may be inclined to object or request condensation of its elements. To such positions this work states the following: I am here because academics is supposed to be about public service, about bettering society; and this is the one place I can take the problems faced by my community and receive the resources, guidance, and intellectual autonomy (in theory) to research solutions. I am here to uplift my community. The length of this thesis speaks more to the ways I wanted to make a degree of this work accessible to those outside of academics, to reach those otherwise barred from this opportunity and experience. The narrative structure of my methods takes the place of typical research practice, which means I don't have a summarized research analysis section typical of a standard thesis, this in tangent with the fact that one of the purposes of the project was to be inclusive of a nonacademic audience during the research process, means my methods section is much longer than typical theses. More pointedly, the length stipulation as a measure of the research thesis, is itself a colonial object. Condensation purely for the sake of upholding these standards projects and supports the exact kind of knowledge that this thesis from the start, has set out to undermine and depart. Hence, I ask, that to the best of your ability, in order to engage authentically in this offering for unlearning, you leave, as they say, your colonial habits "at the door". Lastly, to think 'we', students, perceive ourselves as having 'time' to pursue interests further, goes against all of the impositions we as young people are contending with in the world. We might 'have time' if weren't implicated by racist, sexist and imperialist agendas that subjugate and distort our own experiences; we might 'have time' if we weren't bearing the weight of our ancestors, of our polluted environment and cultural inheritance; we might 'have time' if we remain complacent within privilege—but even this, is an illusion: *the only time we can ever have or possess, is now*. Normalize changing research standards for students, do not to contain them within templates but create space for their expansiveness. Let young people lead and dismantle barriers to experiences of difference. Concern yourselves with how you are creating space for change, not upholding habits of colonial institutions.

the status quo of severing such embodied and experiential knowledge, from reality-- delegitimizing of a host of other ways of knowing and our common human experience. Such defaults have only served to concretize and cement over historical trauma, projecting and protecting the fiction that coloniality and its violence has no spatial or temporal continuity and can as such be, albeit with forbearance and pacifying acknowledgement, archived.

Thus, this work in closing suggests that intervention must engage where such histories play out most readily: within bodies and across borders. It queers boundaries and suggests that togetherness, like rules, is always already within. Furthermore, it exemplifies, how a return to the body makes plain the decoupling of emotions from politics, pedagogy, and knowledge is not only a violent affront and obstruction to notions of equitability, justice, regeneration, and collectivity—but also a perversion of our collectively held communicative and reciprocal human condition. So, in order to intervene upon the world, to manifest change and de-orient habituated colonial ontologies that manifest in our interface technologies and likewise in social relations, we must decalcify our uniquely human capability to creatively dream. This begins first and foremost, by grappling with and understanding the depth of coloniality's reach within ourselves.

So, I invite you to partake in reading and engaging with this work in whatever way suits you. Should the reader find themselves unfamiliar with current critical media studies landscape and desiring concrete framework with which to link interface, identity, and representational ontology I suggest beginning with *The Fever: Mirrors, Maps, and Sameness: The Representational Model*. This provides an overview of the critical media studies, algorithmic studies, and science and technology studies that have informed this work.

Should the reader be interested in the pivot away from “traditional” canons of critical theory, the coloniality of being, and the decolonial turn I suggest beginning with *The Wound: On the Coloniality, of the Cartesian-Colonial habit of being*. Here, I provide a basis for understanding how colonial non-ethics of war and imperialism frame knowledge

and “modern” education and situate the decolonial turn as the necessary antithesis neglected by western philosophy and contemporary theorizing of interface.

For nonbinary theorizing and models for manifesting a decolonial horizon, see *Rituals for Healing: Disorienting ontology: queer performance, decoloniality & fiction, fissures and cracks*. Here I lay the foundation for my methods and illustrate how the educative discomfort and disorientation offered by fictive and poetic writing can support a generative stream of connections that viscerally activates a sense of relationality, entanglement, responsibility and care.

For more in-depth details on my methods see both *The Blackfish Rising* fictions and *Methods* part III *Becoming Blackfish* respectively. If you want to feel your way through begin with the former, for the author’s process, reflections, and insights first begin with the latter. For my research reflection and next steps see: the Closing Meditation: *Manifesting the Bridge: Blackfish, Art, and coalition building through creative performance*.

If you, despite all of the above, would still prefer the ground linearity seemingly provides, read sequentially in the order I have listed.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> URL for Fictions: <http://hannah-holtzclaw.squarespace.com/research/readmetxt>

**The Fever:**

**Mirrors, Maps, Sameness, the imperialism of liberal  
representational models**

these lines don't extend my skin

they burn where they cross over.

flesh singed by the latticeworks of the grid.

matter and meaning leave marks on a body

Patterns of the un/fitted.

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un/aligned.

un/configured.

dis/enabled.

beings of the chasm,

where silence is codified

into the spatial

somewhere amongst the inbetweens,

of existential perforation,

of matter/ing and meaning.

o v e r a n d o v e r a n d o v e r,

i bleed.

almighty immanence

diffractive infinite.

blood pools and dries,

matters of difference

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harden beneath my feet.



Representationalism is grounded in the notion that there are pre-existing and absolute boundaries between subjects and objects and that knowledge about the world is made manifest through holding and reflecting upon objects at a distance. Likewise, it assumes that words mirror things, are free of distortion, and have a linear, mimetic relation to their origin (Barad, 2007 p89). It operates upon an epistemological and ontological binary that understands relations as interactions taking place between atomized and separate units of agency. The basis for communication in this dynamic relies upon consensus or pure, fixed and determinate meanings read against one another (ibid).

We find it in Newtonian principles and Enlightenment ideals of cartesian subjectivity, which insists on a binary system of knowledge of absolute separation of interior/exterior and words/things, where knowledge about the world is encapsulated in absolute characteristics, pure forms, and indeed “original positions”. Scientific objectivity and instrumental rationality (and their associative practices and tools) emerge as far-reaching progeny of a model of thought that enacts a false cut between subjects and nature, positioning us as outside of the world we seek to understand. We see this in the classification systems that undergird and ground the machine learning processes of search engine algorithms, its present in the network maps that presume relation on the basis of mimesis and sameness, and its binary conceptually orients our knowledge producing institutions as well as social and technological development by presenting knowing as a secure, measurable and representable force to be defined and accurately replicated—rather than experienced, embodied, relational and ever-changing. It requires an erasure of socio-material arrangements, the local conditions required or closed down during knowledge producing practices, and masks the fact that certain concepts and ideas obtain meaning or significance at the exclusion of others (ibid p89-93). Put plainly, representationalism is about power.

Barad reminds us that it is not enough to think of variables in scientific practice like gender, race, or class as merely *included* in analysis. For the crux of the matter is not representational inclusion but power and how it is understood (ibid p60). How does race, gender, or class come to matter? How do the effects of differences come to matter? As a quantum physics theorist, Barad sees matter and meaning as ultimately always engaged

in sets of material-discursive agential entanglements. These material-discursive components act as orientation devices, apparatus that embody particular concepts and values at the necessary exclusion of others and enact the cuts that produce subject-object distinctions; i.e difference (ibid p120). Difference takes on meaning in relation to the agencies of its observation, its measurement practices. An enactment of boundaries and as such, also constitutive exclusions. Such exclusions require us to accountably attend to the indefinite nature of boundaries and the contingency of difference and how such exclusions and absences come to matter in the structure of matter(ing) and meaning (ibid p184).

Representationalism's elimination and subjugation of difference allows it to disassociate with the way it reproduces inequality, injustice, and violence as a knowledge-producing practice. As an embedded ontological foundation this enframing found across interface assemblages—whether it be philosophy, scientific method, or liberal institution—fundamentally denies the interconnectedness of the world and puts in place a binary logic of self/other, man/nature, here/there. No such distinctions or separations exist in any other place but the mind. Such is the paradox, the illusion, the myth of cartesian subjectivity and its absolute separation of interior/exterior, inside/outside, and man/nature dichotomies. Phenomena, of any material-discursive capacity in the world don't occur in clearly divided binaries of past/present, us/them, win/loss, right/left, nature/social. Phenomena emerge from relations between and amongst entangled human and nonhuman conditions, the ebbs and flows of the many. It is this relational imperative, this human condition, that makes up our collective existence, our doing here on earth, and likewise in the virtual.

Consequently, when we speak of representationalism's binary gaze we are also speaking of the power relations and violence that this system of knowledge engenders, as it is this ontological enframing that bleeds through interface paradigms as a regulatory practice of their production. This section illustrates how the representational language of science is an inherently colonial habit that imposes particular resonances upon publics and individuals. It is crucial to our understanding of difference in a representationalist context, that we recognize this model of thought has developed along the historical axis

of power provided explicitly by a colonial and patriarchal system. This is because what is often left out of critiques of modernity is a sustained engagement with the impositions of this imperial interface on being and the restraints and limitations it places on our learning. Hence, this section begins with drawing on the work of feminist science and technology studies and critical media and technology scholars to illustrate the symptoms (i.e the fever) of the colonial habit within contemporary interface technologies.

Later, in *The Wound*, it connects the Us/Them, here/there, Othering ethics of separatism and eugenic sameness embedded within modern technologies to the colonial presupposition of knowledge production. Through the work of decolonial and postcolonial theorists it emphasizes how liberal or western philosophy and science institutionalizes certain imperial and colonial postures and assumptions that exploit the human condition and perverts our understanding of the world, short-circuiting our learning and fostering hostile environments to difference. This orientation within the world positions us as always outside of the world we live within, certifying a certain estrangement from nature (to be understood as both human and nonhuman “others”; their various forms of life and intelligence and our place within such practicing forms of difference and liveliness as necessary, distinct components to its creative energy and life force) by orienting all that we encounter as objects to be conquered; to be beaten or instrumentalized into a state of subservient submission.

Racism, sexism, and classism are the by-products of imperial grammars and colonial positions. To address these constructed biases outside of their original conditions is to misunderstand coloniality and imperialism as a priori formatting systems: as emerging from *ego conquiro*'s non-ethics of war and presupposition. Situating liberal academic institutions *and* scientific research practice within the colonial habit of being illustrates how decoloniality is the necessary antithesis to current knowledge producing practices. Where antiracist and feminist policy positions provide triage treatment for marginalized BIPOC and women, by definition and by virtue of their epistemic emergence, they remain chained to liberal politics of recognition<sup>7</sup>. Though these are absolutely necessary

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<sup>7</sup> Liberal politics of recognition seek to pacify and neutralize claims of redistribution or reparation because they begin from the position that those ‘marginalized’ by its gaze need only adapt themselves to

tools for understanding and teaching, what the decolonial turn provides is a means of moving beyond the horizon of “in opposition” toward the expansive potential laden within the shared human condition—most importantly—through doing, or performance from *within* diffracted relations of difference. Decoloniality ushers in practices by which we can come to theorize and interface justice, dignity, and nonbinary relations of epistemic difference (as discussed in *Rituals for Healing*). But first, the symptoms: how representationalism (as a colonial knowledge) presents in digital interface systems—or, how interface reproduces the colonized subject.

### Othering Machines and Cartesian Cuts

Representationalism’s ontological foundation extends through and across interfacial components. Embedded within HCI, AI, network, and data sciences, interface becomes the name for a set of contingently enacted network cuts occurring in accordance with sociomaterial design practices that reduce real-world phenomena to nodes and edges and engage the measurable predictability of efficiency and sameness as formal process (Suchman, 2006 p268). These processes obstruct and impede communication systems in the following ways: in distancing and severing subjects from the local-conditions and procedures that drive and produce interface experience; artificially estranging publics from collective agency through atomized (dis)empowerment; and polarizing interaction through the recursive and segregated pursuit of sameness.

In the freedom-filled but ultimately failed promises of cyberspace digital technologies have not resolved racialized and gendered inequalities (as alleged by silicon valley

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“modernity”—in effect reproducing colonial and imperial logic by emptying recognition of reciprocity and mutual respect. This Lorde also makes this arraignment in *Sister Outside* with regards to white feminism (referenced in this section later on) (1984) as well as Glen Coulthard in *Red Skin White Masks* (2014) and through the work of Sherene Razack in *Dying From Improvement* (2015); but as well, these politics are embedded, made automatic, by network principles and components like correlation methods and proxies—as highlighted by Chun (2021), where race, sexuality, gender and class figure as ‘latent factors’ for recommendation systems (ibid p201) but on the basis of a politics of recognition steeped in eugenic western white supremacy. This link made by Chun is important because the absence of redistribution, or as she writes, “recognition as a way to prevent redistribution—has become the rallying call of the reactionary right” (Chun, 2021 p257) where through the embrace of stigma, and “dis-identifying with the “enemy”, as Chun writes, “[a]lienation [becomes] utopian exile” (ibid p272). Where racism, sexism, and classism are never eliminated, but rather, the colonized subject becomes more acute, as the edges of difference are sharpened and weaponized for further exploitation and division.

provocateurs) but instead instantiated new more obscured regimes of social control (Chun, 2008, 2011; Galloway, 2012). This logic of “programmability” has both historical and present day manifestations beyond the screen in systems of governance, economics, science, and sociality: where such a habit is problematized by the ways it has become automated, invisible, and deeply personal and affectively charged; drawing attention to the destructive notion of progress presented with every wave of “new media” and additionally, the ways with which at every layer of design, these technologies have default assumptions and discriminatory histories baked into their developmental structures (Apprich et al., 2019; Chun, 2008, 2011, 2017, 2021).

To begin, this section outlines computational programming languages, data capture and classification systems, and network and engineering principles as they pertain to technical interface assemblages and the aforementioned communication problems they impose. It then pivots to show how these themes should be understood not as isolated computational phenomenon, but rather in relation with, and the far reaching progeny of, the broader cultural paradigm of their emergence—cartesian-colonial subjectivity. Drawing on Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, Tara McPherson, Simone Browne, Ruha Benjamin, Sherene H. Razack, Virginia Eubanks, Ariella Azoulay and Karen Barad, it makes the link between the material-discursive components of interface: representationalism and objective universality to the necessary violence of rendering residual, “remanant” or “unruly” categories to the peripheral or ‘past’: a spatial and temporal strategy of imperial logic and the colonial habit, enacted through what Ariella Azoulay (2019) terms the imperial shutter.

#### Historical Programming:

Both Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Tara McPherson have outlined the history of digital computational developments of the 1950’s-1980’s, as emerging within a post-WWII cultural context accompanied by changing attitudes toward race, as well as gendered and militarial computational labor. McPherson, makes an explicit connection to the rise of personal computing systems and the changing attitudes toward race that also took place during this time period. The cold war context, adjacent domestic unrest in the United

States, produced a climate where race was instrumentalized in order to maintain support for conflicts abroad. Overt racism was undermining war efforts, and as such, more covert mechanisms of oppression emerged. Both race and computation represent a turn to modular forms of knowledge that privileges fragmentation and separation. More explicitly, it projects a way of seeing and experiencing the world in discrete modules or levels, through the suppression of context and interrelatedness (McPherson, 2018 p52-55). At a structural level, this model underscores a worldview, where disruptive troublesome parts, can be rendered to the peripheral and omitted from larger global processes, as to maintain order of the system (ibid p55). When outliers threaten the system as a whole, modularity and encapsulation ensures the management and control of complexity, smoothing out disruptions by “cleanly” segregating one “neighbor” from another. (ibid p66). Both McPherson and Chun, demonstrate how the dual arrival of the World Wide Web as a mass communication and information resource, and the identity politics of the postmodern era (in the theoretical, not prescriptive tense) developed in symbiosis with wider more sweeping efforts to manage the public sphere and populations (Mcpherson, 2018 p. 81; Chun, 2021). Hence, the “freedom” filled promises of cyberspace, materialized as the reduction of freedom to control<sup>8</sup> (Chun, 2008).

Similarly, and in more detail, Chun illustrates how computing technology evolved in response to an already preconceived fixation with a biopolitics of rationalization and optimization of human populations and capital; of which, evolving alongside and within its contemporary neoliberal context, this fixation finds its basis in enlightenment rationality, “that knowing leads to control”, whereby the internet and computers have

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<sup>8</sup> In control and freedom Chun, drawing on Lacan’s linking of autonomy and paranoia, demonstrates how freedom as a discourse of complete autonomy is what facilitates the current conflation of freedom with security (Chun, 2008 p262). Chun links this to discourses of racial equality and facial recognition systems, of which were alleged to remove human error or “racial profiling” and act as a control mechanism for (just post 9/11) national security. But such systems and discourses of freedom they’re associated, are intimately tied, as Chun shows, to race and colonialism through language. Drawing again on Lacan and Franz Fanon, Chun details how freedom as paranoid control claims to eradicate racism but ultimately : “through language, the colonizer “fixes” the colonized inferior” as she writes, “freedom becomes what you cannot not want—not only because the desire for freedom is everywhere but also because those seeking to “free” do not allow anyone else to want anything else. There is no other choice than their , which is the freedom to be an individual—to exceed one’s culture in order to become incorporate into a global market” (ibid p274) So, we dissolve ourselves into cyberspace, a system we neither designed nor can intervene in, for promises of freedom that ultimately render as social control.

exploded enlightenment thought “by literalizing it” (Chun, 2011 p6). Liberal principles of blind self-interest and freedom produce certain forms of governmentality that operationalize biopolitical power through (executively and scientifically) institutionalized action. This stimulated the conception of computing technology as a central mechanism for institutionalized population management.

Chun extends this link at multiple levels: showing in, *Programmed Visions*, how source code becomes something like judicial process or law, by converting action into language and becoming, she writes, “every lawyer’s dream of what law should be: automatically enabling and disabling certain actions, functioning at the level of everyday practice” (2011, p27). Additionally, Chun shows how the commercialization of computer programming, is tied explicitly to the shift into neoliberal governmentality: “Software, through programming languages that stem from a gendered system of command and control, creates an invisible system of visibility, a system of causal pleasure” (ibid p18), whereby pleasure is derived in explicit relation to the hierarchies embedded within the machine—or more generally those legitimized and carried out historically (ibid p34). This causal pleasure driven by gamified fantasies of the neo-liberal Sovereign, hoodwinks both programmers and users, master’s and slaves alike, Chun writes, “through automation as both empowerment and enslavement and through repetition as both mastery and hell” (ibid p41).

This is further problematized, as Chun details, in automatic and higher-level programming, which “erases the vicissitudes of execution and the institutional and technical structures needed to ensure the coincidence of source code and its execution” (ibid p21). Such an erasure ushers in the conflation of data and information, and subsequently, information with knowledge. Where source code, in all its commanding authority, Chun writes, creates an environment where the computer, program or user becomes the source of meaning (ibid, p53). Hence, Chun illustrates how software as axiom, or “source code as fetish”, “fastens in place a certain neoliberal logic of cause and effect, based on the erasure of execution” (ibid p 49). A self-evident form of propositioning that forecloses other readings and interpretations in the name of its own artificially constructed horizon, a “programmability”, “that itself relies on distorting real

social relations into material givens” in the same way capitalism transforms the labor and sociality of individuals into the reproduction of capital (ibid p50). Chun’s work illustrates how software is endemic (and indeed vital) to contemporary trends in neoliberalism, creating “modes of “governing” that make governing both more personal and impersonal, that enable both empowerment and surveillance, and indeed make it difficult to distinguish between the two” (ibid p58).

Participation and Interactivity: master/slave servitudes of the small-s sovereign.

Contemporary society sees the continuation of this program, to its most extreme places. As McPherson and Chun’s work both elude, identity politics finds a certain resolve (or subjugation) in the modular practices provided by the internet. Offering a placating outlet for the confusion and disorientation brought about by postmodernism and the destabilization of ideology to be funneled into and resolved within<sup>9</sup>. The parameters for interaction sanctioned by interface produces an environment where the assumption of the sovereign individual, despite such disorientation, remains secure by atomizing experience and veiling underlying processes in such a way that interactive participation renders experientially, as agency.

Interactive principles such as direct manipulation and volitional mobility hardwire ideological interpellation by replacing commands with participatory structures (Chun, 2011 p63). Through volitional mobility, users engage in activities of mapping their individual social reality against the totality of “cyberspace” (ibid p75). This positions individuals as above and outside of the world, rather than implicated by and a part of it. User, as subject, encounters the world, as Object, where the inside/outside binary of cartesian subjectivity is made technical. Direct manipulation provides an illusion of empowerment through the manipulation of cultural and conceptual objects, the chasing of facts and truths hyper link to hyper link; the magical manifestation of social connection

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<sup>9</sup> Drawing on the work of Frederic Jameson, Chun illustrates how postmodernism experienced as spatial dysfunction, has a certain disorienting and disconcerting effect on our comprehension (2011, p.72). Such effects, amplify the already cumbersome and challenging feat of understanding the relation between authentic experience and truth (ibid p72-73).



and individual preferences concretized through participatory structures, all contribute to the illusion of user's actions being the transparent cause of interface's experiential effects.

By producing users who believe they are the source of their computers actions, they “buttress notions of personal action, freedom and responsibility” (ibid p74), while masking the fact that we are not the only agents contributing to our interface experience. Chun postulates that such interactions have forged upon us certain expectations regarding cause and effect, whilst also offering us experiences of power and pleasure. A “liberating”, or rather seemingly liberating, means of navigating a complex neoliberal context that seduces us into believing its agency, and as we will see, its affordances for cultural sight, is transferable into other contexts (ibid p92). This “empowerment” is stimulated by the illusion of individual control, by replacing commands with participatory structures and fostering feelings of mastery (ibid p62-64). All the while, the central processes for computation, the means with which manipulation is made possible for user experience, are rendered invisible, imperceptibly “daemonic” (ibid p88). So, interface, projects “mastery” as an ideal state that is nonetheless merely an affective relationship with both the creation and elimination of uncertainty (ibid p65).

The shift from the internet as military weapon to mass communication platform, marks, as Chun details, the “reduction of freedom to control” (2006). As interpellating, participatory structures the programmability of interface technologies then further governs, forecloses, and prescribes user behavior through big data capture systems and network structures, where, Chun writes, “[t]he media have imploded the social” and “YOU are [now] a character in a drama called Big Data”<sup>10</sup> (ibid p23).

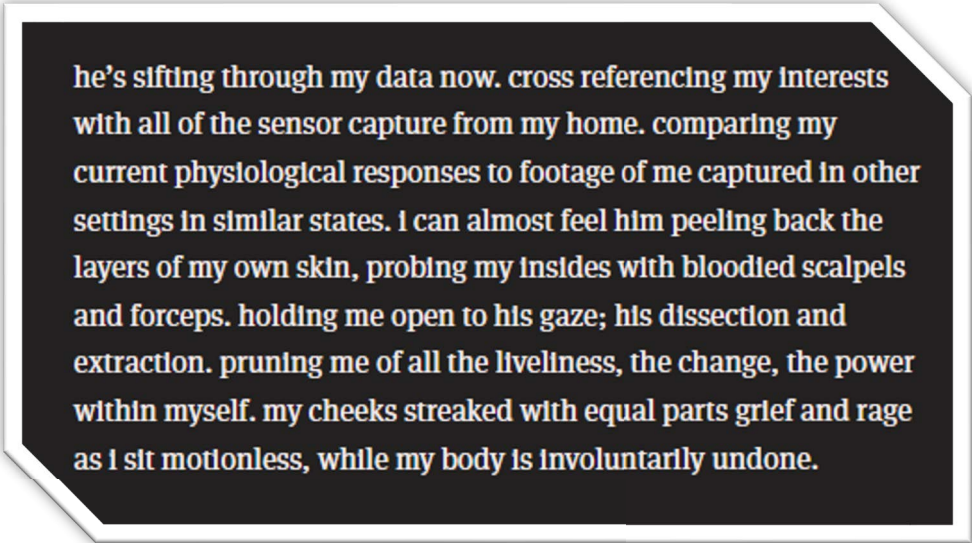
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<sup>10</sup> This drama, Chun writes, marks a transition from “they” (or multiple “I”s) into a both singular and plural “YOU(n): “Whether or not YOU respond, YOU constantly register and are registered—YOUR actions are captured and YOUR silence is made statistically significant through the action of others ‘like YOU...’ YOU register through YOUR habits” (Chun 2017, p23). This transition is facilitated by segregationist principles like homophily.

Data and Proxies: eugenic roots imperial face trace

As mentioned previously, interface is an effect, a process. As users in this space we consume and contribute data, in order to participate in interface processes. This data is then fed back to us via search results and other “recommendation” algorithms for things like news articles, social media accounts, and job postings, and structure our timeline feeds and targeted advertisements as well as a variety of other formulations and analysis of which we may or may not know about. The machine learning and algorithmic systems that belie our interface experiences are explicitly generated off what has come to be known as “big data”.

“Big Data” relies on the quantification of objects and human behaviors that is often beyond the scope of our awareness, and as the previous section detailed, we are often affectively coerced



he's sifting through my data now. cross referencing my interests with all of the sensor capture from my home. comparing my current physiological responses to footage of me captured in other settings in similar states. I can almost feel him peeling back the layers of my own skin, probing my insides with bloodied scalpels and forceps. holding me open to his gaze; his dissection and extraction. pruning me of all the liveliness, the change, the power within myself. my cheeks streaked with equal parts grief and rage as I sit motionless, while my body is involuntarily undone.

**Figure 1: From, Bullethead**

into contributing. The sheer volume of data that make up our digital trace would be overwhelming, nearly impossible to interpret without technical expertise, and drawn from an unsettling range of data capture systems and practices<sup>11</sup>.

Participatory structures and relational principles become further problematized in an information sphere beholden to a neoliberal market <sup>12</sup>model, where rife with avenues for manipulation, attention (read: user data+participation) becomes the currency with which private intermediaries wage possession-based pursuits upon publics. Networks, by design, capture subjects<sup>13</sup>: in such a dynamic, as echoed by the work of Wendy Brown, we become commodified nodes of abstracted systems of financialized data capture, where our figuration as solely human capital ensures that, “equality ceases to be our presumed natural relation with one another” (Brown, 2015 p179). Thus, the YOU(n) hailed by interactive components is always one which extracts and abstracts upon the liveliness of your actions on the sole basis of deriving profit, of funneling, and incentivizing behavior that deepens the divide between corporate companies and disempowered publics.

Furthermore, data only becomes a conceptual object when we choose to engage with it. It has no necessary or inherent form, purpose, value or ideology. Data is “capta”, taken not given (Drucker, 2014 p128; Galloway, 2012 p82-83). Which makes it inherently subjective and context dependent. This notion grinds up against the automation of data capture systems which apply blanket classification systems that ultimately target intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality through allegedly neutral proxies (Chun, 2017 p120, 2021).

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<sup>11</sup> As boyd and Crawford have noted, resulting in inherent inequalities with regards to the users who create data, companies who profit of it, and technicians who interpret and classify it. (boyd & Crawford, 2012)

<sup>12</sup> Tiziana Terranova has made the case most adeptly for the ways the internet and culture as technical and affective production, exists and interacts with late capitalism. (Terranova, 2004 p90)

<sup>13</sup> These subjects, however, are never manifest in isolation either: “but rather by a plethora of YOUs: by the very interconnections between various YOU’s” (Chun, 2017 p118) where, “every interaction is made to leave a trace, which is then tied to other traces and used to understand YOU, where YOU is always singular and plural” (ibid p119). How YOU’s become correlated is determined by network science principles like homophily, of which we will get to momentarily.

Crucially, the process of data capture and classification systems <sup>14</sup>emerged out of a eugenicist fixation with population management and used in the first account, in the context of slave trade and poor houses, to objectify and dehumanize subjects against the backdrop of colonial white supremacy. Explicitly racist, sexist and classist these tendencies required extensive surveillance and policing practices (Benjamin, 2019; Browne, 2015; Chun, 2021; Eubanks, 2018; Razack, 2015). These undercurrents have not been absolved, but rather incessantly persist across spatial and temporal contexts. Cyberspace has not flattened power, but further obscured it. Their emergence through national statistics and “public health” measures has been furthered in automated technologies that disproportionately surveil and oppress our most vulnerable populations who turn to governments for support, as Eubanks notes “marginalized groups face higher levels of data collection when they access public benefits, walk through highly policed neighborhoods, enter the health-care system, or cross national borders.” (2018, p6-7).

We owe the correlation methods that underlie modern data analytics to the discredited eugenicist research of men like Sir Francis Galton, progeny of Darwin no less. Galton, among the likes of Raymond Catrall, Hans Eynsenck and Charles Spearman, and the general narcissism of white European male “intelligence”, drove 19<sup>th</sup> century marshalled science and census statistics—an allegedly unmarked and neutral case for racial purity and superiority. This eugenicist history, as Chun has pointed out, is important “because correlation works—when and if it does—by making the future coincide with a selectively discriminatory past.” (2021, p58). Ruha Benjamin (2019), Simone Brown (2015), Virginia Eubanks (2018), Sherene Razack (2015), and Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2017, 2021) have all given brilliant accounts as to the ways correlation maintains and extends, through capturing, assessing and predicting (shaping) our behavior, social inequalities and oppression—particularly with regards to Blackness, Indigeneity and women<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Bowker and Leigh Star have also noted how organizations utilize classification schemes to selectively forget things about the past during the production of knowledge as well as the role of infrastructure standards in certifying certain POV’s over others. (1999)

<sup>15</sup>See also Safiya Umoja Noble’s recent work on racist and sexist search results queried into google by the search terms, “black girls” for instance, in *Algorithms of Oppression*.

This is in huge part, as Ruha Benjamin notes from boyd and Data & Society, due to the way “[t]he datasets and models used in [correlational] systems are not objective representations of reality. They are the culmination of particular tools, people and power structures that foreground one way of seeing or judging over another.”<sup>16</sup> (2019, p36) In the shift from colonial regimes into liberal democracies and capitalism we see the outputs of such models today in the proliferation of racist and sexist cultural narratives<sup>17</sup> for instance, in the representations of Black and Indigenous peoples as unhealthy, decaying, or unable to adapt to modern society.

Sherene Razack, In *Dying From Improvement*, shows how European colonialist narratives in Canada present indigenous bodies as inherently, “sick, dysfunctional and self-destructive”(Razack, 2015 p17) through early 20<sup>th</sup> century medical surveys where the justification for Residential schools was: “predicated on the basic notion that the First Nations were, by nature, unclean and diseased[;] residential schooling was advocated as a means to ‘save’ Aboriginal children from the insalubrious influences of home life on the reserve.” (ibid p18) Where ‘saving’ children resulted instead in appalling conditions of dehumanization: sexual assault, abuse, starvation, torture, and murder of indigenous grade school children--much of which was conducted under the umbrella of colonial grade scientific ‘experiment’(Mosby & Galloway, 2017; Porter, 2015; Razack, 2015).

Specific to Canada and BC, and as we will see most pertinent to this projects subject and contributions, is also the way colonial Canadian sovereignty certified indigenous populations as unable to cope with the terms of modern colonial society as a means of also stealing and withholding land rights to the claims of the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en:

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<sup>16</sup> Adrian Mackenzie writes in *Machine Learners* about how machine learning might offer us opportunities for knowing criticality differently, “ a means of effecting a certain number of transformative operations on one’s own conduct, thinking and ways of being amid the determinations of contemporary reality” (Mackenzie, 2017 p209), an opportunity to probe for change, given what we know about the ways “people and things, knowledge and power, combine in novels forms to generate statements” (ibid p210). If as Chun notes (2021), machine learning models are premised on the idea that intelligence cannot be taught, only bred, what operational formations, might create the space for changes in performance? How might machine learning, modeled and trained on theories of quantum or nonbinary realities; on natural systems and indigenous epistemologies; on creative intelligence and embodiment; on lived experience, literature and fiction: offer us in terms of unlearning the colonial habit? In terms of rendering something like decolonial resonances of self-collective identity; of difference?

“ Chief Justice Alan McEachern of the British Columbia Supreme court commented on “the relentless energy” of Europeans, with which Indigenous people “would not, or could not, compete,” concluding that if Indigenous people were conquered, it was not by dint of force but simply through the superior capacities of a more resilient group.” (Razack, 2015 p4) Razack notes, that the imposition of these, “mythologies of the settler colonial project are comparable across geographic regions” and indigenous populations <sup>18</sup>(ibid p19).

Similarly, in *Race After Technology*, Ruha Benjamin writes:

“Racial knowledge that had been dominated by anecdotal, hereditarian, and pseudo-biological theories of race would gradually be transformed by new social scientific theories of race and society and *new tools of analysis*, namely racial statistics and social surveys. Out of the new methods and data sources, *black criminality* would emerge, alongside disease and intelligence, as a fundamental measure of black inferiority.” (2019, p32)

Additionally, Virginia Eubanks has shown how automated data correlation methods of today are the progeny of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century scientific charity and poorhouses, legacy of “regulating” the poor. Eubanks highlights how the scientific charity movement deployed data methods to separate the deserving from the undeserving poor, where, “[e]ach poor family became a “case” to be solved; in its early years, the Charity Organization Society even used city police officers to investigate applications for relief. Casework was born.” (Eubanks, 2018 p21) This distinction was important for scientific charity workers for the same reason it was important to scientists like Galton: “[p]roviding aid to the unworthy would simply allow them to survive and reproduce their

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<sup>18</sup> Crucial to understanding the way indigenous peoples have been made to be “remnants” of a dying culture across contexts is also the way colonial governments withheld resources and land rights pivotal to the well-being and health of indigenous peoples. Razack details how in Canada, due to food and tuberculosis crisis brought about by the European colonies, the Cree peoples during negotiations of Treaty 6 were forced to negotiate for medical aid and famine relief. But the Cree resisted, “Facing extreme reductions in food rations, a withholding of rations until young girls were procured for government officials, and increasingly harsh living in climactic conditions, Indigenous and Metis people rebelled. Punishment was swift and extended: chiefs were hung and imprisoned, a pass system was instituted to keep Indians away from white communities, and a relentless surveillance (involving policing and a suppression of religious practices) was instituted. By 1886, Daschuk reports, all Indians found off reserve were questioned. The devastation of this period was extensive. By 1889, less than half the pre-rebellion population of the Battleford reserves, for instance, survived” (Razack, 2015 p21)

genetically inferior stock”, for the breeding of an allegedly genetic elite (ibid p22). The United States in particular was fixated on eliminating “negative characteristics” of the poor, and the first database for monitoring the poor were carried out by the Carnegie Institute in New York, with the explicit aim to monitor those in need’s sex lives, intelligence and general behavior, Eubanks details:

“The filled out lengthy questionnaires, took photographs, inked fingerprints, measured heads, counted children, plotted family trees, and filled logbooks with descriptions like “imbecile.” “feeble-minded,” “harlot,” and “dependent.”” (ibid p 22)

These models then went on to shape contemporary policy and reforms of the welfare state that have deeply sexist, racist, ageist, and ableist undertones (ibid p27), most notably sharp and biting when it comes to low-income single women of color with children (ibid p28)

In both Indigenous and Black populations in north America colonial “charity” still surveil and impose today, of which Eubanks illustrates through her discussion of the Allegheny Family Screening Tool (AFST), an automated child welfare risk assessment tool. Eubanks highlights these systems are often trained on models whose predictive ability is baked in subjective outcome variables<sup>19</sup> (ibid p146). Namely, she writes, “[t]hey are shaped by our nation’s fear of economic insecurity and hatred of the poor; they in turn shape the politics and experience of poverty” (ibid p9). This “fear”, however, takes on new contours when considered alongside the work of Razack or Tanya Talaga who point out that the extension of surveillance and policing, the legacy of residential schools and colonial interference, continues today with number of indigenous youth being placed in the welfare system at rates that exceed residential school numbers even at their peak

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<sup>19</sup> For example, Eubanks details: “Where the line is drawn between routine conditions of poverty and child neglect is particularly vexing. Many struggles common among poor families are officially defined as child maltreatment, including not having enough food, having inadequate or unsafe housing, lacking medical care, or leaving a child alone while you work. Unhoused families face particularly difficult challenges holding on to their children, as the very condition of being homeless I judged as neglectful.” (2018, p130)

“enrollment<sup>20</sup>” and the “Sixties Scoop” (Razack, 2015 p78; Talaga, 2017 p129-30). These “wellness” programs in tangent with the racialization of surveillance technologies highlighted later in this section by Simone Browne, show how systemic surveillance and spying upon black and indigenous communities is the premise, not the disruption, of algorithmically enhanced policing and public health technologies. As Benjamin has noted, the heat maps and gang databases where, ““criminal”: becomes a proxy for Black, poor, immigrant, second-class, disposable, illegal, alien, unwanted or otherwise disposable un-humans (2019, p33).”

Wendy Chun has also shown most recently how these methods have now extended into the murky public/private space of social media for political gains, such as those used by Cambridge Analytica during the 2016 elections, of which were deeply gendered, classed and raced (2021). Most disconcerting, as she highlights, is the way Steve Bannon with the assistance of Christopher Wiley, perverted Kimberle Crenshaw’s intersectional theory not to bridge publics, but antagonize and divide them. As Chun describes: “Put most bluntly: in an attempt to destroy any and all in common, communities are not being destroyed but rather, planned and constructed based on divisions and animosities.” (2021, p49) Whether this divide and conquer strategy is what resulted in the outcomes of the election is perhaps an insufficient, trite or indulgent after thought in the shit storm of the internet information sphere of 2020<sup>21</sup>. What is more important is to understand that these systems, exclusively dependent upon representations--units of encapsulated and abstracted liveliness—divulge more about the system of knowledge that enframes them than the behavior or phenomenon captured. These discrimination steeped proxies are then further siloed through network principles like homophily, which assume and project networked “neighborhoods”, where users are presumed to be like you because they share

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<sup>20</sup> Talaga writes of how, “[t]he scooping of children exists to this day. Assembly of First Nations Chief Perry Bellegarde estimates forty thousand Indigenous children are currently in state care. Less than 8 percent of all kids in Canada under the age of four are Indigenous, but they represent 51.2 percent of preschoolers in foster care.” (2017, p131)

<sup>21</sup> Where, for example, a global public health crisis is exacerbated by QAnon conspiracies and misinformation campaigns embraced by political regimes in order to advance racist and discriminatory agendas (Coaston, 2018) and supported the mobilization of radicalized and increasingly dangerous extremists like the wolverine watchmen (Owen, 2020)



similar “likes” and “hates<sup>22</sup>”. But networks capture our behavior even when we are silent, as Chun writes, through your network neighbors you become predictable, but these predictions are wed to and verified by the past. When these predictions are based on historical inequities, they amplify and reproduce their effects because their models will only be “correct” or “true” if they make predictions premised on these historical harms and mistakes (2021, p58-59)

Read: contemporary interface regimes are formatted to reproduce and affirm colonial postures and imperial grammars as standard cultural relations; they demand estrangement and subjugate difference in the name of predictable and discriminatory sameness.

Networked Homophily: warping relationality, Othering difference

Through the network maps of our interpretation grids we cognitively map our individual relation to others. As theoretical projections network maps enact material-discursive cuts in time and space to produce encapsulated slices of connectivity, where connection is generated according to principles such as homophily.

Homophily as a network principle engages in the perpetuation of inequalities/discrimination as process, by aggregating consensus and similarity into clusters on the basis of comfort (Apprich et al., 2019 p76). This produces what we have come to know as the echo chamber effect in platform communication and its associative worlding practices of You/Other, Us/Them positionality. As a patterning device, homophily produces segregated neighborhoods of presumed individual preference, and names and produces sameness as the basis for relation and connection (ibid p82-83). It can be tempting to read this as an innocuous interpersonal oversight, surely, we can warrant that many friendships and relational ties are due to shared or similar interests and traits? But as Chun has illustrated, segregation is the training model for racism (2021, p80). Drawing on the original analysis of friendship ties conducted by Paul Lazarsfeld

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<sup>22</sup> But the presumption of preference is problematic, as Chun has noted regarding Cambridge Analytica, how much of what is presumed is actually prescribed?

and Robert K Merton, a study of two bi-racial social housing projects, that went on to ground and institutionalize consensus around homophily and network science, Chun has illustrated that from its very conceptual origins homophily has been actualized through a segregational racial premise, “an implicit assumption that values do not cross racial borders, or if they do, that this crossing is less significant than consensus or conflict within a race.”<sup>23</sup> (2021 p121). The presumed individual preference manifest by network neighborhoods is embedded with a, “presumption that there can be no neighbors without common cultural traits.” (ibid p125) This presumption is not neutral, but rather reflects how, to quote Ruha Benjamin in *The New Jim Code*, “[r]acial codes are born from the goal of, and facilitate, social control” (2019, p29).

Additionally laden in this initial study, and the flurry of institutionalized citational endorsement that have since followed, like those mentioned by Chun of Easley and Kleinberg from 2010, is the notion that segregation on the basis of sameness (read: race) is a sort of preindividual network state (Chun, 2021 p102-103). Concurrently, Chun’s work shows how conflict and tenant complaints emerged most often from white community members of the projects and *their* discomfort with being stigmatized for being in the low-income bi-racial housing. Tellingly, this was not included in Lazarsfeld and Merton’s original report, but surely the years of whiteflight can attest, the grounding principle for neighborhood comfort has always been about white (read: colonial) claims to space. We can see then, that by prefiguring segregation as a naturalized claim,

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<sup>23</sup> “Lazarsfeld and Merton examined and modelled the racial attitudes of Hilltown’s white residents. They analyzed the answers to two questions: “Q25. Do you think black and white people should live together in housing projects?” and “Q26: On the whole, do you think that black and white residents in the Village get along pretty well, or not so well?” Based on the answers, they divided the white residents into three camps: liberals, who “believe that ‘colored’ and white people should live together in housing projects and who support this belief by saying that the two racial groups ‘get along pretty well’ in Hilltown”; illiberals, who “maintain that the races should be residentially segregated and who justify this view by claiming that, in Hilltown, where the two races do live in the same project, they fail to get along”; and ambivalents, who “believe that the races should not be allowed to live in the same project, even though it must be admitted that they have managed to get along in Hilltown” (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954a: 26). They ignored the responses of black residents. They removed their answers from their analysis of value homophily because they argued there were “too few illiberal or ambivalent Negroes with friends in Hilltown” (notably, there was a similar small number of illiberal white friends who chose illiberals, yet this number grounded their formulation of value homophily). Thus, at the core of value-homophily lies racial segregation: an implicit assumption that values do not cross racial borders, or if they do, that this crossing is less significant than consensus or conflict within a race.” (Chun, 2021 p108-115)

institutionalized racism and the history of race-based inequality and discrimination is erased.

In the transition to digital space, identity politics, and the solidification of network node characteristics through gender, class and race present socially constructed and institutionally policed categories as immutable divisions with which the imposition of differential identities can be homogenized and pattern discrimination can take place (Apprich, et al, 2019 pi-xi). Homophily effectively sidesteps the disorienting nature of difference, by instrumentalizing it. Deploying techniques for managing, predicting and prescribing it as a measure and marker of sameness. Additionally, this artificial, “scientific” model of connection, unconcerned with the nature, the effects, of connection, has no means of understanding network ties such as conflict, violence, or interrelated dependence (Chun, 2017 p81). In as such, it reproduces, reinscribes, and extends certain cultural relations or connections over others<sup>24</sup>, regardless of the inequality, injustice, or violence its logic ascribes. Such systems “train” individuals to expect and recognize this form of segregation, and, as Chun writes,

“Instead of ushering in a postracial, postidentitarian era, networks perpetuate micro-identities via “default” variables and axioms. Through data analytics, individual differences and similarities are actively sought, shaped, and instrumentalized in order to capture and shape clusters.” (2021, p49)

Through networked homophily sameness becomes the gaze with which we hold upon the world, the habituated lens with which see. Hence, difference, or difference sustained in such lenses, becomes disruption, crisis, problem, alien, Other. In short, such principles produce interface as “Othering” machines, beholden to a system of classification and representation takes for granted the interdependencies, the interrelatedness of knowing

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<sup>24</sup> Taine Bucher illustrates this in, *If...Then Algorithmic Power and Politics*. Algorithms as material-discursive phenomena steer and curate connection and relation; in virtual space the ways with which we relate to each other as “friends” are determined in accordance to what platforms determine are more “worthwhile” or “promising” connections (Bucher, 2018 p6-7). Thus facilitating or fabricating some “relational impulses” over others ( ibid p9).

and being in the world, dealing exclusively in the absolute separation of man/nature, words/things, and interior/exterior states of being.

Such foundational principles of design lack an ability to engage dynamically with difference. In this failure to grapple with the way difference is experienced and produced in practice, it masks the fact that the same map that shows us the world, also traps us inside of it, as Chun puts it, “we are now in a different and perhaps historically unique situation: we are forever mapping forever performing- and so we are told, forever empowered- and yet no more able to imagine, let alone decisively intervene in, the world around us” (2017, p44). So, while on the surface, the world projected by the network maps of cyberspace, seemed to be shifting towards more democratic possibilities, internally to all of these “new” systems of liberation, are systems of value and models of thought that are ultimately discriminatory, racialized, and imperial shape perception and serve to construct (or warp) user reality.

The Institutionalization of the Imperial Shutter:  
science is a fiction; history is a technology.

What the collective work of these critical data and critical media scholars show, is the problem of interface is one of an institutionalized set of knowledge-producing practices, whose orientation toward knowledge and conceptual frameworks are gendered, racialized, classist and imperial. This renders them incapable of engaging with systemic violence and inequalities by very design. As leading critical algorithm studies scholars such as Ruha Benjamin too point out, these emerging technologies do not overcome the feedback loops of inequity, as the founders of this “new frontier” have alleged, but more accurately enact something like a “New Jim Code: the employment of new technologies that reflect and reproduce existing inequities but that are promoted and perceived as more objective or progressive than the discriminatory systems of a previous era” (Benjamin, 2019 p28). Just like homophily’s seemingly innocuous and naturalized claims that project (and manifest) social ties through segregated sameness, “[t]he view that “technology is a neutral tool” ignores how race also functions like a tool, structuring whose literal voice gets embodied in AI” (ibid p54). The point I am emphasizing here focalizes around the

notion that normative orientations toward knowing and being, in all stages of technological and social development, are the by-product of the invisibly visible colonial gaze. Where the only thing rendered imperceptible and unseen is power and the imperialism of whiteness; where all else, defined against its neutrality, become sub-human cultural signs.

Deconstructing the violence of this binary, its infrastructural positioning and critiquing its implications is essential to undermining its authority. However, the gap in question remains in how to move beyond its seemingly ubiquitous reign. It is not enough to draw attention to the violence and include excluded categories or conditions for subjectivity, for the pattern persists across time and space and the voices implicated by its violence, the indigenous, slave, woman, child, Other, have again, have always been present and wailing. To intervene in representationalism requires engaging in its colonial history. Without contending with its emergence from this cultural trauma any intervention or solution will remain ineffective—this is something critical theory and philosophy of technology has largely overlooked. Read: colonialism is at the heart of western civilization and ‘modern’ educational institutions. Even in its most ‘progressive’ forms, Liberalism peripheralizes non-Eurocentric epistemological contributions, centers whiteness and individuality over collectivity and difference.

Moving Beyond the Symptoms: prelude to the wound

The point of contention as it pertains to the cartesian-colonial habit, is not merely the representation of something abstracted as material or concrete (though the critique of absolute truths and representationalism’s logic on this front is to be sure, very much a part of this project), but rather the fact that cartesian subjectivity, has from its outset, presented and abstracted upon the world from the over-representation of Man as human. And while from Marcuse to Feenberg alike, the notion of the human condition and experience is central to any liberation from this rationality, the irony in Critical Theory is its inability to engage the human condition beyond the subjective (and imperial) vantage point of Man, and in doing so keeps ‘waiting for the realization’ of excluded values as if they weren’t already at present, and continuously, wailing and in resistance. This largely

overlooks the differential complexity of “modern” regimes of power as well as its ontological predicates.

For example, Andrew Feenberg’s concept of the technical code reflects both the technical function and its meaning expressed through language, of any given technical artifact (2010). Technical codes, Feenberg says, reflect the design standards of a given set of social actors involved in technical development. These standards carry with them the embedded social needs and values of these actors (Feenberg & Callon, 2010). These ideals become embodied, and as such, enacted, through technical design but are often implicated by what Feenberg terms “formal bias”:

“critical theory of technology introduces the concept of “formal bias” to understand how a rationally coherent, well designed, and properly operated technical device or system can nevertheless discriminate in a given social context. The concept of formal bias also sheds light on notions such as institutional racism and serves much the same purpose, name, to enable a critique of socially rational activities that appear fair when abstracted from their context but have discriminatory consequences in that context. Today justice requires identifying and changing formally biased technical codes.” (2010, p.69)

Feenberg also suggests that, “the democratization of technology is about finding new ways of privileging excluded values and realizing them in new technical arrangements” (2005). But here, Feenberg sidesteps the historization of this claim, making generalized points about democratically constituted alliances that take into account the imposition of certain feedback loops on disempowered groups (2005). In doing so misleadingly, through this ambiguity and nondisclosure, notions of gender, race, and coloniality are presented (through their muted nonpresence) as values or actors merely *excluded* from technological design through “formally biased technical codes”. This bypasses the fact that not only are instrumentalization, objectification, and technocratic tendencies explicitly gendered, racialized *colonial* phenomena, but philosophical and scientific thought itself is predicated on absented and exploited bodies of Black and indigenous peoples, and women. Such absences are never empty “waiting to be realized”, but

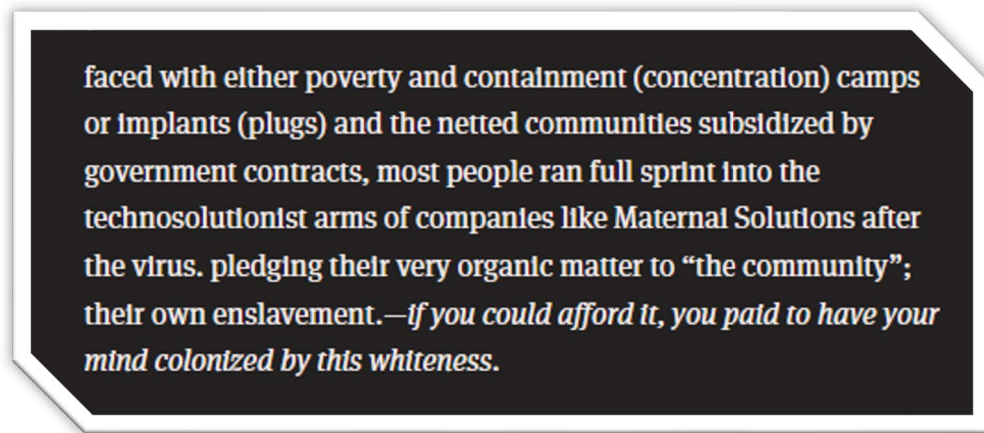
definitive, constitutive and didactic (and presently resistant) to the subsequent teleological violence of technological development. The notion that socially rational activities can appear fair when abstracted from their context but nonetheless discriminate in that context is to speak of such activities from the position of privilege and unmarked neutrality. From the position of that which is not experiencing the system as fundamentally discriminatory, unjust and violent from the outset.

Feenberg's assertion that technical action provides a temporary escape from the human condition provides perhaps the most realizable opportunity to consider these absences, where his position:

"[distinguishes] the situation of a finite actor from a hypothetical infinite actor capable of a "do from nowhere." The latter can act on its object without reciprocity. God creates the world without suffering any recoil, side effects, or blowback. This is the ultimate practical hierarchy establishing a one way relation between actor and object. But we are not gods. Human beings can only act on a system to which they themselves belong. This is the practical consequence of being an embodied being. Every one of our interventions returns to us in some form as a feedback from our objects... Technical action represents a partial escape from the human condition. We call an action "technical" when the impact on the object is out of all proportion to the return feedback affecting the actor...So the technical subject does not escape from the logic of finitude after all. But the reciprocity of finite action is dissipated or deferred in such a way as to create the space of a necessary illusion of transcendence." (2005, p48)

Considered in parallel to the works of Simone Browne or Ariella Azoulay, this "do from nowhere" implicates how technology, in both historical and contemporary contexts, is memetic to the colonial gaze of whiteness, of which imposes and places demands upon objectified bodies of the conquered. This "do from nowhere" echoing Haraway's claim

regarding “the conquered gaze<sup>25</sup>”, is made explicit by the work of Simone Brown in *Dark Matter*, who shows how the disembodied gaze of surveillant tech is explicitly a *racialized* technique, “a gaze that is always unmarked, and therefore already markedly white and male” (Browne, 2015 p49).



faced with either poverty and containment (concentration) camps or implants (plugs) and the netted communities subsidized by government contracts, most people ran full sprint into the technosolutionist arms of companies like Maternal Solutions after the virus, pledging their very organic matter to “the community”; their own enslavement.—*if you could afford it, you paid to have your mind colonized by this whiteness.*

**Figure 2: From, Bullethead**

Such looking relations have much to expose, as Browne highlights through the work of Patricia A. Turner, “only a subject can observe or see” (2015, p58). Such optical oversight has no concerns with reciprocity, and as Browne’s work on the historical racialization of surveillance technologies through things like lantern laws for slaves walking after dark, is rather about rendering racialized bodies as “outside of the category of the human, *un-visible*” (ibid p68).

“In situating lantern laws as a supervisory device that sought to render those who could be, or were always and already, criminalized by this legal framework as outside of the category of the human and as un-visible, my intent is not to reify Western notions of “the human,” but to say here that the candle lantern as a form knowledge production about the black, indigenous, and mixed-race subject was part of the project of a racializing surveillance and become one of the ways that, to cite McKittrick, “Man comes to represent the only

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<sup>25</sup> “the “god-like trick of seeing everything from nowhere”, an optics that “fucks the world” (Haraway, 1988)



viable expression of humanness, in effect, overrepresenting itself discursively and empirically” [and as Brown adds, technologically] and namely, “overrepresenting Man as the human” (2015, p79-80).

Likewise, she highlights how artifacts of slavery such as *The Book of Negroes*, expose, “[a]n early imprint of how the [racialized] body comes to be understood as a means of identification and tracking by the state” (ibid p97). In tandem with lantern laws, lit candles as supervisory ‘prosthesis’ devices, these examples illustrate early forms of corporeal racialized knowledge production anchored in making a racialized Other, visible (and therefore, un-visible), knowable, and locatable (ibid p110). Put more plainly, it exemplifies how early technologies, be they bookkeeping, breeder documents, or lantern, were manifest explicitly from a desire to manage, control, and exploit certain bodies over others. Racialization and imperial logic grounds the very act of documentation, classification, and policing (as detailed further in other sections of this work). The problem is not the nonpresence of marginalized groups *but that they have already been embedded into design processes from their very beginnings*. As inferior Others; as slaves, ‘Indians’, Negroes, and women. My point is not to arraign all of critical theory and philosophy as useless, but to draw attention to the ways such disciplines are themselves implicated within a colonial system—to draw attention to the colonial habit’s imperial conditions and operating principles; to its overshadowing of ontological and epistemological difference<sup>26</sup>.

Ariella Azoulay’s *Potential History* offers an understanding of how imperial conditions standardise productions of meaning while simultaneously shaping the phenomenological field with which they are manifested (2019, p301). A photography and visual theorist, Azoulay is very much concerned with the reopening of images to renegotiate what they show, foregrounding the dynamics of power and emphasizing the role of the spectator in bearing responsibility towards that which the camera either does or does not allow us to see. In *Potential History*, Azoulay applies this arraignment to suggest and engage a reopening of history. Azoulay foregrounds how liberal forms of knowledge constitute and

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<sup>26</sup> For more on this see, *The Wound*

extend what she terms a differential body politic through the imperial shutter. The imperial shutter enacts spatial, temporal and bodily divisions through various imperial technologies such as: borders and nation states; and their associative documents, tools and rights of citizens, and archives, museums and laws; and their imperial sight, language and politics. Such an ontology operates to render the common world as no longer something shared to care for, but scattered enclaves to possess and protect.

The imperial shutter fragments time into an illusion of past, present futures, allowing for the erasure and depoliticization of precolonial or anti-imperial ways of knowing. History is a series of expulsions, separation and colonization that set in motion a long process of dispossession and violence. Azoulay highlights, how this embedded ontology of the imperial plunder, in this sense, has come to shape how we relate to our common world and narrate living together. The “New” world manifest post 1492 across different geographical places times, and contexts has been used to justify the destruction of what exists in the name of “modernity” and “progress”. Azoulay draws our attention to the way “modern citizenship” privileges are built and dependent upon the worldlessness of others that emerged from this imperial project:

“Given the fact that the violence used to inscribe privileged citizens’ rights is deployed through the extraction of the material wealth of others from whom the same rights are denied, the nature of rights inscribed in these objects and their entitlement cannot be determined with categories of ownership. These categories enabled the accumulation of differences between those from whom these objects were expropriated and from whom rights were denied, on the one hand, and those who used others’ craftsmanship for their statecraft. Citizen’s privileges depended on the near worldlessness of others.” (2019, p30)

In her discussion of the historical archive, Azoulay shows how the imperial shutter serves to close down the multiplicity of experiences in the world only to subsume them under one homogenized cultural narrative where persons and their worlds, become abstracted, and thus extracted from the colonial history of time, through seemingly neutral and objective language of universal procedure, that is nonetheless and unequivocally violent.

Here, she says, is where the “theaters of imperial violence” reproduce and legitimize particular fictions regarding relationality, subjectivity, and the human condition,

“what is being reproduced throughout these centuries is the distribution of subject positions such as citizens, subjects, the indigenous, non-citizens, slaves, illegal workers, infiltrators, and so on. Despite what actors who embody these positions see, create, say or dream, even while opposing the evils of imperialism, their actions, interactions, and speculations remain bounded by its very condition.” (ibid p32)

Azoulay, drawing on several examples like the mass rape of German woman by the allies during the fall of Berlin in WWII, as well as Hannah Arendt’s report in Eichmann in Jerusalem and the virulent reproach received on behalf of the unapologetic account of ‘history’, read: in her refusal to only account the past from a victim’s perspective and emphasize the role of unquestioned obedience to the centralized power of Jewish Council’s Azoulay highlights how, “Arendt did not blur the distinction between perpetrators and victims, but she did question the total identification of all Jews with victims and all Germans with perpetrators”( ibid p313). It was consequently this imposition of meaning that caused backlash and rejection of Arendt’s accounts as legitimately historical and philosophical (ibid p309-313). Arendt’s exposure of the dangers and consequences of the organization and archivisation of a community is the additional layer of context and meaning to the events of the war that she sought to keep open against the theater of imperial history (ibid p313).

In highlighting WWII’s implications for race, human rights, and equality Azoulay shows how even our most “progressive” liberal signposts and principles are anchored in what Maldonado-Torres terms a non-ethics of war, but what Azoulay is framing as the violence of imperial history. However, Azoulay suggests that not only is this violence reversible, but that we ought to refuse the shutter as a means of beginning to practice potential history:

“Potential history is a form of being with others, both living and dead, across time, against the separation of the past from the present, colonized

peoples from their worlds and possessions, and history from politics ... Potential history is not the account of radical thinking, of explicit ideological struggles against imperialism, but a rejection of imperialism's conceptual apparatus altogether." (ibid p1)

Crucial to this practice, for Azoulay, is understanding how the human condition is the object of imperialism's assault as well as the bedrock of resistance to it. The human condition, for Azoulay, is not defeatable nor does it need to be invented, "a free gift from nowhere" (ibid p32), it cannot progress as it is already the basis with "which human life is given and renewed" (ibid p32) and thus does not operate within the realm of linear temporality. Therefore, the human condition supersedes and subsists the imperial shutter and offers a shift from colonial temporality's beginning, end, or post conditions. It subsumes axis and markers of colonial power, instead provides spaces for regeneration, reparation, and reviving on the basis of "precolonial patterns and arrangements ungoverned by Man" (ibid p31). And fervently presences itself within and against the destructive wake of progress, to remind us of our own very connection to nature and as Azoulay puts it, "asks not to be ignored for the sake of future utopias" (ibid p31); Azoulay drawing on Hannah Arendt, shows how imperialism exchanges this "free gift" for something it's made itself instead<sup>27</sup>. This involves making those bracketed away or rendered to the dustbins of history and the archive during Man's construction of history and imperial reality, their memories, moments and potentialities legible, perceptible and redistributed; as well as, a firm rejection of neutrality, newness, and the progressive project.

This includes liberal institutions and the propagation of its tools. Part of the naturalization of imperial differential rule, as Azoulay highlights, is tied to the way institutions draw on the historical archive to propagate both material and discursive objects: "After a few centuries during which imperialism institutionalized its modalities of violence and imposed them globally, these modalities could appear as the "political and historical a priori" of human experience. This fabricated field is defined by and defines both the

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<sup>27</sup> Lucie Suchman quote on man creating the miracle of life through the machine

master's house and the tools used to dismantle it; that is, it limits what we can see as problems, what we can use as tools, and when we can use them." (ibid p302). Drawing on Audre Lorde, she exemplifies this through feminist theory and the tendency to construct *alternative* histories still beholden to the master's house and his tools:

"Lorde associated tools with racial patriarchy, the regime that transforms humans into raw material and asks them not to escape the question: "What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?" ...Lorde confronted her audience of white women directly and called on them to exit their dependency on the master's house, their trust in it..."What is the theory behind racist feminism?" ...Disavowed whiteness, that is, simply feminism, in the American context is one way racial origins are sealed as "past," and emancipatory politics can be envisaged as color-blind. Lorde regarded white feminists as the protégés of the master's house who continue to operate its tools against others. However, she didn't give up on the hope that they would recognize their interest in collapsing the master's house and find "the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charts."" (ibid p299)

To act where there are no charts, requires not a crafting of a new plan, place or project, but a rigorous engagement with the here and now of past/present/futures, as "the only temporality in which a community persists against the tools that threaten its freedom to exist" (ibid p299). Because alternative histories still work within the imperial narrative and operate in-service to and remain defined by binary settler worldviews, this has the effect of rendering, "those who struggle against the archive as victims to salvaged from the archive rather than as allies in a common struggle"(ibid p195). Instead, Azoulay suggests we engage in not *alternative* histories, but *nonimperial grammars*. A process by which we "unlearn what one's ancestors inherited from their ancestors as solid facts and recognizable sign posts—in order to attend to their origins and render the imperial plunder impossible again" ( ibid p13). Nonimperial grammars are intimately tied to the human condition, shared (and stolen) worlds, and the rejection and resistance to the authority of imperial shutters.

To engage in nonimperial grammars she suggests a form of co-citizenship: “a set of assumptions and practices shared by different people—including scholars—who oppose imperialism, colonialism, racial capitalism and its institution of citizenship” (ibid p 16). It explicitly deprivileges these accounts and agencies to retrieve instead an interaction and resuscitation of the many refusal and precolonial modes of sharing the world inherent in people’s public performances, diverse claims and repressed aspirations. Crucially, not as objects of study or discoveries but as collaborators and companions in partnership against imperial citizenship and the process of unlearning imperialism (ibid p16-17):

“Unlearning is a way of disengaging from political initiatives, concepts, or modes of thinking, including critical theory, that are devised and promoted as progressive and unprecedented. Instead, it insists that finding precedents—or at least assuming that precedents could be found—for resistance to racial and colonial crimes is not the novel work of academic discovery. Unlearning is a way of assuming that what seems catastrophic today to certain groups was already catastrophic for many other groups, groups that didn’t wait for critical theory to come along to understand the contours of their dispossession and the urgency of resisting it and seeking reparation” (ibid p17)

Such grammars engage not disciplinary predecessors but present actors; not hidden nor new accounts but lived realities of the here and now, more pointedly it is a, “[refusal] to be complicit, to claim that justice is due, even after a long time”( ibid p526) that understands this, as well as caring for a share world, as preconditions or premises to living and belonging within a global community. It is a refusal to engage as the perpetrators of imperial colonial violence by acknowledging our fundamental interconnectedness and shared human condition; our relational responsibility to one another. It is rejecting the disassociation from violence provided by the socially constructed parameters of the imperial shutter.

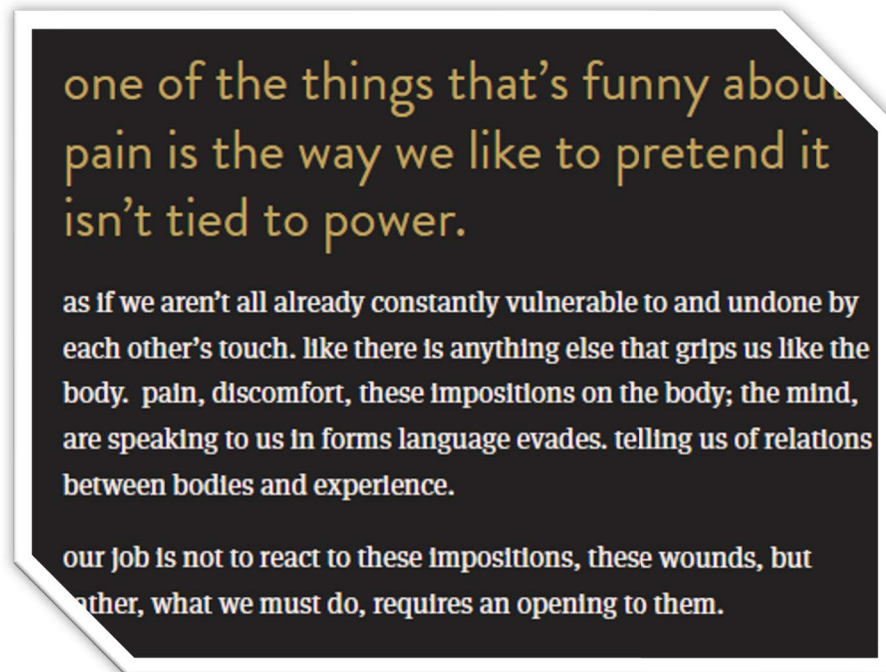
Reading Azoulay through contributions of critical algorithm and media studies, and feminist science and technology studies, shows how science and history as socially constructed practices that necessarily bracket away (and thus depoliticize and

delegitimize) pre- and anti-colonial ways of knowing, are hegemonic narratives conceptually, methodologically and epistemologically oriented along a racialized, gendered, and classed axis of imperial colonial powers (Chun, 2021; Browne 2015; Benjamin, 2019; Eubanks, 2018; Barad, 2007; Azoulay, 2019). Where “seeing” in the scientific sense, involves a bracketing of practices that obscures how science and history as social practices extend certain assumptions and habits of being over others. Hence, what is needed is a shift in orientation towards these voices and ongoing resistances to representationalism’s imperial optics<sup>28</sup>.

If interface technologies format specific ways of knowing in the world in accordance with these optics, they also have the potential to open up and hasten forward appreciation and exposure to different epistemic positions and resonances (O’Shea, 2019 p237) . This project takes seriously the notion of thinking within, creating and learning from these perspectives by theorizing from nonbinary and decolonial creative practice. It contributes to, extends and transforms all of the aforementioned contributions by engaging their insights through embodied writing practice, through poetics, fiction and storytelling as interface, as cultural device and knowledge filter; as “research” method. Doing so allows me to resist the typical deliverables afforded standard research thesis practice and reject the authority of scientific language and imaginaries; undermining scientific measurement and representational methods as the sole means of objective knowledge production. It begins from the position that if coloniality is embedded in interface, it is also embedded within the self.

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<sup>28</sup> In the context of reconfiguring ontological horizons to deposition the cartesian binary with regards to interface technologies, knowledge production, and the habitual colonial gaze, recent interventions have been made by Lizzie O’Shea in her work *Future Histories*. O’Shea’s work offers one point of entry into what processes of unlearning with companions might look like in critical media studies. Though not a critical media scholar, but rather a human rights lawyer, O’Shea writes about how historical social movements and thinkers are relevant to current discourses and debates surrounding interfaced networked culture. O’Shea makes several claims throughout her chapters that are fruitful considerations for this project: one is her discussion of digital trace and Fanonian self-determination discussed in *Black Skin White Masks*, the second is her reading of the Maori iwi and the Whanganui River in New Zealand (a recent treaty settlement between the Maori and the New Zealand government resulting in the Whanganui River being recognized as a legal person with rights, duties and liabilities) and other indigenous epistemological interventions alongside the notion of digital space as an environment we ought to care for. (O’Shea, 2019)



**Figure 3: From, Bullethead**

If interface are at the moment, technologies of the conqueror, intimately woven into our identity and general being within the world, we cannot talk about them in the abstract. We cannot talk about identity or ontology without being inside of it in all its messy and intimate entanglement. Oppression is personal. It is not abstract. It is not isolated within black, brown, indigenous and female bodies. It does not occur out there against others, because it begins with ourselves. To ignore this, to ignore how our daily practices and relations further colonial violence is to ascribe inequality as purely a representational problem, and to ignore how it is very much embedded within who we are and what we do in every moment; in identity as daily performance: habit produces ontology. Contending with imperialism and the coloniality of being means radical humanizing, through a return and embrace of the human condition, to a centering of our shared relation to the world, to embodiment. So, this project employs poetics and fiction in its imaginings about interface, it writes and researches, with the body; through engagement with the queer performativity of disorientation and diffraction as educative and transformative practices. It considers both research practice and theory from decolonial positions, imperfect, but open to change, it is both offering and refusal; invitation and applied resistance.



**The Wound:**

**On the Coloniality of the Cartesian-Colonial habit:  
European philosophy and *ego cogito conquiro***

keep knocking up against these walls and ceilings.

feeling stuck inside this box.

these expectations, imprint themselves against my skin.

[in the thick of usurpation, turbid thoughts]

hard to tell where the world ends and my self begins.

entangled predelections exhaust.

histories, dance across my skin

burning permanence,

pattern painted thoughts.

not sure where my line of intention is

trying to get a sense of whats mine and whats not

sondering within the fret,

dropping threads,

a perpetual promenade between *is* and *ought*.

This section's purpose is to illustrate how there have always been colonies, imperial white-supremacy, at the center of Heidegger; at the center of 20<sup>th</sup> century European Philosophy and 'modern' education—an epistemic position that renders relations of subordination and domination within the world through all that it shapes and informs, technology included.

To be clear, I do not mean to oversimplify what I understand as a dynamic and relational absence of what decolonial theorists Walter Mignolo has identified as 'The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference' or what Ariella Azoulay calls 'Imperial Differential Rule' (Azoulay, 2019; Mignolo, 2000). The manifestation of the geopolitics of knowledge and colonial differential rule can be traced back to 1492. Though as Azoulay and decolonial theorists Walter Mignolo and Anibal Quijano have shown, the imperial plunder takes place at geographically different times and places with shifting social and political contours, its epistemological and ontological dimensions of dominance, dislocation and dispossession remain at the heart of western civilisation and the 'modern'/colonial global system (Quijano, 2007; Mignolo, 2000).

While it is narratively convenient to render colonial logic as "historical", and present 'modernity' as the enlightened advancement beyond colonialism, monarchy and other pre-capitalist systems, as Mignolo and Quijano note, locating "modernity" as chronologically manifest within the 18<sup>th</sup> century, erases the Iberian foundational period of capitalist and colonial expansion (Mignolo, 2000; Quijano, 2007). This absence is significant because it overlooks the construction (and exploitation) of the global south as well as the role of the trans Atlantic slave trade circuit in constructing "modernity". Both reveal coloniality as not merely constitutive, but ontologically and epistemologically generative of modernity as a world-system (Mignolo, 2000, 60-61). The conquest of the peoples and cultures of what is known today as Latin America was the catalyst for a series of processes that violently concentrated much of the world's resources within the hands of a small European minority; obliged by the enslavement and domination of millions of African and Latin American peoples (Quijano, 2007). This concentration of power gained inertia and concretized throughout the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, to today, where as Quijano details, "[t]he 'Western' European dominators and their Euro-

North American descendants are still the principle beneficiaries” (ibid, 2)<sup>29</sup>. Hence, colonialism as a political system, gave way to an imperial ‘Modernity’: a Eurocentered colonial system of political, social, and cultural domination that grounds not only European Philosophy but all of ‘modern’ (*and* ‘postmodern’) scientific and historical thought (Mignolo, 2000; Quijano, 2007; Azoulay 2019).

Hence, the gap and critique of Frankfurt School critical theory (as well it’s prodigies) this research seeks to outline is similar to thinkers that subvert the habituation of western philosophy. Such as Emmanuel Levinas, who illustrate, as decolonial scholar Nelson Maldonado Torres has pointed out, the difference and potentialities opened by thinking *within* (not merely *including*) perspectives that have been historically marginalized, indeed culturally desecrated by western thought ( Maldonado-Torres, 2007,p241).

In contrast to Heidegger, Levina’s thought is marked by being a survivor of the Jewish Holocaust. An experience of which led him to become one of his most radical opposers and perhaps more importantly, in his critique, making the link between ontology and power (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p242). Exemplified in such works like that of his essay *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*:

“How is universality compatible with racism? The answer-to be found in the logic of what first inspires racism- involves a basic modification of the very idea of universality. Universality must give way to the idea of expansion, for the expansion of a force presents a structure that is completely different from the propagation of an idea...In

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<sup>29</sup> “The eighteenth century (or more exactly, the period between approximately 1760 and 1800 was dominated by two distinctive shifts. First, there was the displacement of power in the Atlantic circuit from the south to the north. Second, the main concern in Europe, from the Peace of Westphalia (1648) until the end of the eighteenth century, was nation-state building rather than colonialism.<sup>17</sup>England, France, and Germany were not yet colonial powers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and when they be-came so, they mutually reinforced nation building with colonial expansion, particularly starting in the nineteenth century. However, the strong pre-occupation in the north with the Europe of nations placed colonialism on the back burner, so to speak. Colonialism was a secondary concern for nations such as England and France, whose presence in the Americas was geared toward commerce rather than conversion, like the project of Spain and Portugal. At that point, France and England did not have a civilizing mission to accomplish in the Americas, as they would have in Asia and Africa after the Napoleonic era. Current conceptualizations of modernity and postmodernity are historically grounded in that period. The second stage of modernity was part of the German restitution of the Greek legacy as the foundation of Western civilization” (Mignolo, 2000, p61)

spite of the unique accent communicated to it by its creator, it becomes a common heritage. It is fundamentally anonymous. The person who accepts it becomes its master, as does the person who proposes it. The propagation of an idea thus creates a community of "masters"; it is a process of equalization... But force is characterized by another type of propagation. The person who exerts force does not abandon it. Force does not disappear among those who submit to it. It is attached to the personality or society exerting it, enlarging that person or society while subordinating the rest. Here the universal order is not established as a consequence of ideological expansion; it is that very expansion that constitutes the unity of a world of masters and slaves. ."

(Levinas, 1990, p68)

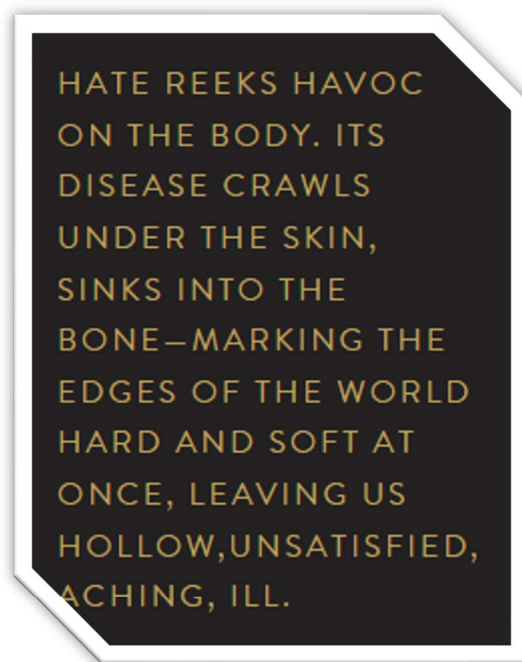
Furthermore, Levinas' in, *As if Consenting to Horror*, a reflection on whether Heidegger's support for the Nazi regime necessitates evil laden within Heidegger's work in *Being and Time*, takes care in suggesting that evil is never so unidirectional or simplistic and defaulting to a position that fixes its representation ultimately forecloses our understanding, indeed our recognition of its praxis:

"Can we be assured, however, that there was never any echo of Evil in it? The diabolical is not limited to the wickedness popular wisdom ascribes to it and whose malice, based on guile, is familiar and predictable in an adult culture. The diabolical is endowed with intelligence and enters where it will. To reject it, it is first necessary to refute it. Intellectual effort is needed to recognize it. Who can boast of having done so? Say what you will, the diabolical gives food for thought." (1989, 488)

The refusal to oversimplify violence as merely about good versus evil finds resonance in the persistence of colonial impositions like racism and sexism, and pivot us towards a subversion of European phenomenological and ontological positions that take as their premise and beginning Man's encounter with the world and/or the act of thinking. Put another way, the Diabolical is dynamic, processual, emergent out of a set of conditions. It is a certain poisoning. It can't be censored or easily removed because it emerges out of a

colonial and imperial positioning; Levinas paved way for discussions about the colonial presupposition. Holding the door open for decolonial scholars of the likes of Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Walter Dignolo and Enrique Dussel towards ways of knowing that instead concern themselves with ethics and the bodily demands of face-to-face, subject-Other encounters: or, the relational demands of transontological difference.

To begin from this position, it is crucial to articulate the role of coloniality in ‘modern’ identity formation. Only then can we begin to fully come to terms with the conditions and relations for identity the coloniality of being creates and seeks; as well as what it forecloses and destroys. Situating the problem of the cartesian-colonial habit explicitly within its colonial roots, allows me to articulate decolonial commitments as the necessary antithesis to contemporary regimes of knowing and being that are fundamentally violent; and as such, detrimental to both human and non-human life.



**Figure 4:** from, *Not a Woman but a Shaman*

In short, a decolonial turn or commitment, returns us to several fundamental truths obscured and estranged by the cartesian-colonial habit: 1. self is always already threaded through with that which is excluded; that which is outside, other, and absent; self is always fundamentally shot through and shaped by the other and all else; and 2. Being is

ultimately an ongoing creative relation of reciprocity and participation with the world and its human and nonhuman inhabitants. I turn to the work of decolonial theorist Nelson Maldonado-Torres who in turn draws on the work of Enrique Dussel, Emmanuel Levinas, as well as Walter Mignolo and Franz Fanon, to examine the bases of modernity/coloniality that transforms the coloniality of power, to the coloniality of being.

Enrique Dussel offers a point of entry with regards to the rhetoric of modernity cultivated by Frankfurt school theorists. In one of his Frankfurt Lectures he proceeds as follows:

“Modernity is, for many (for Jurgen Habermas or Charles Taylor) an essentially or exclusively European phenomenon... Modernity appears when Europe affirms itself as the ‘center’ of a World History that it inaugurates: the ‘periphery’ that surrounds this center is consequently part of its self-definition. The occlusion of this periphery (and of the role of Spain and Portugal in the formation of the modern world system from the late fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries) leads the major contemporary thinkers of the ‘center’ into a Eurocentric fallacy in their understanding of modernity. If their understanding of the genealogy of modernity is thus partial and provincial, their attempts at a critique or defense of it are likewise unilateral and, in part, false.”  
(1995, p65)

Dussel in this lecture ties the concept of modernity to the Spanish reconquest of the Kingdom of Granada from Islamic rule in 1492 and the colonization of the Andalusia. Dussel highlights how the “broken treaties, elimination of local elites, endless massacres and tortures, the demand that the conquered betray their religion and culture under pain of death or expulsion, the confiscation and repartition in feudal form of lands, towns, and their inhabitant to the officers of the conquering army” consequently provided the model for the colonial pursuits in the New World and the rendering of Latin America as “first periphery” of modern Europe (ibid 67). The global effects of this moment (or ‘myth’) of origin would set in motion the generative and constitutive process of ‘modernization’ in Africa and Asia as well, where the connection between Eurocentrism and its associated “fallacy of developmentalism” were imposed unilaterally upon other cultures across the

world (ibid). But drawing on Hegel and Kant, Dussel shows how ‘development’ was framed and applied as a form “necessary movement” from humanity’s alleged state of “guilty immaturity”; “laziness”; “cowardice” adolescence, towards an enlightened and developed consciousness (ibid, p67-69). Where through Doctrines of Discovery, Eurocentrism delegitimized (by violent force) pre-existing ways of knowing and being within Latin America, Africa and Asia, so that “Spirit’s freedom” could be fully realized through the “moment of development” and the rational, individual, self—courtesy of explicitly Christian principles.

Concurrently, Dussel links both Hegel’s and Habermas’s discounting of the ‘discovery’ of the Americas as the violent, necessary imperative to modernity, where the ‘civil society’ of Europe transcends the state through colonies in the New World. Hegel, he writes, does not clearly comprehend that the myth of ‘free space’ in the peripheries of Europe, of which allowed, “the poor, produced by contradictions of capitalist development, to become capitalists or property owners themselves in the colonies” of the New World, necessitated a dispossession, exploitation (if not complete annihilation) and dislocation of pre-existing cultures and peoples (ibid 74). That “new possibilities” or ‘transcendental’ subjectivity for the poor and down trodden of Europe, meant the rearticulation of dominant/subordinate relations elsewhere. Thus, Dussel writes, “[t]his process of discovery and conquest...is not simply of anecdotal or historical interest: It is part of the process of the constitution of modern subjectivity itself.” (67). Reason and rationality, as well as their critique, are dependent upon a vision of modernity that necessitates an asymmetrical Other in order to manifest a Self; and willfully, through violence, and through both discursive and material erasure and exclusion, ensures they can neither intervene in such “critiques” or conversations (ibid 76). Hence, to critique and deal with the problem of interface, be it technology as language, device, or institutional policy, one must deal with the resonances of coloniality in identity and being.

Ego Conquiro

Maldonado-Torres, in *The Coloniality of Being*, illustrates how cartesian subjectivity was established along a particular axis of power. Namely, domination structured around the



idea of race and global markets. Through coloniality, the codification of difference was established through racialized terms of the conqueror and the conquered. The objectification of conquered land and peoples through capitalism became a means of controlling resources and labour. Through slavery and serfdom at best and cultural genocide at worst, this system of domination and subordination was central to maintaining colonial control in the Americas (2007, P243-244).

Maldonado-Torres, drawing on the work of Enrique Dussel, points to Spanish Conquistador Hernan Cortes's expression of ideal subjectivity, one predating Rene Descarte's *ego cogito*, of *ego conquiro*. Whereby, the significance of Cartesian subjectivity derived from the European enlightenment, must be understood first and foremost, "against the backdrop of an unquestioned ideal of self expressed in the notion of the *ego conquiro*. The certainty of the self as a conqueror, of its tasks and missions" (2007, p.245). Thus, for Maldonado-Torres, the skepticism generated towards the humanity of the conquered barbarian became not only the justification for domination and subordination, but also constituted an *imperial attitude*. Of which served to form the basis for cartesian formations of identity, or "modern Imperial Man" (2007, p. 245):

"point of view also leads to the idea that it would be impossible to provide an adequate account of the crisis of modern Europe without reference, not only to the limits of a Cartesian view of the world, but also to the traumatic effects of Manichean misanthropic skepticism and its imperial ethos." (2007, p. 245-246)

Such ethos can be seen through the accomplishments of instrumental rationality and *ego cognito*, in the way that notions of progress, freedom, or Rights of Man do not inherently extend equally to all, as their assertion in the first account presupposes universal or shared definitions of which the conquered in question have been stripped in contributing or ascribing to (2007, p.246). Thus, " the preferential option for the *ego conquiro* [explains] why security for some can conceivably be obtained at the expense of the lives of others" (2007, p. 246), as coloniality is a process by which the transcendental moment of subjectivity arrives at the behest of an ethical forgetfulness or *selectiveness*, where "exceptions to ethical relationships become the norm" (2007,p. 259). Foreclosing the

horizon of interaction amongst peoples; indeed any Other way knowing and being within the world, “by actually giving birth to a world in which lordship and supremacy rather than generous interaction define social dynamics in society.” (2007, p.259)

### The Non-Ethics of War

Coloniality then must be understood as an ontologically significant event in the history of human societies with which notions of Self emerged in response and relation, always already perforated and shot through, by colonial dispositions of Otherness. Achieved at the expense of subordination, indeed the violence against, the conquered peoples of the Americas. This condition of individual agency is then shaped, by what Maldonado-Torres asserts as, “a transformation and naturalization of the non-ethics of war”:

“This non-ethics included the practices of eliminating and slaving certain subjects - e.g., indigenous and black - as part of the enterprise of colonization. The hyperbolic expression of coloniality includes genocide, which is the paroxysm of the ego cogito - a world in which the ego cogito exists alone. War, however, is not only about killing or enslaving. War includes a particular treatment of sexuality and of feminity: rape. Coloniality is an order of things that put people of color under the murderous and rapist sight of a vigilant ego. And the primary targets of rape are women.” (2007, p247-248)

Thus, cartesian-coloniality’s non-ethics are a violent racialization of identity that is also explicitly, *gendered*, “the *ego conquiro* is constitutively a phallic ego as well” (2007, p248).

Maldonado-Torres then, in recourse to Descartes, postulates three categories of Fanonian meditations necessary for reflection on the coloniality of being: *Trans-ontological difference*: the difference between Being and what is beyond Being; or Being and exteriority, *Ontological difference*: the difference between Being and beings, and *Sub-ontological/ontological colonial difference*: the difference between Being and what lies

below Being or that which is negatively marked as dispensable as well as a target of rape and murder (2007, p. 253-254).

The latter is a product of the coloniality of being where:

“The same ideas that inspire perverted acts in war, particularly slavery, murder and rape, are legitimized in modernity through the idea of race and gradually are seen as normal to a great extent thanks to the alleged obviousness and non-problematic character of Black slavery and anti-Black racism. To be sure those who suffer the consequences of such a system are primarily Blacks and indigenous peoples, as well as all of those who appear as colored. In short, this system of symbolic representations, the material conditions that in part produce it and continue to legitimate it, and the existential dynamics that occur therein, which are also at the same time derivative and constitutive of such a context, are part of a process that naturalizes the non-ethics of war.”  
(Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p.254-255)

It is these non ethics of war that become particularly important when addressing the habits of being embedded within modern institutions, technology and ways of knowing. Understanding the racialized and gendered violence the colonial habit instantiates, is not a call for mere reconciliation, acknowledgement or inclusion, it is also a call to pay attention to the ways this violence against Other is fundamentally always already a violence done to ourselves<sup>30</sup>. What *ego conquiro* reveals is that the racist and sexist impasse of modern scientific and social development is predicated on a dehumanization, a dislocation or dismemberment, of a fundamental ontological difference that is always

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<sup>30</sup> To quote Fanon, in *Black Skin White Masks*: “The disaster of the man of color lies in the fact that he was enslaved. The disaster and the inhumanity of the white man lie in the fact that somewhere he has killed man. And even today they subsist, to organize this dehumanization rationally.” (1986 p.231)

inevitably interwoven with how we see or don't see, the *damne'*<sup>31</sup> and ourselves<sup>32</sup>. As Quijano points out, under the reign of a differential politic,

"[t]he differentiated individual subjectivity is real', but it is not an entity, to it doesn't exist only vis-a-vis itself or by itself. It exists as a differentiated part, but not separated, of an intersubjectivity or intersubjective dimension of a social relationship. Every individual discourse, or reflection, remits to a structure of intersubjectivity. The former is constituted in and vis a vis the latter. Knowledge in this perspective is an intersubjective relation..." (2007, p173)

Where knowledge as an intersubjective relation, is not one of atomized individual interiority and something else, but an intersubjective queer relationship between entangled subjectivities and their exteriority for the purpose of something else. Maldonado-Torres, turns to Emmanuel Levinas to elaborate on that which ties the interiority of being intimately with the exterior of being, the transontological imperative of being in and of the world:

Levinas argues that gift-giving and reception are fundamental traits of the self. Giving is first and

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<sup>31</sup> "Following Fanon, I will use a concept that refers to the colonial subject, equivalent in some way to Dasein but

marking the aspects of the coloniality of Being: the *damne'* or condemned of the earth. The *damne'* is for the coloniality of Being what Dasein is for fundamental ontology, but, as it were, in reverse. The *Damne'* is for European Dasein the being who is 'not there'. I want to argue that they are not independent of each other but that, without awareness of coloniality, reflection on Dasein and Being involve the erasure of the *damne'* and the coloniality of Being" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007 p253) Maldonado-Torres also asserts: "The *damne'* is the subject that emerges in a world marked by the coloniality of Being. The *damne'*, as Fanon put it, has nonontological resistance in the eyes of the dominant group. The *damne'* is either invisible or excessively visible. The *damne'* exists in the mode of not-being there, which hints at the nearness of death, at the company of death. The *damne'* is a concrete being but it is also a transcendental concept. Emile Benveniste has shown that the term *damne'* is etymologically related to the concept of *donner*, which means, to give. The *damne'* is literally the subject who cannot give because what he or she has has been taken from him or her." (ibid 258)

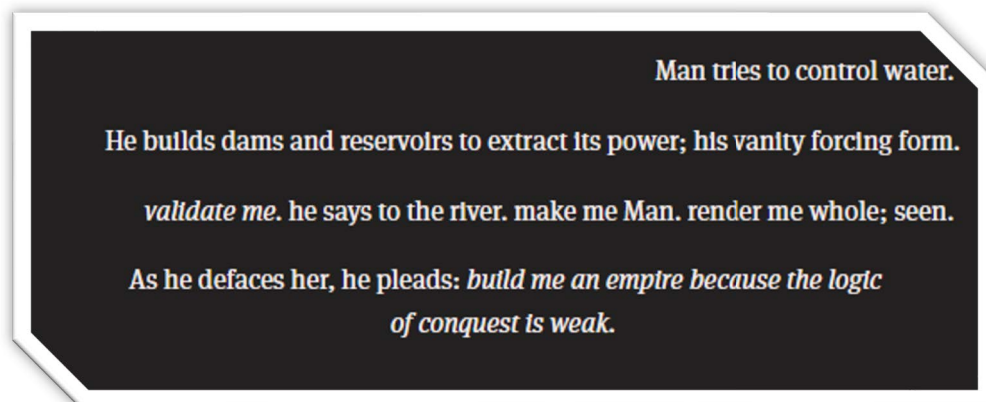
<sup>32</sup> As eluded to above, this non ethics can and should be read through the lens of ethical forgetfulness and *selectiveness*, whereby supremacy and lordship, indeed explicitly *white* supremacy and lordship, dictate the parameters of ethics and the dehumanization of being. *Damne* is used by Franz Fanon and Maldonado-Torres here to articulate the subject that emerges from this process, those implicated by the non-ethics of war; the violent absence and silenced, conquered peoples; specifically Black and indigenous peoples; women, of no being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 257-260).

foremost for Levinas a metaphysical act that makes possible the communication between a self and an Other as transontological as well as the sharing of a common world. Without giving to an Other there would be no self just as without receiving from the Other there would be no reason. In short, without a trans-ontological moment there would be no self, no reason, and no Being. The trans-ontological is the foundation of the ontological. For Levinas, the ontological, the realm of being, comes to exist out of the introduction of justice into the trans-ontological relation" (2007, p.258)

We see this echoed most reverently in the concluding chapters of *Black Skin, White Masks*, with Fanon's final words laying bare the fundamental imperative of trans/ontological difference, "Superiority? Inferiority? Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself? Was my freedom not given to me then in order to build the world of the You?" (1986, p.231-232). For Fanon, the countering of the force and legitimacy of European modernity and its dynamics of possession, its logic of dehumanization and subordination demanded, "a war against war oriented by 'love'", specifically, to situating *love* as ethics within notions of trans/ontological differences (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p.256). Indeed, the restoration of humanity as givers in perpetual and reciprocal generous exchange, denies all politics of possession the colonality of being imposes; it is colonization and its extensions, its obligatory subjugation upon bodies, that instantiates the death instinct<sup>33</sup> we wield upon ourselves and other.

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<sup>33</sup> Where the life instinct or life energy in question for this work should be understood as one of receptivity, creativity, and giving; indeed love, in its most honest forms and truth bearing forms.



**Figure 5: From, Not a Woman but a Shaman**

*El conquiero* provides we all find ourselves “in a world in which things do evil; a world in which I am summoned into battle; a world in which it is always a question of annihilation or triumph.” (Fanon, 1986, p.228) Leaving us two paths to transcendence: domination or death. Thus, a turn to decolonial commitments ought to destabilize *el conquiero* and *el cogito* as bodily and institutional habits that serve to buttress these conditions. Where love as ethics, understands social totality as the radical threadedness of entangled subjectivities in reciprocal exchange with the world and all else.

Restoring the Gift: the decolonial turn

“And, if Sartre has appeared to formulate a description of love as frustration, his Being and Nothingness amounting only to an analysis of dishonesty and inauthenticity, the fact remains that true, authentic love—wishing for others what one postulates for oneself, when that postulation unites the permanent values of human reality—entails the mobilization of psychic drives basically freed of unconscious conflicts... Today I believe in the possibility of love; that is why I endeavor to trace its imperfections, its perversions.” (Fanon, 1986, p.41)

Thus what is crucial to this discussion, is the notion that the colonality of being is by no means an inherent nor inevitable outcome or mode to being, indeed we might understand it instead, as an unnatural pollutant, a toxin, soiling the dynamic relations involved in the

creation of meaning. A disease, that, “shows itself forth when the preservation of Being (in any of its determinations: national ontologies, identitarian ontologies, etc.) takes primacy over listening to the cries of those whose humanity is being denied.” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007.p 257) Furthermore, a restoration of humanity, of being, requires a theory of a healing, indeed an ethics of love that dismantles imperial man and the paradigm of war imposed in his wake. Where agency is defined in relation to, “a world oriented by the ideals of human generosity and receptivity. This is the precise meaning of decolonization: restoration of the logic of the gift.” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p.260)

The gift that it is a trans/ontological experience; of difference. This work, then, understands decoloniality and its discourse to be concepts, expressions that act as invitations to dialogue and respond to desires for new meaning to be exchanged across and through different ways of knowing. (2007, 261) In such a way (as best put by Fanon), “[t]hat the tool never possess the man. That the enslavement of man by man cease forever. That is, of one by another. That it be possible for me to discover and to love man, wherever he may be.” (Fanon, 1986, p.231)

Decolonial commitments, then, are not ones of mere representation and its exclusion/inclusion terms of being, they include, but more appropriately extend beyond acknowledgement and reconciliation. More appropriately it is a performative ethos that ceases to engage in the neurotic<sup>34</sup> demands of colonial being and instead pursues rehumanizing efforts to breakdown “hierarchies of difference that dehumanize subjects and communities”, and explores methods for, “the production of counter-discourses, counter-knowledges, and counter-creative acts and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality and open up other forms of being within the world” (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p.10).

Such commitments, introduce questions regarding the embodied effects of the coloniality of being in modern societies and subjectivities, in order to create space for alternative

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<sup>34</sup> “The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation. “(Fanon, 1986 p.60)

ways of knowing and relating to the world and each other to emerge; that are ideally committed to the creative generation of meaning more suitable to a collectively implicated world of human and nonhuman being. Where learning, indeed knowing, does not serve to extend, verify, or preference *el cogito* and its binary non ethics, but rather actively pursues its unraveling:

“The Decolonial Turn is about making visible the invisible and about analyzing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility in light of a large stock of ideas that must necessarily include the critical reflections of the ‘invisible’ people themselves. Indeed, one must recognize their intellectual production as **thinking** not only as culture or ideology... a fundamental shift in perspective that leads one to see the world anew in a way that allows one to target its evils in a new way and that gives us a better sense of what to do next...” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p.262)

Crucially, decolonial commitments are about *doing*. Not isolating ideas and change in ways that divorce knowledge from action or theory from practice. Rather, decolonial commitments “combine knowledge, practice, and creative expressions, among other areas in their efforts to change the world. “(Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p.7) Indeed, we are thinking with and from within the absences, silences, and gaps that mark and sustain *el cogito*’s reign. This very much means that decolonial commitments are rife with conflict and imperfections. Unlearning habits is a process that requires feedback and ongoing dialogue in order for new formations of being, new habits, to be developed and sustained. Furthermore, this more pointedly suggests they must remain open to amendments and transformation, “Neither perfect nor pure, decoloniality is rather an attitude that keeps subjects and collectives open to growth and corrections as well as an unfinished project.” (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p.31)

Technologies of decolonization do not name and cannot name, the outside, absence, unknown or beyond, from within the colonial matrix of power<sup>35</sup>. As detailed elsewhere,

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<sup>35</sup> As with concepts such as Dependency Theory or World-system analysis, emergent from the social sciences. That as Mignolo notes, “in the politics of their loci of enunciation”, impose and extend differential imperial rule as praxis and can be understood as, “the difference between center and periphery,



when we are positioned above and outside of the world we are a part of, in all its colonial and imperial inheritance, we are offered little insight as to how we contribute to or transcend its violence. The imperial differential transitions in the global south that extend the colonality of being, are marked by the social transformation of Third World countries (who were manifest as 3<sup>rd</sup> through their exploitation) by the imposition of First World academic, corporate and governmental structures, as Mignolo writes:

“The scenario is simple: Western expansion was not only economic and political but also educational and intellectual. The Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism was accepted in former colonies as ‘‘our own’’ critique of Eurocentrism; socialist alternatives to liberalism in Europe were taken, in the colonies, as a path of liberation without making the distinction between emancipation in Europe and liberation in the colonial world. Quite simply, the colonial difference was not considered in its epistemic dimension...” (2013, p 64)

This conceptual enframing bleeds through institutionalized epistemic biases beholden and gripped by the omnipresent imposition of colonality within liberal academics. To theorize within an institution that standardizes education and pedagogy through disciplinary enclosures<sup>36</sup>, ethnocentrism, credibility metrics, methodologically stunted scientific practices, and a shared reality bias, is to not only further colonality via epistemic injustice but also circumvent and short circuit epistemological accountability, growth and potential (Anderson, 2012; Andreotti et al 2015; Amar, 2018). Hence, decolonial technologies of epistemic interface ought to think with and from within pre-

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between the Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism and knowledge production by those who participated in building the modern/colonial world and those who have been left out of the discussion. Las Casas defended the Indians, but the Indians did not participate in the discussions about their rights. The emerging capitalists benefiting from the industrial revolution were eager to end slavery that supported plantation owners and slaveholders. Black Africans and American Indians were not taken into account when knowledge and social organization were at stake. They, Africans and American Indians, were considered patient, living organisms to be told, not to be heard.” (2000, p63)

<sup>36</sup> Specifically here with regards to the fact that Women, Black, Indigenous, Asian and Latino people, as Jose Saldivar has pointed out in Mignolo and elsewhere, “are not just a social phenomenon that shall be studied from the perspective of the social sciences modeled from the perspective of White Europeans and US scholars” and under a certain “universal pretension of an epistemology founded, [as Quijano observes], on the experience of one particular ethnicity, white euro-americans” (2013, p269)

colonial or anti-imperial ways of knowing and disengage<sup>37</sup> from the imposed obligation to see and understand the world from within the hubris of an ‘alleged unmarked universal neutrality (Mignolo, 2013, p278).

José Saldivar has suggested that de-colonial thinking is the “pluri-versal epistemology of the future; an epistemology that de-links from the tyranny of abstract universals (Christians, liberals, or Marxists).” (Mignolo et al 2013, 284) Crucial to this epistemic shift, as Saldivar notes in *Unsettling Race, Coloniality and Caste*, is the refusal to essentialize identity through the reversal of such enunciative foci<sup>38</sup> and the embrace of geopolitical and spatial implications for those whose experience and identities have been fractured by the borders of coloniality and all its binary castes. Drawing on both W. E. B. Du Bois and Gloria Anzaldúa, Saldivar explains how the work of these author’s recodifies ethnoracial subjectivities to hold the tensions; the “warring ideals” of “inherent US linguistic wars” (or for Du Bois, white Americanism) “both inside the body of the nation and in the body of [the] soul”, so that new cultural formations might emerge (2007, p351-352).

Specifically, Saldivar is interested in Anzaldúa’s insistence on the centrality of *nepantilism*, as a subalternist vernacular that resists borders, binaries, and castes, a “serpent” dialect “capable of cracking, fracturing, and braiding the very authority of the master’s English-only tongue.” (2007, p353) Significant to Anzaldúa’s perspective is the way she understands *nepantilism* as the threshold between identities; for Anzaldúa the multiple axis of experience privy to being a chicano, queer, feminist, woman. The vantage point offered by *nepantilism* it can be said, is explicitly emergent from Anzaldúa’s struggle with colonial gender binarism<sup>39</sup> *in and through* her chicano identity.

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<sup>37</sup> In recent years, shifts in university approaches in the Andean region of South America have show what epistemic decolonisation, thinking with and within pre- or anti-imperial or otherwise marginalized epistemologies, might look like indigenous run educational initiatives and *interculturalidad* educational components (Amar, 2018).

<sup>38</sup> To study white European world-making, from within the colonial crack.

<sup>39</sup> Gender dynamics have been from the beginning, fundamental and crucial to fortifying and upholding imperial regimes and the coloniality of power (Shiwy, 2007 p275). Freya Shiwy has drawn attention to how gender and, “[t]he construction of subjectivity is the third dimension of the coloniality of power” (ibid p 274). And while the invention of race as a technology of the conqueror has been highly important marker

Though Anzaldúa's theory of *nepantilism* is expanded upon and revised in her later work to be both liminal space and embodied spirit (as explained and drawn on in other sections), the braided and threaded-throughness of its vernacular manifests through performance, as a means of resisting binary systems of knowledge production. In short, it takes the entangled nature of knowledge and identity as the fluid state with which we begin in the world; but also the transformative space with which we can engage and rewrite our selves. *Nepantilism* is not a closed world, but rather an openness to totality and change that supports the manifestation of nonbinary modes of being, privy to the shape shifting demands of concepts like justice, dignity, and diversity inclusive, or *interculturalidad* worlds.

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for the coloniality of power and contributed significantly to the reign of imperial power and unjust governance over subjectivities, as Shiwiy details, gender imaginaries have not received the same degree of attention: "The construction of racial subjectivity has served as a bodily metaphor for ordering economic, political as well as epistemic relations, while at the same time creating lived exclusions and abuses as well as forms of organized and quotidian resistance and subversion. Yet, constructs of masculinity and femininity, relations between women and men as well as those who do not fit smoothly into these binary categories have been crucial to all of these dimensions." (ibid 274-275) Hence, coloniality and imperial differential rule cannot be completely comprehended or contended with in the absence of a theory of gender as Shiwiy writes: "[w]hen discussions of the coloniality of power abstract from gender, they risk reinscribing foundational elements of the coloniality of power where gender binaries and gender imaginaries have been naturalized<sup>39</sup>" she goes on: "[t]he colonial imaginary has employed gender as a metaphor and means of subalternization, a metaphor that resulted not only in the representation of territories as female virgin lands that the conquerors penetrated with the sword in hand. The gendering of colonial imaginaries has operated as a means of rendering European masculinity through Othering." (ibid 275)

And to hold that kind of power? to conquer it; tame it;  
instrumentalize its medicine for individual use: that  
kind of seizure of spirit, is the foundation of our  
modern society, our current mode of historical violence.  
against nature, against others;

against ourselves.

nepantlera's Its time to ask ourselves:

*why, if we didn't have power, would we need to be contained so much?*  
Impositions and expectations swarm us, foreclose our identities with shame  
and (self) hate.

but we are not the wave. *we are water.* our energy is constant and finite, present  
in ultimately all things: but our form, is already expanding, our form, is  
reminder that we can, we must, we do, change.

**Figure 6: From, Not a woman but a Shaman**

Decolonial technologies of epistemic interface ought to queer identity/knowledge in such a way that resists essentialist representations *and* universal epistemic positions. They should be fundamentally concerned with the performance and embodiment of epistemic (and as such ontologic) transitions; with occupying the space between becoming accountable to what we must leave behind to pursue just and dignity centered futures, and sensing the world anew through embrace of the messy, uncontainable and interrelational threadedness of trans/ontological difference. This means engaging in imaginative methods committed to nonbinary, pre-colonial or anti-imperial thinking and doing as critical project, as well as, more fundamentally, a shift toward love as ethics, and identity/knowledge as performative entanglement. Hence, to decolonize interface as epistemic, this project turns to the embodied demands of quantum physics, gender, precolonial ways of knowing, and fiction and poetics as method.

## **Rituals for Healing:**

**Queer performance, decoloniality and fiction, fissures, and  
cracks**

i read once that words are weapons.

wield them wisely,  
in their splendor,  
in their violence.

that in the silence of what it is, and what could be,

they find their defiance.

what lies between what's written, and that which crowns perception?

indefinite shadows masquerade upon walls, while the  
hallows of truth beguile acceptance.

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i wonder, of the words that don't break the surface, liminal gods of expression,

what kinds of matters, remain estranged, severed,  
from man-made transcendence.

such sources of vision, however fragmented, of divine prismatic

somewhere in-between sentient beings,

and sorcery and magic.

truth evades us, even as words proliferate,

in the fertile nexus,

the realm of intangibles.

simulated experience, blinds us with signals, traps us within the  
threshold.

where meaning, becomes gesture, where word, becomes symbol,

what becomes of weapons and splendor, transcendence,

in the land of the ephemeral?

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## Methods Part 1: nonbinary theorizing and fictionalized performance

The binary non ethics of the modern sociotechnic system, then, are not rogue or wild deviations brought about by technologies. It is from the examination of el conquiso, the colonial presupposition to the cartesian, that we can see these systems are working exactly as they were designed. There have always been bodies buried beneath the commons. The veil is a propriety built on this accord. Liberalism and markets are colonial games, colonial extensions:

"...liberalism is by no means the opposite of racism, racist state formations, colonialism, or apartheid. Liberalism is rather a political ideology that facilitates a transition from vulgar legal forms of discrimination to in many cases less vulgar but equally or more discriminatory practices and structures. Liberal institutions in a modern/colonial world aim to advance modernity without realizing that doing so also entails the continuation of coloniality. Universities become centers of command and control, which make them easy to militarize when opposition rises. Many students feel choked and breathless in this context." ((Maldonado-Torres, 2016 p5)

Thus, domination shifts, in modern capitalist democracies, to less conspicuous, "state sanctioned" mechanisms of control and violence. The kind that reduces the process, the potentialities of learning and knowledge creation to the same kind of atomized abuse of agency and the militant governing of cognitive, spiritual, and bodily horizons of the cartesian-colonial habit. Universities in their siloed and hegemonic approaches to education; in their colonial mindsets that sanction hierarchal structures, labor abuse, paternalism, competition structured and ethno/eurocentric lenses; in their abstracted distance from their world and the violence their inattentive detachment inflicts, effectively foreclose the possibilities for alternative configurations of being to emerge. If we are to truly to dismantle cartesian-colonial habits of being, to work towards ideals of justice, we need to more acutely understand the social and historical forces that brought us here and how they move and connect us. This includes rigorously examining the

spaces within liberal institutions that extend and reinforce colonial logic, that close down and prohibit us from imagining, evolving, or engaging other ways of knowing and being.

Race, inequalities, and global and higher education scholar Vanessa Andreotti says of the imposed knowledge filters and cultural horizons of modern colonial approaches to education: “they produce, “cognitive, affective, and relational economies that have left us unprepared and unwilling to address our complicity in systemic harm, or face the magnitude of the problems that we have ahead of us” (Andreotti et al., 2018 p11). This means, any decolonial inquiry into a theory of change needs to be anchored in a turn away and deliberate undoing of cartesian-colonial habits of being that underlie, govern, guide, and constrain our current organization of human and nonhuman life. Who we are within political structures; laws; ideas; stories have physical manifestations within our bodies. We come to embody, enact, or chafe against, the material-discursive forces of language, of matter and meaning; in all its anxieties and violence, in all its liberation and freedoms. Thus, we must concern ourselves with the embodied practice of knowledge making. So, this project instead, gathers itself around and engages imaginative offerings for creative, just, and ever-changing futures. An engagement with creativity, rather than creation. Human evolution has always been and continues to be anchored in deeply imaginative, spiritual and creative participation with the world (Cajete, 2000). Bell Hooks in creative fictions speaks of how fiction and writing act as method for creating new possible worlds, for taking back the objects of the mind and moving beyond the neoliberal colonization of minds and imaginations: “...if the mind was to be a the site of resistance, only the imagination could make it so. To imagine, then, was a way to begin the process of transforming reality. All that we cannot imagine will never come into being. Critical fictions emerge when the imagination is free to wander, explore, question, transgress.” (hooks, 1998 p55) So, what does this mean in practice? How do we create space for change?

Both fictions and communication technologies, act as translation systems for collective knowledge and understanding. Both interpolate bodies<sup>40</sup>. Both manifest worlds.

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<sup>40</sup> Hayles has made the link between fiction and machines as interpolating texts that render certain effects upon embodiment “...bodies *within* texts and their relation to the human lifeworld as it is reconfigured by



Technology itself being value, and as such story, laden, to speak of the latter is to implicitly engage the former by default. Put another way, as we make technology, it also makes us. Being, and as such knowing, is interfaced through these material discursive assemblages, with differential affordances and resonances within, upon and across bodies. The embeddedness of the cartesian-colonial habit renders a certain disjointed logic that poses technology as neutral, as outside of the implications of history or culture, while at the same time posing technology as an overdetermining force, a looming threat that is destroying democracy. This logic perpetuates a dynamic that divorces what we create from who and what we are and wish to become—it objectifies and distances us from our own nature. It enacts a false cut between identity and being; it masks the agency and role of interface in rendering certain habits, worlds, social relations, and culture.

Thus, fictions and communication media, as political technologies, as cultural interface, generate collective belief systems, delimiting both origin and horizon stories of a given society. These commonly held notions of truth, however oppressive, liberating and in any case knowledge producing, merge with individual experiences and personal histories to mark and bound how we come to understand and engage with the world, as well as, how we come to know and understand ourselves. Hence, understanding the role of interface, one of the most critical tasks of any movement of change, is determining how to organize information in such a way that moves us, that ignites our spirit, fosters relationships across, through and within differences; that engages us eco-politically and helps us understand intimately the conditions of our self-collective experience; it demands courage, love, and responsibility, without guilt, without shame and without fear. Thus, fictionalizing and the imaginary remain crucial to the project of any conceivable future, as the desire for social change itself is driven by a certain collective dreaming of a better world.

As Jon K Shaw and Theo Reeves-Evison detail in their introduction to *Fiction as Method*, “Fictions proliferate in all aspects of our lives, unconstrained by the novel as a specific form of art.”(Shaw and Reeves-Evison, 2017 p27) Westphalian maps,

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interpolating humans with machines that, as they become intelligent, increasingly interpenetrate and indeed constitute bodies” (Hayles, 2005 p62)

financialization, and democracy have all been established upon imagined relations or fictitious based leaps of faith (Allen, 2004; Shaw and Reeves-Evison, 2017). Such fictions, as we have seen have significant real life effects. Shaw and Reeves detail post Reagan-Thatcher deregulation and derivative markets, ushered in alongside complex mathematical modeling, have resulted in an “economy of speculative financial products of which employ fictions to model, and to determine, the future” and “begets a new deterministic relation such that the demands of the market come to shape the matter and relations of life...and the future itself comes to be manipulable by finance, and potentiality—the future as properly unknowable—is permanently deferred” (Shaw and Reeves-Evison, 2017 p22-23).

Thus for Reeves and Shaw, the emergence of the “term “post-truth” simply describes the spread of this paradigm into a media space that was presumed to be insulated against its effects” (ibid p27). However, they suggest that fiction and fictionalising ought to be understood as an invitation we extend carefully and strategically into, “the radical unknowability of the future” (ibid p23). Hence, the value and stakes of fiction as method, are “no less than the reinvention of the future beyond the impasses of the present” (ibid p23); a “turning toward an outside that has been [yet] colonized by Capital” (ibid p24). In a “post-truth” era, what has become clear is that, “it is not longer a case of establishing the truth about post-truth, or of cleaving fiction from fact, but making tangible the idea that truth and fiction are dynamic concepts that are both produced and productive” (ibid p29), beholden to a technical interface assemblage over-determined by neoliberal markets and thus exploited via the logics of circulation, connectivity, visibility and order, weaponized by private interests (ibid p29). Accordingly, Reeves and Shaw’s point is that “...categories of fact and fiction are always conditioned by the materials used to craft, frame, and distribute the discursive objects that scroll down our screens in a blur of epistemological indeterminacy” (ibid p32) and likewise, “[t]he issue of how we both construct and are constructed by fiction has over recent years had an increasing influence on thinking about the future of human relations with technology<sup>41</sup>” (ibid p36).

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<sup>41</sup> This relationship has also been articulated by Katherine N Hayles, who has shown how narrative (mainly SF) offers renegotiations of subject/object binaries and how within these stories we are offered a lensing of

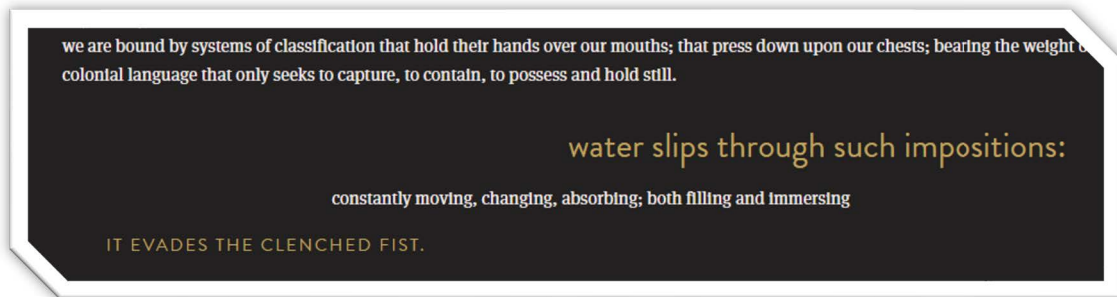
This project is very much concerned with the latter relationship, especially as it relates to performance, identity, colonized subjects, and just post-digital futures. Just as fictions “can send semiotic ripples in multiple directions at the same time, spreading its reach deep into the material intensities of the body”, additionally they can be “constructed as protective shields against truths too difficult, traumatic, or incongruous to bear” (ibid p35). Thus in an era of increasingly AI mediated social exchange, where fiction is both synthetic and embodied, how can fictionally grounded social relations that acknowledge the necessity of reciprocity in personhood and interaction, “open us toward a sociality based on acknowledging the opacity of the other’s subjectivity”? (ibid p41) Or—if the algorithmic gaze estranges us, Others us in all its quantified speculative leaps, how can embodied fictionalising help us “[imagine] and [practice] new social relations beyond those overcoded by fictional commodities and future-modeling financial-fictions”? (ibid p52) If we have: “[become] both a circulating image and a statistical subject intersected by commercial and governmental algorithms” (ibid p126), what can a return to the body through fictionalized writing teach us about the limitations of representation and identity and potentialities laden within processes of performance?

Thus, this research presents speculative autofiction, as a productive political mechanism suitable for resisting and reconfiguring modern fictions and systems of knowledge that are fundamentally colonial, violent and culturally and politically pollutant. However, it begins from the notion that performativity, not representation, is the basis for ontology. Hence why we can speak indeed even see difference proliferate across disciplinary contexts but fail to liberate and respect its role in the human condition; fail to understand it as a distributed knowledge producing practice. Difference is not a representation—it is a relation. The basic ontological unit is entanglement, not individuality. The performativity of interface (and fictions), then, lends itself to critical discourses surrounding gender, difference, and queer (or quantum) phenomenology to which this

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how “human action and agency [can be] understood as embodied processes sharing important characteristics with the processes taking place within computational media, including possibilities for evolution and emergence...” “What we make” and “what (we think) we are” coevolve together; emergence can operate as an ethical dynamic as well as a technological one.” (Hayles, 2005 p243) Hayles articulates the issue at hand is not inscribing these interactions into structures of domination but rather, the pursuit of understandings “that recognize and enact the complex mutuality of [these] interactions” (ibid 243).

section turns to, along with decolonial educational frameworks and commitments, to illustrate creativity as an iterative process that returns us to the body and performance.



**Figure 7: Subtext on Gender in Bullethead**

Queer Performativity: refusing the body as sub-human cultural sign

Gender as a generative category of identity, structures and orients experience. It presents as comparable framework for rejecting the binary conceptions of causality (described in previous sections), and begins from the position that identity is not an essence but a doing (Butler, 1990 p.112). Both essential points for interventions into and understandings of, interface: as it understands how “[t]he formulation of the body [is] a mode of dramatizing or enacting possibilities” and as such, “offers a way to understand how a cultural convention is embodied and enacted.” (butler 1988 p4) It offers a performative temporal process that operates through and within a reiteration of norms, “inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations” (Butler, 1997, p.160).

Like Butler, I refuse any binary sense of agency between individuals and larger social structures (*butler 1988, p1*). The point, then, of turning to gender is to render identity as a performance implicated by the colonial shutter. Enacted, embodied, and ongoing, gender reveals the inherent spatial and temporal boundaries and cuts of material-discursive categories and practices (Barad, 2007, p.63) Read: it illustrates the power of constructed cultural fictions.

Thus, gender offers a clearing with which to begin theorizing models of performativity in technological design, or how identity becomes interfaced through certain resonances or

affordances in performance. Where, queer theory offers a model that is premised on inhabiting norms differently, in rejecting fixed assumptions of identity. Queering representationalist binarisms, “[q]ueer lives are about the potentiality of not following certain conventional scripts” or habitual standards of being that codify social space (Ahmed, 2006 p.177). Where queer as commitment, would be an orientation toward being that doesn’t disrupt or require ‘deviation’ from script, but rather, a rejection of scripts, a rejection of representations, altogether (Ahmed, 2006, p. 178). A queering of sociality that refuses incorporation on the basis that queer encounters with the world, like that of disorientation or disalignment, are points of contact and interaction that produce new patterns and new ways of making sense of the world and embodied experience (2006, p. 171).

Furthermore, that these differences, these disenabled and disjointed vantage points carry meaning and ontological significance in their very defiance of a homogenized cultural narrative and imperial structure. So, drawing on Judith Butler, bodies are not instruments for the self, but the doing; performance of self, and what differentiates bodies is how they occupy (i.e, move, dwell, do in) space. I draw on two theoretical tools that allow for nonbinary encounters with difference: a theory of disorientation provided by queer phenomenology and Sarah Ahmed, and Karen Barad’s diffractive difference.

The concept of disorientation is often described in negative terms. Associated with things like disorder, unknowns, or crisis. And indeed, in this vein, the sensation, in some instances lends itself to these descriptions. And as Ahmed herself notes, disorientation can and does, often cause us to reach for ground; we can retreat to conservatism in efforts to reground. But what is most peculiar about disorientation is the way it is entirely dependent upon orientation, order, familiarity. Orientation determines how the body proceeds in space; what is within its reach and what is obstructed. We become disoriented, when we no longer know what direction we face, when what is familiar has become unfamiliar. For a disoriented subject making contact becomes an educative doing that doesn’t subscribe to representation or absolute categories. Barad offers an extension of Ahmed’s theory of disorientation: where Ahmed returns us to the body and its injuries;

Barad asks us how these patterns of meaning have come to impress upon skins; their agential patterns.

Thus neither disorientation nor diffraction “overcome the “disalignment” of subjects, objects or lines on axes”, but instead allow what is queer, what is unfamiliar, oblique or absented by the imperial shutter, to “open up another angle on the world” (2006, p.172). Thus these guiding principles are not merely committed to attending to the values *excluded* by the design process (as Feenberg notes), but in embracing difference as a fundamental, fluid, iterative, and relation ridden ontology.

### Orientation as an Ideological Project

For Sarah Ahmed, orientation is our position in space from which the world unfolds. We find our way in accordance with how the social is arranged (Ahmed, 2006, p.7). So when the lines we take in space, align with the lines pre-established by the social, we are oriented subjects. As oriented subjects, we might not even recognize ourselves as such, since our lines proceed clearly established and unobstructed. Thus, orientation within the colonial habit, becomes a hegemonic ideological project—as that which produces order and familiarity and enacts the imperial shutter. We should also, in this vein, pay attention to the way orientation indicates privilege. As what differentiates bodily orientation is how bodies occupy (move, dwell, do in) space (Ahmed, 2006, p.8), where space extends some bodies and not others and enables some actions but not others.

Bodies are produced by and produce, the orientational here and now of their bodily dwelling, in the ways, their bodies align or disalign with the normative conventions, the lines, of the social. Through dwelling, bodies acquire the shape of positions and orientations repeated over time, crucially, “the body emerges from this history of doing, which is also a history of not doing, of paths not taken, which also involves the loss, impossible to know or to even register, of what might have followed from other paths” (Ahmed, 2006 p.159). Thus, the pressures of certain habituated turns and ontological postures, reproduce particular patterns within the social. For Ahmed, the physical impressions heteronormative and hegemonic orientations impose, close down potentialities for social gathering (2006, p. 17, p.24), by delimiting the social to a fixed

and habituated topography. This restricts what is cognitively placed within our reach to think and do as “it is not just that bodies are directed in specific ways, but that the world is shaped by the directions taken by some bodies more than others” (Ahmed, 2006, p.159). What is ‘normative’, then, emerges from certain bodily repetitions sustained over time, that in their very positioning orient and de-orient, enable and dis-enable, close down or extend, certain habits of being over others (Ahmed, 2006, p.66). Conceptualizing orientation as an ideological project in relation to the construction of meaning and knowledge requires being attentive to bodies excluded by current colonial imperatives; what possibilities for connection disappear, what potentialities close down, when we reduce interaction, movement, within virtual space to what is ideologically comfortable through concepts such as homophily? It means accounting for the way certain directions have skewed the network map over time; how do hegemonic orientations sear limitations into our horizons as a result of the imperial shutter? Furthermore, what can we learn about the world from a de-oriented position?

Disorienting in Order to Diffract: patterns of  
difference and relational responsibility

To be a de-oriented or unaligned subject is to exist in a space where objects evade our reach and actions are closed down because the lines we seek to trek as non-normative or dis-enabled bodies are not permitted by the grid of the social. To be a disoriented subject is to constantly feel across surfaces for cracks and fissures; it is to engage the darkspots and gaps; to listen for the silences and the vibrations that mark the distinction between signal and noise in interaction. It is this active doing, coming to know through encountering what is absent, unknown, out of reach or unintelligible, that becomes a useful set of optics for encountering difference differently. Boundless, and as such, precarious in all its abysmal depths, “inhabiting a body that is not extended by the skin of the social means the world acquires a new shape and makes new impressions” (Ahmed, 2006, p.17). Ahmed reminds us, that sometimes, “[b]odies that experience disorientation can be defensive, as they reach out for support or as they search for a place to reground and orientate their relation to the world”, in seeking to reground themselves in reality, such politics of disorientation can also foster conservativeness (2006, p158). However,

she also insists, that, “the point is what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do” (2006, p.158). Thus, moments of disorientation itself are neither crisis nor disorder, for the latter pertains to how we respond; what we do when our normative frameworks of reality become strange; when the transient, fleeting, fragility of “knowing” becomes exposed.

To be a disoriented, disabled, unextended or otherwise nonnormative body, is to live in a space where what is familiar, is unfamiliar. Where what is normative, becomes queer. It is to encounter the space of the social differently. It is a generative and discomfoting feeling of searching, reaching, and making contact with information, not for verification, but as a sustained engagement with the unfamiliar in the effort to deOther space. As Ahmed describes, “they are moments in which you lose one perspective, but the “loss” itself is not empty or waiting; it is an object, thick with presence...the presence of an absence” (2006, p.158). Thus, disorientation ruptures binary optics that enact artificial borders between here/there, now/then, or us/them. An undoing principle that queers the Other in such a way that reveals perceived externality, as always already within.

Disorientation changes the way we move, do and relate within the world, by producing space that extends and enriches, that disrupts and reconfigures. It queers the social givenness of that which appears before us, by concerning itself with what disappears in relation to such arrivals (Ahmed, 2006, p.90). Such concern with the relational effects of difference, provides an alternative mode of being that allows us to abstain from representation as an orientation device and denounce the familiar ontological programs that accompany modernity’s project, and as such technological dwelling. To make the familiar, strange. Disorienting allows us to wipe away the grid that constricts what we think to be intelligible. In doing so, disorientation provides us performative means of engaging difference diffractively, by revealing the indeterminacy, the fragility of knowing, and its ongoing boundlessness. In short, disorientation as a principle reveals inequalities but it is also generative and didactic. Hence, in making evident the importance between identity and performance, queering ontology opens up the body to changes in performance.



Karen Barad, physicist and science and technology historian, draws on diffraction, a quantum or queer, optical phenomena during her development of agential realism in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007) Barad's critique of representational logic stems from the position that the basic ontological unit of reality is phenomena: agential entanglements that emerge out of intra-actions between material and discursive components, human and non human alike (2007, 89). Her agential realist account asserts that bodies are a part of the differential performance of the world's intra-activity, where "embodiment is a matter of not being situated in the world, but rather of being of the world in its dynamic specificity" (2007, 371) Thus she draws on diffraction as means of engaging with our differential responsiveness to this dynamism—our degree of accountability to the marks left on bodies during ontological performances.

Diffraction, is the effect of difference that emerges as individual waves combine; a co-constitutive worldly phenomena (Barad, 2007, p. 135). In diffraction, difference is not encapsulated, or pre/figured in any one subject, object, or network node, but rather emerges out of specific intra-actions of material-discursive practices: " a diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather where the effects of differences appear" (Barad, 2007, p. 72). Diffraction patterns offer us a way of engaging that which is not mapped by the network; or relegated to the archive by the imperial shutter. It is engagement with the absences that make certain things matter over others; the ways in which what gets bracketed out or away from mattering, marks the validity, the mattering, of that which does. For Barad, diffraction is not fixed, nor does not it reproduce itself, rather it is an ongoing unfolding, where there is "no leaving the 'old' behind" because no such absolute boundaries between the here/now and there/then exist (Barad, 2014, p. 168). Barad's central argument rests upon the self as a multiplicity, a superposition of "beings and becomings", of matter(ing) and meaning (2014, p. 37); "a contingent and iterative performativity", where subjectivity, "is about taking responsibility and account of the entangled materialization we are apart of...a relation of responsibility to the other." (389-391).

Where representations mask the historical arrival of difference, and excludes certain experiences and values, diffraction opens up angles within the world. It is important, at

this point, to highlight that the indeterminacy of disorientation is essential to its performativity as an educative device, because it illustrates how “that which is determinate (e.g.intelligible) is materially haunted by – infused with – that which is constitutively excluded (remains indeterminate, e.g., unintelligible)” and thus exposes the body, indeed identity and being, to a space where, “the self doesn’t hold; the self is dispersed in an un/doing of self as a result of being threaded through by that which is excluded” (Barad, 2014, p.178). Thus, representationalism and all its binary optics and politics of recognition is a weak principle for understanding justice, change, and the relation demands of ontological entanglement.

Some bodies are bound to humanity in ways that brackets away their embodied experience, leaving them trapped somewhere along the peripheral, neither in control nor able to intervene in the narratives to which their body is ascribed. And while Barad’s point is that selfhood is already perforated with difference, and we ought to come to understand the ways we are implicated by difference as a relational process, such an understanding is hard to derive from theoretical physics and the language of science. Diffraction and disorientation both are still an abstraction, a distance of sorts, from the problem. The very use of scientific language tends to impose significant limitations on the imaginary and is notably at odds with subjective and intimate terrains of the human condition. Thus while I draw on Barad, Ahmed, diffraction and disorientation through fictionalizing and poetics to engage the ineffable threadedness of transontological difference, I do so by reading them through an explicitly decolonial commitment to undo the imperial plunder.

there's a certain naivety to hope. and  
such a short distance between arrogance  
and idealism (Elliot: 38). an even  
shorter one between ego and  
intellectualism. if you like yourself  
going into graduate school, don't  
expect that kind of existential  
security moving forward.

academics is like getting hit by a  
truck. then handed 75 papers to grade  
and about as many nervous young  
undergrads hovering over you while you  
lie there spattered across the  
pavement:

*"its okay guys, you are going to get through this term. i  
realize the counseling and well being app isn't therapy, if  
you could solve your problems through an app you  
would have just gone to YouTube. i'm sorry. we're failing  
you and i know that. you're worth more than this. you  
are important. your hurt is real, the world is heavy. yes  
you can have an extension."*

you'd spend more time thinking about  
how fucked up it all is if you weren't  
already bleeding out on the pavement on  
account of the truck. so we put our  
heads down and pour whats left of our  
bodily matter into surviving it.

**Figure 8: From, Manic Millennial (Z)**

This means I take the notion of being accountable to the body, and my role within the entanglement quite literally. Specifically, to the privilege I hold as an academic and the ways liberal institutions, in all their thesis formats, protocols, standards, and metrics, extend colonial violence and enact the shutter; as well as, engage rigorously in the work of decolonizing myself. If the collective contributions of the aforementioned scholars, texts, and paradigms of thought have shown anything, its that the performances we

choose to engage, the fictions we choose to uplift and ascribe, have political and material consequences. These choices reach out and effect the world and all else because they are a part of the world and all else. Matter and meaning are entangled with one another.<sup>42</sup> Contending to the shadow of our colonial inheritance means we take the imposition of disillusionment, the heaviness of our shared world seriously, understanding that in all of 2020's ruptures and prior, academics too, is a place where we seek to reground; engage in ontological hiding; evade responsibility.

Consequently, even the school of communication itself, produce and mirror imperial patterns of thinking that continue to manifest in all of the previously critiqued communication infrastructure and more generally in society. Our entire education system is designed to further a version of history that renders its violence as past even as it persists in our present/futures. This system of knowledge production, its principles of enclosure and encapsulation incorporated through institutionalized hegemony, orients us as graduate students to emphasize particular endeavours over others, and forwards particular ways of knowing over others. This bracketing reduces our accountability and engagement to not only local Indigenous communities and marginalized members of the public, but more broadly, distances us from our impact and responsibility within a global society. To be clear: it only serves to reproduce patterns of prejudice and habits of being that foreclose the future by insisting on a colonial ground zero horizon. Are we really to continue to look away and relegate to the past what it means to sit atop stolen indigenous territory but bear the name of its colonizers? To claim to support indigeneity, equality and reparations but not take a stand against the further expansion of colonial regimes through a planned pipeline project? Can we really claim to be about lifting up society when all we do is reproduce the imperial shutter and its blindedness? It is uncomfortable to daylight the structures that extend violence, but this is the point. Social change does not manifest in a vacuum. We cannot rebuild the master's house with his tools. We need new stories, nonimperial grammars, liberating language; imaginative and accountable

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<sup>42</sup> This carries resonance to Katherine N Hayles definition of materiality: "...an emergent property created through dynamic interactions between physical characteristics and signifying strategies. Materiality thus marks a junction between physical reality and human intention", she writes, "[f]ollowing Bruno Latour's call for a turn from "matters of fact" to "matters of concern," I like to think of materiality as the constructions of matter that matter for human meaning" (2005 p3)

methods for dealing with, rather than sidestepping, conflict, alienation, and traumas that bereft the imperial plunder and colonized publics.

## Methods Part II: Disorienting the Threshold, decolonizing the self, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa and writing from within the crack

"And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives. That we not hide behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our own...and all the other endless ways in which we rob ourselves of ourselves and each other"

(Lorde 1984, p 43)

Disillusion and disorientation don't attempt to present themselves as comforting. But discomfort teaches us something. Its persistence is teaching us something about impositions on the body and the mind. About the way we are fundamentally connected to others and all else across space and time. About the ways we can profoundly affect one another and be affected by the world and all else. Where we tend to get snagged, where we tend to hesitate, or erect defenses is often where we ought to pay the most light. In seminar during the course of this project with Karen Barad and Vanessa Andreotti, in a dialogue about integrity, accountability and justice, Andreotti challenged us to consider, *what are you resisting?* In what ways are you still snagged by the illusion of imperialism? What can leaning into these shadows tell us about what it is going to take to change? If we are already shot through with each Other, what does it mean to be accountable to this? If the performativity of interface is organized in accordance with a cultural myth that permeates the fabric of our modern society, how to expand our horizon? Where do we begin with writing in new stories?

This project takes the latter questions seriously on every front and has thus far suggested we start with identity. So it proceeds by engaging in an applied praxis of fictionalizing and poetics to decolonize the self and established research praxis. This research, because

it is committed to decolonizing the institution and refusing the imperial imperative, does not work within a traditional research thesis format. It rejects linear story principles and formats for reading in order to leave itself open to additional meaning. But perhaps most explicitly it follows in the footsteps of the likes of chamaneria Gloria Anzaldúa and warrior poet Audre Lorde, and engages in what has been outlawed, stigmatized, delegitimized; as well as exploited and oppressed most violently: the human condition; body, mind and spirit, the life-force of creative power; the embodied knowledge of what Audre Lorde calls, the erotic:

“The very word erotic comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects—born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life-force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.”

Lorde, 1984, p 55)

A re-turn to the human condition as the ever most constant, widest, and fullest common denominator we have, this project emerged through creative bodily praxis<sup>43</sup>, through dreams, poetry, and freewriting as external expressions of internal commitments to change. As Lorde writes “the white western patriarchal ordering of things requires that we believe there is an inherent conflict between what we feel and what we think—between poetry and theory”( 1984, p 8). But this separation is a by product of a system that is dependent upon the extraction of the creative life-force as patriarchal and imperial resources<sup>44</sup>. Severing the heart from the mind is not a means of rendering objective truth,

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<sup>43</sup> Drawing on Anzaldúa here, “for me, writing is a gesture of the body, a gesture of creativity, a working from the inside out. My feminism is grounded not in incorporeal abstraction but on corporeal realities. The material body is center, and central. The body is the ground of thought. The body is a text. Writing is not about being in your head; its about being in your body” (2014, p5)

<sup>44</sup> “in order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change...” “As women” Lorde writes, “we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which fears this same depth too much to examine the possibilities of it within themselves” (1984, p53)

but distorting it: “we are easier to control when one part of our selves is split from the another, fragmented, off balance.”( 1984, p 8), as Lorde describes, our current “living structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts or pleasant pastimes, feelings were expected to kneel to thought as women were expected to kneel to men. But women have survived. As poets.” (1984, p 39) Indeed, “[t]he white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am.”, but from Lorde we are reminded of a deeper knowledge and truth, as “[t]he Black mother within each of us—the poet—whispers in our dreams: I feel therefore I can be free.” (1984, p 38)

Re-turning to poetics and fiction opens up learning and unlearning in a way that isn’t constrained or delimited by normative research conventions beholden to the violence of a colonial system, but also provides a language for transformation and change. It provides a way to engage a representationally evasive and performative process like diffraction or engagement with the space where the self doesn’t hold: an understanding of the distortions imposed by the colonality of being and a place to begin, without fear, guilt or shame, decolonizing identity. Poetics as an embodied form of writing, beckons forth the ineffable affects of experience and shines light on our deepest forms of emotional knowledge that often evade conventional forms of writing and expression, as Lorde puts it:“ Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought....[the] spawning grounds for the most radical and daring ideas... a safe-house for that difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of any meaningful action”, where poetry acts as not only dream and vision, but also “lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before.” (1984, p 37) To draw on bell hooks once more, creative writing like autofiction and poetry, help us manifest the bridge because:

“All too often the colonized mind thinks of the imagination as the realm of the psyche that, if fully explored, will lead one into madness, away from reality. Consequently, it is feared. For the colonized mind to think of the imagination as the

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instrument that does not estrange us from reality, but returns us to the real more fully, in ways that help us to confront and cope, is a liberatory gesture.” (hooks, 1991 p.55)

To connect to the erotic, is to connect to the inner power of our innate creative spirit, that which moves us to grow, to change. To ignore, repress and neglect our imaginative, emotional and embodied consciousness is to deny the depths of the human condition and as Lorde writes: “When we live outside ourselves, and by that I mean on external directive only rather than from our internal knowledge and needs, when we live away from those erotic guides from within ourselves, then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that’s not based on human need”, hence, “when we look the other way from our experience, erotic or otherwise, we use rather than share the feelings of those others who participate in the experience with us. And use without consent of the used is abuse.” (1984, p 58)

Likewise, when we deny this knowledge within ourselves, when we separate what we feel from what we think we starve our creative potential; and enact, “a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives”(1984, p111), and this difference is vitally important for as Lorde notes: this difference is both what marks our mutual interdependence, and “that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged” (1984, p112). Consequently, “the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors’ tactics, the oppressors relationships” (1984, p 123), therefore liberation, justice, and change only emerge from coming to understand and embrace in practice, how to decolonize ourselves. This is how we reject the master’s tools and his house:

“When we view living in the European mode only as a problem to be solved, we rely solely upon our ideas to make us free, for these were what the white fathers told us were precious. But as we come more into touch with our ancient, non-european consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings and to respect those



hidden sources our power from where true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes" (1984, p37)

Gloria Anzaldúa's work shows how writing provides the link between the personal and the collective, when we write *from within* rather than merely about ontologies instrumentalized and oppressed by current colonial-enlightenment models. Anzaldúa, a kindred spirit to Barad, refused the distinction between the personal and the collective, and thus never divorced her own empirical experience from theory or practice, and rather in her late work *Light in the Dark*, suggests that what embodied writing offers is an aesthetic artistic practice that transforms (2014, xxi).

Indeed, as her writing partner Analouise Keating writes, "[f]or Anzaldúa, writing *is* ontological"<sup>45</sup>(2014, xxxii), and the words we use through ritualized performance don't just affect our perception of reality, but have the power to *shift* reality. A point Reeves and Shaw allude to with regards to fiction as method and form. However, what is unique about Anzaldúa's perspective (and relevant to notions of interface) in her work in *Light in the Dark* is twofold: 1. Anzaldúa understood intimately the ways that identity becomes a knowledge filter, that delimits your ability to understand reality (ibid, p119); and 2. Understood that in order to move away from the illnesses of colonial trauma<sup>46</sup> extended by European philosophy and scientific traditions; in order to decolonize ontology, we need to draw on and develop "a more expansive philosophy embracing spirit, indigenous wisdom, alchemy, mythic figures, ancestral guides"<sup>47</sup> and other non-Cartesian teachings

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<sup>45</sup> Emphasis added

<sup>46</sup> Of which I will define broadly in line with Anzaldúa as: "the effects of colonialism, assimilation, racism, sexism, capitalism, environmental degradation, and other destructive practices, epistemologies, and states of being that occur at individual, systemic, and planetary levels" (xxxii)

<sup>47</sup> Critiques of Anzaldúa's earlier work in *Borderlands* to oversimplify or romanticize indigenous pasts and peoples are valid and important. However, as Keating notes in *Light in the Dark*'s editor's introduction, her later work just prior to her death recognizes and refines her earlier missteps: "Anzaldúa viewed indigenous thought as a foundational, vital source of decolonial wisdom for contemporary and future life and...that indigenous philosophies offer alternatives o cartesian-based knowledge systems which we ignore at our peril...The Gloria Anzaldúa who wrote *Light in the Dark* was not interested in recovering "authentic" ancient teachings...and inserting them into twenty first century life. Nor did she identify herself *as* "Native American." Rather, she learned from and built on indigenous insights; she mixed these hints with other teachings crafting a philosophy designed to address contemporary needs... Anzaldúa does not reclaim an authentic indigenous practice but instead develops a twenty-first century approach—a decolonizing ontology—that respectfully borrows from indigenous wisdom and many other non-cartesian teachings" (xxxiii) This project aligns itself methodologically with the latter and emphasizes a point made by both

and perspectives (ibid, xxxii). When it comes to opening the body to change, Anzaldúa understood the connection between manifesting nonbinary decolonial change and “consciously inhabiting your body” (ibid p120).

For Anzaldúa the imaginary and creative process serve as critical aspects for the site with which epistemological and ontological transformation can take place (ibid, xxxiv). For Anzaldúa it is process, doing, not merely knowing or seeing that catalyzes change, she writes: “writing is a process of discovery and perception that produces knowledge and *conocimiento* (insight)” (ibid, p1). Through a multidisciplinary auto-ethnographic approach Anzaldúa’s constructs her own symbolic system in *Light in the Dark* to develop an epistemology of the imagination and a psychology of the image; concerned with “questioning, affecting, and changing the paradigms that govern prevailing notions of reality, identity, creativity, activism, spirituality, race, gender, class, and sexuality” (ibid, p2). Understanding identity as involving both reading and writing oneself and the world, Anzaldúa consistently blurs the distinction between subject/object, being both observer and participant at once. This privileging of primary methods of presentation (auto-historia), decenters hierarchal standards of approach in academic writing to draw on predecessors or other people’s conception or readings; and simultaneously and quite intentionally, blurs the boundary between private and public.

Accordingly, not with the master’s house means here for Anzaldúa, manifesting and engaging theory through one’s own voice and experience. This is the connection to spirit or what Lorde calls the erotic; that which drives our internal experience. For Anzaldúa spirit (or *Naguala*) and the imagination are interconnected aspects of the same process of creativity (ibid, p4), hence writing from an abstracted perspective denies the ways we are implicated by the texts, theories, and conditions within the world that we experience. Consequently, “The writer struggles to capture an elusive life from the imagination, but

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Azoulay and Lorde regarding pre- or anti imperial ways of knowing or forms of resistance as sites for decolonizing approaches: “there are no new ideas still waiting in the wings to save us as women, as human. *There are only old and forgotten ones, new combinations, extrapolations and recognitions from within ourselves.*” (emphasis added, Lorde, 1984, p 38) Thus, this project sees its engagement with creative practice as an access point to the self-collective human condition, and respectfully draws on older forms of wisdom and insight offered by indigenous writers, scholars, and epistemologies (as well as other non-western or nonimperial grammars) to better understand the effects of colonization on imagination as a spiritually, and thus ontologically, transformative process.

reality is too big for any ideological system to contain, and literary realism it too small to contain it. To explore experience in an indeterminate world such as the one we inhabit, one in which anything that can be imagined can happen, [we] need a different mode of telling stories” In order to contend with difference diffractively, responsibly, “[we] need a different way of organizing reality” (ibid p43). Imagination and creative writing manifest the space and pathways for both personal and collective change, for the “transformation of self, consciousness, community, culture, society.” (ibid, p44).

Already diffracted by transontological <sup>48</sup>difference, “[o]ur bodies are geographies of selves made up of diverse, bordering and overlapping “countries”. We’re each composed of information, billions of bits of cultural knowledge superimposing many different categories of experience...As our bodies interact with internal and external, real and virtual, past and present environments, people, and objects around us, we weave (tejemos), and are woven into, our identities...”; Thus, Anzaldúa writes, “identity is always in process”; is always relational. ( ibid p69) Concerned with the ways “[c]onventional, traditional identity labels are stuck in binaries, trapped in jaulas (cages) that limit the growth of our individual and collective lives” (ibid p66), *Light in the Dark* is about the challenge and struggles of representation, identity, self-inscription and creative expression through what Anzaldúa terms the Coyolxāuhqui imperative:

“the Coyolxāuhqui imperative”: a struggle to reconstruct oneself and heal the sustos resulting from woundings, traumas, racism, and others acts of violation que hechan pedazos nuestras almas, split us, scatter our energies...The Coyolxauhqui imperative is the act of calling back those pieces of the self/soul that have been dispersed or lost, the act of mourning the losses that haunt us...” (ibid p1)

Coyolxāuhqui acts as the transformative aesthetic with which Anzaldúa explores her onto-epistemology of “the path of conocimiento”. Anzaldúa’s reading of the Coyolxāuhqui Aztec myth presents a space for self-collective identity transformation; it is both the process of emotional, spiritual, and psychic dismemberment and the creative

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<sup>48</sup> Maldonado-Torres’s definition, for more see *The Wound*

process of putting the pieces of one's identity together again anew. This process takes place through stages of *conocimientos* and *deconocimientos* and is brought about by an experience of *nepantla*<sup>49</sup>. *Nepantla*, is the Nahuatl word for "in-between-space". For Anzaldúa it is "a liminal space where transformation can occur"; the space between old worlds and new ones, it acts as a point of rupture and "indicates space/times of chaos, anxiety, pain and loss of control" (ibid, xxxiv). However, *Nepantla* also deployed by Anzaldúa in spiritual or supernatural sense when its theorization extends beyond a ready definition to become an embodied or agentic quality. Whereby, "*Nepantlera*'s" are threshold peoples born from *nepantla*, "those who move within and among multiple worlds and use their movement in the service of transformation" (ibid xxxv). Hence,

"[d]uring an Anzaldúan *nepantla*, individual and collective self-definitions and belief systems are destabilized as we begin questioning our previously accepted worlds views (our epistemologies, ontologies and/or ethics)...This loosening of restrictive worldviews—while extremely painful—can create shifts in consciousness and, thus, opportunities for change; we acquire additional, potentially transformative perspectives, different ways to understand ourselves , our circumstances, and our worlds" (ibid, xxxv)

For Anzaldúa, *nepantla* can also become embodied during the creative writing process when we shift from everyday experience into a feeling, fantasy or fiction, when reality as we know it disappears and imaginative shifts take place. These dream-like states, Anzaldúa reads through an ancient indigenous lens, understanding them as spirits entering us and influencing the mind and allowing us a sort of "seeing" from the other side, seeing the ego as other and seeing familiar elements from that other alien perspective." (ibid p34) These dreams or fantasies, for Anzaldúa are not just coping mechanisms or means of correcting or supplementing reality but rather, "frees [us] from the confines...of [our] habitual identity" and the constraints of every day reality (ibid p37). Thus, "to change the or reinvent reality" Anzaldúa writes, "you must interrupt or

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<sup>49</sup> *Nepantla* as Anzaldúan concept emerged first in her work in *La Frontera*, but is used across chicano and other border identity cultural studies → insert reference to this

suspend the conscious “I” that reminds you of your history and your beliefs because these reminders tie you to certain notions of reality and behavior” (ibid p44)

Conocimiento is the Spanish word for knowledge or consciousness. For Anzaldúa it is an onto-epistemology, so, conocimiento is a nonbinary, unfolding “connectionist mode of thinking” recounted often within oppressive contexts (ibid p243). Conocimientos, plural, is the insights learned through the conocimiento process. Desconocimiento, the Spanish word for ignorance, translates in Anzaldúa’s work as the cost of knowing; our shadow beast that grapples with the fear and ignorance *we cultivate* to keep ourselves from knowledge so that we can evade accountability (ibid p2). Anzaldúa says the two are an interrelated experience during nepantla, and that each serves an educative purpose. Indeed, if nepantla is disorientation, desconocimientos is the regressive and self-preserving impulse to reground. Desconocimientos also shunts us into isolatory feelings of guilt, shame, depression or despair. But conocimiento, “is about relatedness—to self, others, world.”(ibid p151)

The path of conocimiento, Anzaldúa writes: “requires you that you encounter your shadow side and confront what you’ve programmed yourself (and have been programmed by your cultures) to avoid (deconocer), to confront the traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full sense of your facultades” (ibid p118). Anzaldúa explains to us how we already find ourselves at the threshold of a nepantla experience, in the shadow of colonial conquest:

“we are experiencing a personal, global identity crisis in a disintegrating social order...We are collectively conditioned not to know that every comfort of our lives is acquired with the blood of conquered, subjugated, enslaved, or exterminated people...We stand at a major threshold in the extension of consciousness, caught in the remolinos (vortices) of systemic change across all fields of knowledge The binaries of colored/white, female/male, mind/body are collapsing.” (ibid 119)

Though writing in 2001, just post 9/11 at the time, we can now see that this crisis has not led to the collapse of binaries in an algorithmic public sphere, but their polarized and

weaponized exacerbation. Nonetheless we can say, this crisis is still upon us, and if “[n]epantla is the zone between changes”, where, destabilized and fragmented we struggle to find equilibrium and balance, we find ourselves in 2020 in a moment of unprecedented looking away and avoidance of the wound. Nepantla is the negotiation between “the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it”(ibid p127); if our world has only become sharpened by colonial binarisms it is because we have yet to contend with the personal changes needed within ourselves to manifest a different world. We have continued to spin in perpetual desconocimientos, hedging responsibility thinking we can circumvent our own nature but the paradox, Anzaldúa writes, is this:

“[t]he knowledge that exposes your fears can also remove them. Seeing through [nepantla] cracks makes you uncomfortable because it reveals aspects of yourself (shadow beasts) you don’t want to own. Admitting your darker aspects allows you to break out of your self-imposed prison. But it will cost you. When you woo el oscuro, digging into it, sooner or later you pay the consequences” (ibid p132)

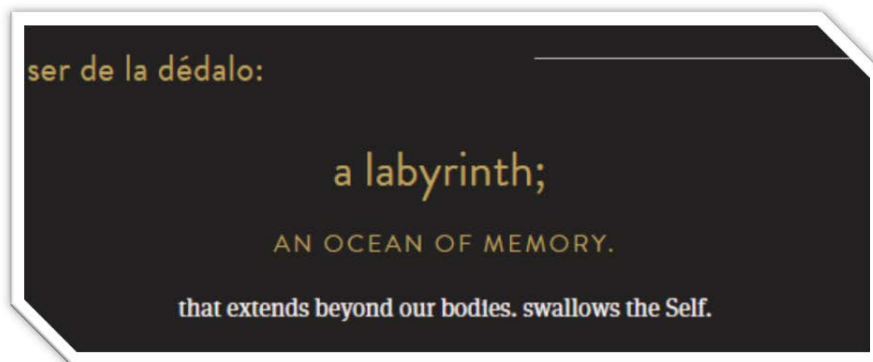
Growth is painful. *But discomfort teaches us something.* Delving into what leaves us in pain, anger, depression or despair; when we move through what immobilizes and silences us, when we realize we’ve severed the mind from the body to avoid the weight of our own human condition; when we stop avoiding the ways we are undone by the gift of interdependent global existence; when we find the courage to engage our own potential: We heal. We change. We press forward anew. Consequently, “leaving the body reinforces the mind/body, matter/spirit, dichotomy that you’re trying to show doesn’t exist in reality” (ibid, p135). To return to the body through creative practice, is to become the bridge, it is to restore the gift. Nepantlera’s, hence, having passed through fire and left the old Self, the previous world behind, “[reach] through the wound to connect”(ibid p153).

As Anzaldúa writes:

“In gatherings where we’ve forgotten that the object of conflict is peace, la nepantlera proposes spiritual techniques (mindfulness, openness, receptivity) along with activist tactics. Where

before we saw only separateness, difference, and polarities, our connectionist sense of spirit recognizes nurturance and reciprocity and encourages alliances among groups working to transform communities" (ibid p149)

## Methods Part III: Becoming Blackfish



**Figure 9: From, Not a Woman but a Shaman**

"there are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt"

(Lorde, 1984, p 39)

Preamble:

if the performativity of interface is organized in accordance with a cultural myth that permeates the fabric of our modern society, how to engage alternatives? Where do we begin with writing in new stories?

I began with reading the stories of others. This originally began with me exploring the fictive pieces by science and technology scholars like Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway. And while useful, they weren't entirely what I was looking for. The stories, the words, the perspectives I needed to encounter to address the problem of interface as a cartesian-colonial habit, needed to come explicitly from the absences, silences, gaps, of invisible nonbeing; But this also became tricky because I cant and wont speak for these subjects or

experiences, I can only accountably & responsibly attend to my own position and agency; finding commonality in wounds or dreams where there are ones; to speculate about these concepts, these dynamics, takes care—so how to build a bridge?

Fiction, poetics, or art based practice, offers a methodological entry point into the complex social problems we face as a collective society not constrained or delimited by normative research conventions, of which, are often sterilized of appeals to intimacy, emotion, and human connection. It allowed me to dive headfirst into subjects sidestepped or silenced by the academy and actively work to fill the gap that often persists between research and reality. In the school of communication at SFU in 2017, none of my coursework engaged concepts of race, gender, or colonialism on their own accord. Criticality was defined, nearly exclusively, through the lens of European whiteness. And when faculty was pressed to weigh in on these issues as pedagogical mentors, they were not prepared to respond adequately, nor did many feel like they ought to. This is what happens when we maintain the gap between research and reality. This is what neoliberal specialization does to “criticality”. It has taken months of uprisings and the mass proliferation of images of violence to even begin conversations about this colonial habit within the academy. And In all honesty, despite solidarity statements, my faith in an organized, tactful, and timely response to the demands of our moment by the administration and leadership is not high.

It was black student activists, for example, whom mobilized and actively held administrations accountable for changing racist varsity athletics team name—then received no recognition for their efforts by SFU president Andrew Petter; or keeping things local, remind ourselves of SFU’s refusal to grant space through the literal eviction of the black student society SOCA from their long term community space on campus in 2018. Likewise, we could point towards the recent resignation of the head of UBC’s board of Governors Michael Korenberg, after public backlash over his liking of “regressive” tweets that likened BLM to Nazi brownshirts. As the work of Black Canadian Studies Scholar Charmaine Nelson has laboured to show, liberal institutions of Canada have been regressive, hostile, and oppressive because they have rendered issues of colonialism (slavery, racism, and sexism) to the periphery if not all together absent.



Safely confined in “critical” race, gender or first nation studies coursework, where the mentorship and moral center of the academy can remain distanced and disassociated from the implications of such research for reality and embodied practice.

Hence, this project never waited for permission to unlearn these habits, it created the space for decolonial critical practice because it was offered none; because the performance of change does not take place solely through the staging of a scene or a conversation, the performance of change requires actors. So in an effort to collapse the master’s house and find the” sustenance to act where there are no charts.” (299), I do my best to create space for other ways of knowing and contributions to knowledge to take precedent: by breaking the master’s rules and refusing his conventions and standards of practice. There are and were undoubtedly missteps made throughout this process, but I invite those mistakes to become a part of my learning, as all learning, all *conocimiento* requires ruptures; thus, this project is not a thesis statement, but an offering, an invitation to others to think deeply about what we need to change in order to truly become accountable to the coloniality of academic spaces and truly engage in decolonial research practice.

During the process of developing stories, when I would start to begin to think from within concepts, the most expressive and accessible means to engage a subject like diffractive difference or the coloniality of the screen, was initially poetics. Poetics is an embodied form of writing that gets at those sticky ineffable effects of experience that often evade more conventional forms of writing. Every story emerged first from poetic processing. Fictionalizing had multiple stages. It took place on my blog because I could format the stories literally alongside the literature and writers that inspired or informed them. I was able to hold the complexity of certain concepts, experiences, and issues together while I processed them. It also allowed me to decenter my own words and trouble the authority of authorship—I am not the authority on these subjects, I am the learner—I am inviting you to join in on my learning process.

All of this, chaotic and disorienting, is intended to allow additional layers of meaning to circulate by allowing readers to recognize and determine their own textual resonances. It

is also very much an attempt at capturing the messy interiority of experiential processing, unlearning habits, and transformative processes: the threaded fiction, literature, theory, and poetics speaks to the layers of story that perforate our identities and influence how we make sense of our world. Rather than telling or trying to explicate this, I invite readers to experience it for themselves<sup>50</sup>.

The subtext or “autocontext” of the stories offer additional readings or layers of meaning to the primary threads. All of which were added after primary story development. They are a means of reaching through the wound to connect: coming to terms with the reciprocity of relationality; coming to understand myself and the world through the experience of others. These texts are, then, necessarily, unfinished and likely rife with potential stumbles.

On Anzaldúa, Coyolxauhqui, and Supernaturalism

This project takes concepts of queer disorientation, diffracted difference, and reads and writes them through an Anzaldúan Autofiction. Each section of *Blackfish Rising* is a stage of Anzaldúa’s ‘path of *conocimiento*’, though Anzaldúa presents her aesthetic through 7 stages, I have blurred several of her phases and presented them here as four diffracted narratives with a situating README.TXT document and hyperlinked subtext. I explore these concepts from within my own position within the diffraction pattern. This means I do not avoid or erase my experience but foreground it as a means of better understanding the ways *ego conquiro* operates through my identity and filters my encounters with the world. It also means I read narratives of experience by those marginalized, disenabled, or un-visible within the diffraction pattern through my own to better understand and learn from the resonances and affordances, absence and presence, of epistemic difference. Or, put another way: some things in order to be taught, need to be felt. For me this mean contending with the shadow of difference in my life. Contending with whiteness, with gender, with ancestors, with difference meant I walk

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<sup>50</sup> Interactive iterations of such methods might also allow readers to contribute and make their own additions.

asking<sup>51</sup>: how did I get here? How will I bear witness, yield responsibility to my inheritance? How will I interface something like change within myself?

I chose Anzaldúa's reading of Coyolxāuhqui as a narrative model with which to nest this fiction for several reasons: 1) Ultimately writing within a science fiction frame (Stephenson, Stanislaw Lem, Philip K Dick, Gibson) proved quite a struggle because most SF cannot engage the aforementioned gaps and ineffables because they still work within the Cartesian-Colonial habit. This is a point of which Wendy Chun gestures in *Control and Freedom*—in her chapter on Cyberpunk and Orienting the Future, illustrating the relationship between the rise of the internet and cyberpunk, where the internet as racial utopia attempts to eradicate conflict and antagonism by reconfiguring it so that domination stems from one's very body, to produce cyberspace an othering space (2006, 158). Hence, fictionalizing from this framework only serves to extend the narrative of cyberspace as a new colonial frontier and has very little to offer decolonial relations to difference<sup>52</sup>. I grappled with this for awhile trying to develop something that worked. I spent an entire summer writing stories, but I found that the writing I was doing was very

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<sup>51</sup> Walsh write about how in order to move and think within; open up and extend, fissures and cracks requires considerations and reflections of our own explicit locations (our cognizance and participation) with which, we “act and move within, from, and with respect to the cracks” (83); it means lessons, “in humility, displacing, and decentering what I thought I knew, how I thought I knew it” and confronting assumptions. To walk asking, writes Walsh, is a part of the decolonial and pedagogical weave, of a *decolonial pedagogy rising*: “making itself and becoming, opening and extending cracks and fissures in the dominant world and, at the same time, contributing to the building of a world—of worlds-*muy otro(s)*” (IBID 88). It is an engaged pedagogy, that emphasizes well-being, and healing and is “constructed in, resistance and opposition, as well as in insurgence, affirmation, and re-existence (as re-humanization), in imagining and building a different world” (ibid).

<sup>52</sup> I think it is important to note a few things here: writers such as Octavia Butler and Ted Chiang challenge and breathe new life into the SF genre, and this work is deeply marked by their uniquely resonating capacity to express shared human conditions and their potentialities with loving, critical curiosity. In particular, resonances of Butler's Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Talents can be found in the final section of the fictionalized text, Not A Woman but a Shaman—and Chiang's Anxiety is the Dizziness of Freedom in his collection of short stories in *Exhalation* marks the narrative in *Bullethead*. However, often indigenous and black and other POC science fiction writers are categorized as slipstream, “magical realism”, or indigenous- afro-futurism writers. This transgression of genre is telling. Because the focus for this stage of the project was understanding epistemic difference, I needed to begin with reading about the effects of coloniality, within myself and those rendered un-visible by the cartesian-colonial habit. Further stages of this research would more rigorously engage the aforementioned bodies of work by black and indigenous writers in the area of slipstream, and indigenous- or afro futurisms, as such epistemologies open up our capacity to imagine and dream about the world from a de- or pre-colonial perspective, and perhaps most crucially, offer transformative speculative, future oriented lenses with which to render something like justice in a shared world. Put another way, it will engage with these perspectives beyond the wound, to as it were, other potential worlds.

hard to work into an SF narrative. What's more I began to feel like I was just rearticulating the problem with similar tropes. Mirroring instead of depositing the binary. Which is why I turned to Gloria Anzaldúa, supernaturalism and "magical realism" as these provided my creative process a whole new set of compositional frameworks and tools, and more pointedly to the aims of this project, began from the place that really engages writing as a process that transforms, and deals directly with space and identity.

2) Anchoring this creative process within a reading of an Aztec mythology allowed me to theorize about identity and decolonial transformation through a precolonial epistemology—it allowed me to disavow the authority of the imperial shutter. The form of cognitive relationality brought about by this epistemology created a liminal space hospitable to theories of transformation or change, regeneration, healing, and decolonial embodiment—hence, Coyolxāuhqui's grappling with the life and death of identity, with the nepantla rupturing of reality and disillusion of cultural center, offers not only a timely metaphor for contending with our current moment, but speaks to the ways precolonial, indigenous, or aboriginal ways of knowing harbour crucial insights for dealing with implications of the colonial plunder. It teaches us to understand that life emerges from death, that disorientation can offer us new means of understanding, taking back, and accountably rewriting embodiment. But only if we move, we do, we create, we practice. This requires we rewire our notions of change to understand it will always require conflict. The idea is not to shy away from what lingers in shadows or what is complicated or messy to process: but step into the lessons darkness offers. There is no duality, no binarism, in a Coyolxāuhqui transformative process.

### On Autofiction

I chose autofiction due to the way interface of the 21<sup>st</sup> century proliferate and manipulate the self through affectively charged and deeply personal network and data practices. Social media requires us, willingly and unknowingly, to write-ourselves into these digital spaces, this expression or gesture of life-writing, is predetermined and formatted for us. We accept the terms of service, with little other option and limited language for articulating objections. We subject ourselves, against our better interests, to the embodied

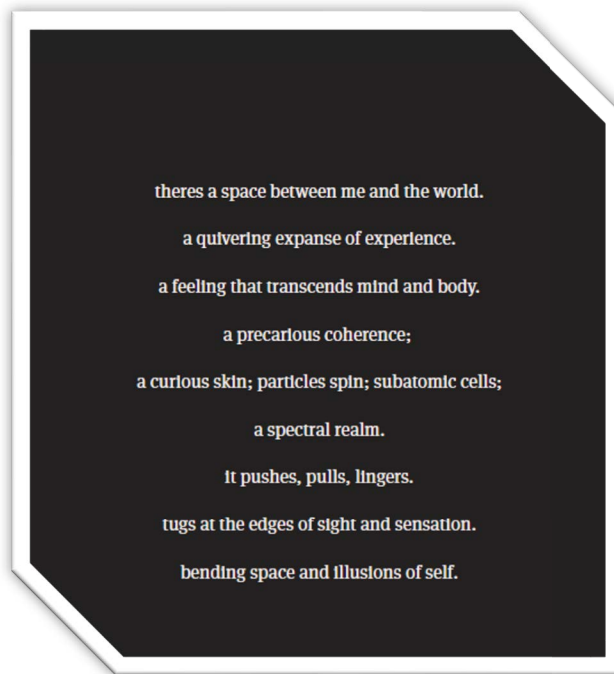
effects of “living” within these digital spaces. Formatted as human capital within interface, we are measured, modulated, segregated, enraged, captured, “normalized” and “cleaned”, sold, and redistributed once again. Fed back to ourselves for additional hedging and fitting, sharpening the edges of sameness. This process habituates our bodies to act in accordance with the screen’s demands, to *think* in accordance with its hierarchy of principles. Autofiction allows me to both grapple with the internalized effects of this interface process, as well as, take back authorship, reformat and reconfigure—*rewrite*, this experience.

On Epistemic Location:

I have a fairly hybrid, dime-a-dozen background within the western context, which is to say I grew up working-class/working-poor in the United States. I am the queer offspring of a white woman of mixed European descent and a second-generation Mexican American father. This left me somewhere in between but never really apart of American whiteness, as well as Mexican American and Mexican culture. I’d label this as periphery to a typical “American” identity, except, I think this social and cultural position is increasingly more commonplace, or complex—depending on how you choose to observe it—revealing, nonetheless, of the indeterminate center of American statistics, cultural complacency, and economic disparity. Somewhat residual, indeterminate, or contradictory: I am white *and* Mexican; assigned female at birth but *not* a woman; educated but “low brow” by birthright. At once, none of these things define my identity, and yet, all of them do. So, I try my best to hold all of these things together-apart as a I write from the subject position of a graduate student in North America, studying the effects of difference in the shifting cultural relations of a post-digital society.

In preparation for fictionalizing I read the science fiction of: Ursula Le Guin, Octavia Butler, Ted Chiang, Neil Stephenson, Stanislaw Lem, and Philip K Dick. I also read the words of Audre Lorde, Maya Angelou, Rita Wong, Fred Wah, Leanne Betasomasake Simpson, Alicia Elliot, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Tanya Talaga, Toni Morrison, Malcolm X and Ocean Vuong. Additionally, I read and learned about the life of trees and fungi, hallucinogenics, Pranayama, Buddhism, quantum field theory, Tsawalk, and love; as well

as the ethnographic accounts of Jacqui Alexander and Nancy Sheper Hughes; I drew on higher education suggestions and tool kits provided by the Decolonial Futures Collective<sup>53</sup>, and two brilliant fiction based workshops led by Alexandra Juhasz and Gillian Russell at the Digital Democracies Conference in 2019. This fiction owes a great deal to Karen Barad and Vanessa Andreotti specifically, with regards to discussion they provided at Karen’s seminar at UBC March of 2018—without which I would have never become undone. Lastly, it centers the ongoings and experience of Indigenous leadership at Standing Rock—whom changed everything about what I understand of community, solidarity, and home.



**Figure 10: From, Readme.txt**

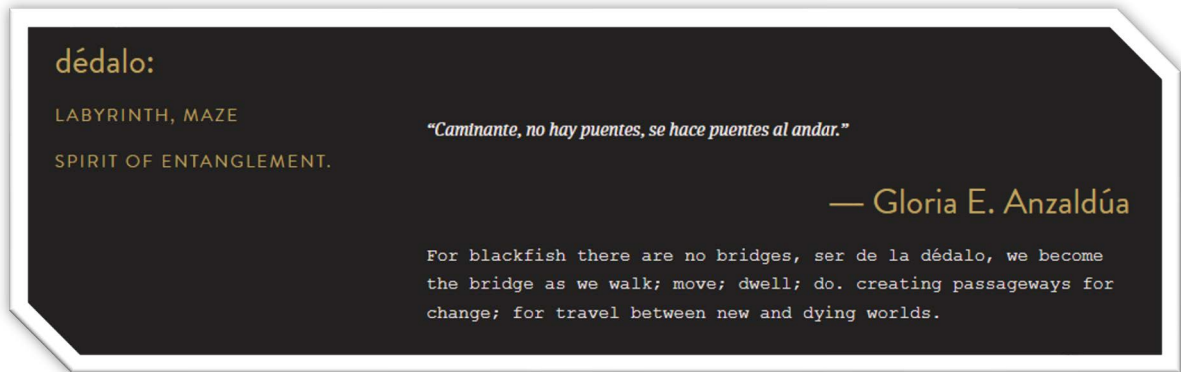
Blackfish Rising Fictions:

README .TXT is the situating document for the entirety of the project. It sets the stage for your reading, providing context to the plot’s emergence and offering suggestions for reading and navigating the non-linear format. All of the Blackfish Rising fictions, as well

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<sup>53</sup> Namely their HEADS UP Checklist, social cartographies and pedagogical experiments featured here: <https://decolonialfutures.net/project-type/pedagogical-experiments/>

as thesis chapters, are hyperlinked here. This text also includes an index of terms for the reader's reference, tips for identifying subtext, and an opening story-poetics called Stage 1: The Rupture.



**Figure 11: From, Blackfish Rising**

Blackfish Rising: is the spirit guiding my creative writing; the spirit of the story. My naguala but also, like Anzaldúa, an embodiment of nepantlera, of a threshold spirit that manifests pathways for change. Blackfish Rising is about transformation, personal and collective knowledge and growth; Blackfish is about bearing witness and becoming the bridge for change as we dive deep into what is seemingly unknown about both. Blackfish is about embracing complexity, contradiction, dark and light, and coming to understand the depths of being within the world. I alternate hailing for Blackfish and Nepantlera interchangeably throughout the stories, and in the final stage of *conocimiento* solidify the connection between spirit, chamaneria, blackfish, and our natural relation to the world.

## Stage 2: Seeing Nepantla

YOUR REALITY IS SUBJECT TO DISILLUSION

this story begins with the nepantla generation. or what white people call: millennials and Z

nepantla here because they were born into a time of “living between stories”; a global identity crisis.

somewhere, some genius pin pricked the center of the atom and the world cracked open.

naturally all the religious cults and neuros are going ape shit. the mormons have completely lost it and are gearing up for battle royale with hell, sending smoke signals to the air gods every hour. fucks sake.

so, anyway, now,

there's a crack in the world. and people keep falling into it.

they haven't even put up barriers! its been years. and still no matter the signage and regular PSA's, people keep walking up to it to take selfies and just sliding right off the jagged edge.

an existential clusterfuck of proportions no one was prepared for (per usual).

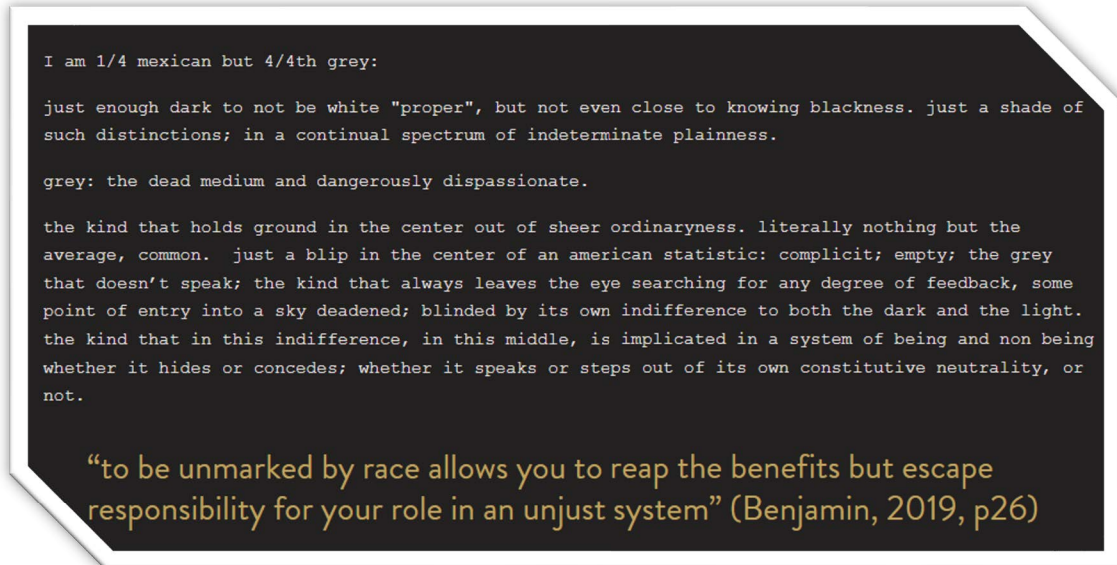
no ones really doing anything because the religious cults have everyone up in arms about this inevitable rapture, most of us are all just bumbling about in confusion, in feverish and fearful apprehension, perpetually holding our breath. avoiding direct eye contact: avoiding the wound.

**Figure 12: From, Manic Millennial (Z)**

Manic Millennial (Z) : the nepantla generation, articulates the experience of coming of age in an era of interface; the experience of seeing and being within a



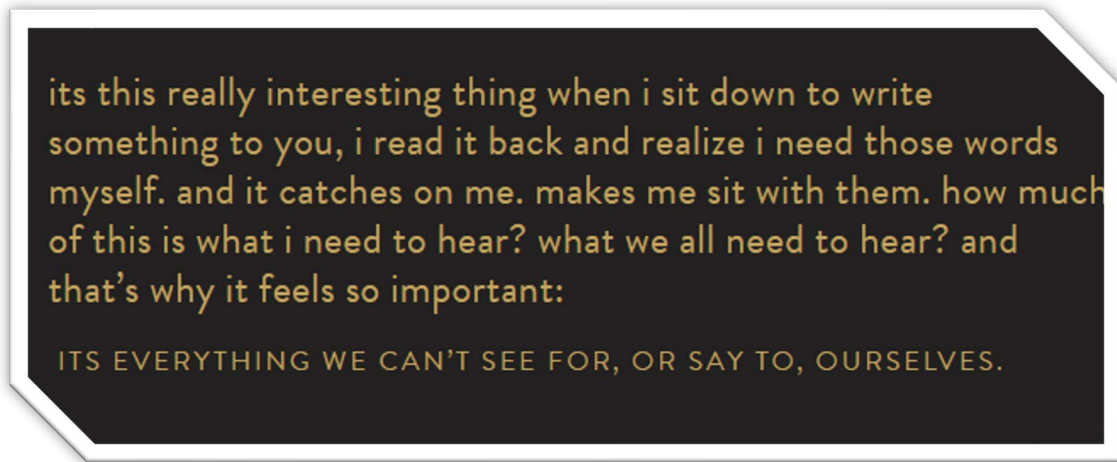
nepantla. This story is more precisely addressing North American's roughly between the ages of 20-40, with emphasis on the disillusion and disorientation brought about by growing up amidst the contradiction of a globalized promise and threat, as nepantla youth. In particular it attempts to highlight the dynamics of a cognitive development marked by the emergence of the world wide web and internet mediated communication: the explosion of social relations and societal shifts interface ripped across the world; but also the ways we internalize the struggle against the invasion of our private worlds and reification of experience. It draws attention to how these changes stimulated a wave of global civil uprisings (led by youth and students) that indicate a persistent wailing, an intuitive yearning and reaching for a different kind of world.



**Figure 13: From, Bullethead**

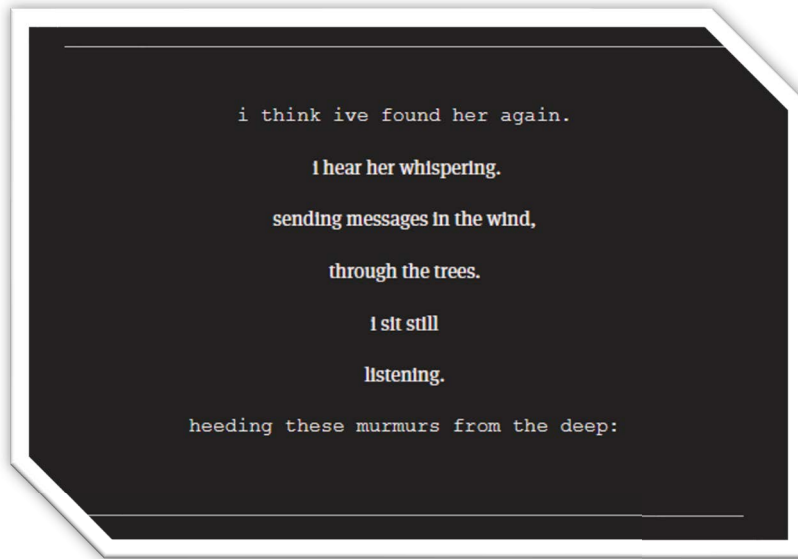
Bullethead: Or La Guerra of the Mexican Dogs, is a stage of desconocimiento. In this section I am working through my relationship to my ancestors, difference, the effects of colonization and my relationship to race within my family, and thus subsequently, white privilege. The thread regarding Maternal Solutions is a fictionalization of my relationship to colonial whiteness. The 1/4<sup>th</sup> of a Person subtext is a meditation on navigating the greyness of racial hybridity, and the plot line of a drug induced hallucination is a play on the role of ego and disorientation in rendering experiences and knowledge legible. More profoundly, Bullethead is about contending

with ignorance, shadows, fear, and the coloniality of selfhood and difference—in it's close it is a highlighting of how myth both frees us and cages us.



**Figure 14: From, Flight of the Portuguese Sparrow**

Flight of the Portuguese Sparrow is about coming to terms with colonial trauma (or memory) and decolonizing relations (or love). It is the shedding of a previous selfhood, to make room for the first stage of becoming Blackfish: a meditation on the experience of change brought about by love. FPS is also about contending with the way coloniality impedes on all of our most intimate relationships and experiences, polluting and delimiting our capacity to care for and give to one another and ourselves. It centers the idea that coloniality perverts one of the most fundamental relations to being within and of the world: giving. Coloniality is about taking, is about possession, and because of this it has taught us to hate and hence, empty us, of ourselves.



**Figure 15: From, Not a Woman but a Shaman**

Not a Woman but a Shaman is about becoming the bridge, healing, and languages for cultural regeneration and social change.. It works to solidify a loose understanding of “our-self” or collective-identity through narratives that speak of trees, water, and waves. It is a meditation on recognizing ourselves as water, not the wave; or, understanding our natural capacity for love and transformation. Most importantly, it ties this state to our ability to recognize the significance of our own performances in the world and dreaming as a collective task we must engage in order to change.

**Closing Meditation:**

**Manifesting the Bridge, Blackfish, art and coalition  
building through creative performance**

Waiting on unknowns.

Verses caught in transition.

mensajes cast into the threshold

At the edge of existence.

There's this spot where the ocean meets the skyline

The horizon dissolves

Sea and sky lose definition.

At the edge of the world:

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A vastness

An opening

an infinite  
collision.

I think I find myself there,  
More than any place else.

In what could be,

What is

Was

Will be

isn't.

I find myself there  
Versing

unbounded

potential

insisting:

Ser el Puente

Lose the self

Become

---

the transition.

“Performativity is properly understood as a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grant language and other forms of representation more power in determining our ontologies than they deserve.” (Barad, 2007 p133)

Whether we will them to or not our bodies bear meaning upon the world every day. When we are still and silent and when we are in motion, we leave a mark; produce an affect within spacetime. Weaves and traces of affectedness ripple outward and manifest from, within and across entanglements in ways we can never be sure of nor keep apace. The turn in data sciences and machine learning to complex systems modeling gestures to us, something about the ways we are aware of our own lived multiplicity on earth. But the framework with which that awareness is oriented ensures that even when machine learning methods do produce something like intelligibility, it is never anchored by lived experience or “intelligence”, but probabilities, repetition, absolute segregation, quantified metrics, and perhaps most importantly, premised on a colonial past. These things enact the formatting of phenomena, the scaling of liveliness into scientific model, a kind of over- and under-fitting of experience into the boundaries of a representation. But knowing, knowing is never so fixed or still, as Barad points out, “knowing is a distributed practice that includes the larger material arrangement. To the extent that people participate in scientific or other practices of knowing they do so as bodies”; as “differential performances” dancing within the world’s greater creative and dynamic enfolding (Barad, 2007, p379), or “intra-activity”. Where in this sense intelligibility is a matter of complex *embodied* performance; affecting and deeply affected by the entangled materializations of which we are perpetually implicated.

This project has taken great care in thinking with the body as interface to illustrate the resonances of *ego conquirro* that lie beyond the screen; to engage the liminal space between the stories we tell and the stories we embody. In writing about identity as in-process, in ongoing reconstruction and lively entanglement with the world, we are offered opportunities for ritualizing and weaving moments of transition and change; processes for threading personal histories into collective fabrics, “for fashioning a story greater than yourself” (Anzaldúa, 2015) and responding to the demands of our collective cultural performance; our entangled materializations within the world.

nepantlera i have a secret:

once you realize how malleable identity is, all you want to do is listen; open yourself up to what you can become. creativity is a profoundly intimate process. creativity, when anchored in healing, stimulates emotional intelligence. it reconnects our minds to our bodies; cleans and heals the wound.

Toni Morrison writes about how the “inability to project, to become the “other<sup>54</sup>,” to imagine her or him. [is] an intellectual flaw, a shortening of the imagination”(Morrison, 2019 p43) made manifest by a colonial matrix of power that is only able to process, to render, large difference; to reduce complexity. But everything about life systems on earth tells us that we demand a set of cognitive relations much more complex than what is offered by current fictions. Fiction is only as good as the worlds it opens up, not reproduces. Reading and writing literature and story that puts us in the position of those most oppressed and affected by colonial systems de-oriens us from reality: it takes us up out of our habituated positions and privilege to help us develop adequate understandings of the social world we live in; it better equips us to relate to, work with, and support one another; to become accountable to the marks we leave upon matter in the world.

Anchored in experiences of the body and the human condition; becoming attune to the discomfort of the current colonial interface, reaching through the wound to connect, concerning ourselves with difference diffracted: opens our bodies to change; to unlearning; to coming undone; contending with our shadows and understanding narratives of identity outside of dominant hegemonic discourse. It offers a means of moving beyond allyship, acknowledgement, reconciliation: to coalitions and community; to accomplices and collaborators; to blackfish. It provides opportunities for creative performances of decolonial solidarity and communication; for moving beyond liberal politics of recognition (Chun, 2021; Coulthard, 2014): for locating ourselves within the

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<sup>54</sup> To draw once again on Maldonado-Torres and the importance of centering historically absented and oppressed experiences: “Questioning is a key part of self-understanding and of understanding and knowledge in general. Knowledge and understanding are fundamentally inter-subjective affairs. The damné has to break from the solitude of its prison to be able to reach out to an Other. Speaking, writing, and the generation of questions are part of the drama of a subject that starts to regain its humanity in reaching out, without masks, to others” (Maldonado-Torres, 2016 p25)

circle<sup>55</sup> and in diffracted relations with others<sup>56</sup>. Writing and reading from and through perspectives and identities of those marginalized, silenced, or rendered defective or past by the imperial shutter helps us develop plural ways of being and relating within the world that can expand our capacity to feel; to imagine; to understand morality, our-self, and home.

We fundamentally exist to learn. To live is to change. One of the outcomes of this project is how it has provided me a liberating relationship to language that is vitally necessary for both dismantling oppressive orientations and reviving and reconfiguring affectedness. It created the space for me to engage discomfort and better understand its resistances, its sources. This was an invaluable experience when it comes to theorizing the demands of difference in the wake of the colonial plunder. As this discomfort, this affectedness, this human condition, is very much the point. I can't tell you how many times I have found myself overcome by deep waves of gratitude for the change this project has brought to my life; for its honesty and its insistence. It took me to the edge of myself and further—it has challenged and demanded of me: will you merely learn, or will you embody this? This is what connecting to the world through story, through writing and reading from the body; through creativity as critical intimacy, radical tenderness, reciprocal offering, might provide us. A homecoming; a return to our bodies, it gets us to start accountably creating; helps us begin the process of regeneration; of healing.

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<sup>55</sup> The concept of the sacred circle is an indigenous epistemology regarding the interconnectedness and interrelationships of all life. Williams and Snively write “cycles and circles can be seen in the relationships of all things: seasons, migrations, life cycles, food chains, tidal cycles, interdependence of all life, the movement of the sun and moon in relation to the earth, and the earth in relation to the universe. Time is perceived as cyclical rather than linear”, in accordance with the sacred circle, in indigenous epistemologies “wholeness is the perception of the undivided unity of life forms” (Snively and Williams 2016). Notions of Oneness are also found indigenous epistemologies like Tsawalk (Atleo 2007).

<sup>56</sup> E Richard Atleo's reading of the theory of Tsawalk “Nuu-chah-nulth origin stories and traditional Nuu-chah-nulth life ways and experience indicate that the basic character of creation is a unity expressed as *heshook-ish tsawalk* (everything is one). This unity of existence does not mean that individuals are denied a separate existence; on the contrary, individualism is a very strong value. Heshook-ish tsawalk is a matter of the first principles laid out in the original design of creation. The creator and creation are one.” (2007 p117); Tsawalk, Atleo writes: “assumes the unity of creation irrespective of any of contemporary society's contradictions...They came to understand the value of the individual without necessarily undermining the value of the group. They understood the value in life and the value in death, the value in love and the value in pain.” (2007 p133)



The silos of abstract identity formatted by current interface regimes fragment and distance, Other us from one another. But, as Morrison writes: “Fictional literature can be an alternative language that can contradict and elude or analyze the regime, the authority of the electronically visual, the seduction of “virtual.” The study of fiction may also be the mechanism of repair in the disconnect between public and private. Literature has features that make it possible to experience the public without coercion and without submission... Literature allows us—no, demands of us—the experience of ourselves as multidimensional persons.”(Morrison, 2019 p100) To draw, like I have in other places across this text, on the work of Ocean Vuong, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Audre Lorde, and Anzaldúa, the language of creativity has a profound ability to manifest something like home, outside of yourself, within and through others. Language can destroy and oppress, but it is also a fundamental testament to our ability to transform; to connect.

Morrison also writes of how there are several human responses to our perception of chaos (or disorientation; disillusion; unknowns or unrest), most often they are: naming (or representation) and violence ( or conquest)—both attempts at rendering something like security or control; but warrants there is also “a third response to chaos...which is stillness. Such stillness can be passivity and dumbfoundedness; it can be paralytic fear. But it can also be art.”<sup>57</sup> (Morrison, 2019 pviii). Our own fragmented, rattled, sense of identity, sense of home, comes from the way colonial fictions foreclose our cultural and cognitive horizons; render a closed world. Fiction opens up the world to reinterpretation, it returns us to the body and the human condition. Or: through fiction, through art, we bring the world into the self—read: some things, in order to be properly learned and unlearned, need to be felt.

So then, what might an interface for decolonial  
coalition building look like?

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<sup>57</sup> in *Peril*, The Source of Self Regard.

“When we have failed at solidarity work we often retreat, struggling to convince ourselves that this is indeed the work we have been called on to do. The fact of the matter is that there is no other work but the work of creating and re-creating ourselves within the context of community. Sim-ply put, there is no other work. It took five hundred years, at least in this hemisphere, to solidify the division of things that belong together. But it need not take us another five hundred years to move ourselves out of this existential impasse. Spirit work does not conform to the dictates of hu-man time, but it needs our courage, revolutionary patience, and intentional shifts in consciousness”

(Alexander, 2005 p283)

History is calling on us to know each other differently. To *be* differently. In order to understand ourselves as the interface for change, we must first begin to cultivate creative practices for bringing the world and others, into our-self. This means a return to bodies and the human condition, to Lorde’s erotic (Lorde, 1984) and Jacqui Alexander’s pedagogies of the sacred (2005); to Mignolo and Walsh’s decolonial pedagogies rising (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018 p88-96), and Greg Cajete’s native science: our creative participation, responsibility; entangled unfolding with the natural world (Cajete, 2000 p14). So, in relation to this imperative, in closing, I have one more offering for further contemplation, an undercurrent if you will, to all of the previous text you’ve just experienced:

Writing, creative practice, art and embodied learning as interface foster and engage emotional intelligence. They move us beyond the cognitive relations of *ego conquiro*; the restraints of liberal politics of recognition<sup>58</sup>. But writing won’t save us, we need more than this, (as narrative and knowing is not enough), we need iterative spaces *to do; to practice*.

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<sup>58</sup> Of which, format and prescribe alienation (Chun, 2021; Coulthard, 2014).

Coalition building for change requires just such an embrace of embodied practice; mutual recognition for the human condition and respect for its affectedness. In order to interface something like decoloniality, we need safe, localized community spaces to come together to create shared resonances of justice, suffering, culture, and experience. Additionally, more profoundly, spaces for creative, albeit differential, collective dreaming for a better world. We must create space, in education and knowledge production, in communities, for practicing habits of self-collective experience, for living in diffracted difference. We must create space to engage discomfort: embrace disorientation; lose our sense of ground, in order to understand something about our own complexity and expansiveness. But more pointedly, we need collective cultural practices for cultivating critical intimacy—for developing literacies for entanglement and affectedness; for *understanding* and *accepting* the performativity of discomfort and conflict. We need opportunities and tactics for disarming habituated responses to reach for ground, for breaking down internalized defenses.

Interface as a set of cognitive relations or process, is deeply performative. As a set of phenomenological, material-discursive entanglements with the world, interface grip us, both body and mind. Interface is always an experience. This project has at once, concerned itself with the kind of extension our current interface mythologies afford, and how we *ought* to dwell, do, teach, learn, *be* through this space. Interface, as filters for knowledge, have the ability to expand or contract our understandings of the world—hence, another aim of this project has been to offer a lensing of how we might reorient ourselves toward knowledge, to expand our capacity for care, for relations with the world and others. On this front, future extensions or applications of this project are numerous but ultimately begin with systems of learning, communication and education. Or put another way: how can we rewrite technologies of interface to foster the emotional

intelligence necessary for sustainable and just relations?<sup>59</sup> I walk asking<sup>60</sup>, how might pre- and decolonial epistemologies, that bridge the self to the collective through creative participation, help us better understand and manifest something like “criticality”, pedagogies, coalitions, or, interface for unlearning and re-existence?

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<sup>59</sup> Might we consider for example, Adrian Mackenzie’s position on machine learning and preindividual reality:

“[p]articipating in a collective, individual subjects, far from losing whatever defines their unique or essential identity, gain the chance to individuate, at least in part, the share of preindividual reality that marks the collective within them...by participating in a collective, even an operational formation, individuals may transform themselves (to attain certain state or experiences) but also affect the collective itself” (Mackenzie, 2017 p214), alongside Jacqui Alexander’s work in *Pedagogies of the Sacred*, where, she asserts, “embodiment functions as a path-way to knowledge, a talking book, whose intelligibility relies on the social—the spiritual expertise of a community to decode Sacred knowledge”, where spiritual practice, rituals for healing, coming into alignment with the divine (where the divine *is* the collective and so *also* the self) and practices of “the Sacred becomes a way of embodying the remembering of self...neither habitually individuated nor unwittingly secularized.” (Alexander, 2005 p297-298)

<sup>60</sup> Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality*, 2018 p 88

## The Gifts of Failure

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A review and reflection of decolonial gestures and experimentation provided by the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective workspace.

Decolonial gesturing and experimentation is premised on the persistent and ubiquitous presence of coloniality. Interwoven into individual and collective social fabrics its habit is not something that can be resolved through mere critique, acknowledgement, or resistance. This work has spent a good deal of time insisting that, rather, we must understand coloniality as something that lives within and through us and, despite all of our best and most innocuous intentions, it is both subtle and devastating in its patterns of resonance.

My aim in this project was not to expropriate or essentialize Indigenous knowledges, nor place them on a pedestal but rather offer the audience an opportunity to sense similar resonances of *ego conquiro* within their own bodies, experience, and practices; as well as, reflect on the insights offered by de or precolonial, nonbinary and non-western thought and aesthetic creative practices. Decolonial pedagogical approaches offer flexible and integrous strategies for “staying with the trouble”, for embracing conflict, discomfort, confrontation, and differential friction.

However, critiquing and resisting coloniality’s framing of education has not dissolved these resonances within myself, I still very much grapple daily with its marks and habituation. And, importantly, my disrupting and resisting coloniality in this project (and beyond) begins from a position of epistemic ignorance, what can be described as the violent “innocence” of incomprehension that accompanies both whiteness and settler subject positions. This means my approach is necessarily grounded in colonial patterns of thinking (as educational and societal; material-discursive conditioning) that have a tendency to be detached of, if not completely overlook, the lived realities of high-impact struggles in experiences of difference.

This produces a potential for failure in a few different ways. One of which is in its ability to romanticize entanglement due to inexperience or blindspots that idealize interconnection free of violence, conflict, pain, and “shit.” This romanticization also has a tendency to present decoloniality as transcendence through mere creativity or engagement with Indigenous teachings—leaving behind or neglecting the necessary discomfort of confronting and becoming accountable to colonial resonances and privilege. But entanglement is disorienting and ontologically rattling. It’s depositioning and repositioning of the self through the collective should not lead us to clean transitions nor settled self actualizing conclusions because decolonial change is ongoing, difficult, and complicated.

This project has attempted to grapple responsibly with these potholes by highlighting the critiques and potential pitfalls of working through Anzaldúa’s reading of an Aztec myth, by locating its own creative practice through the situatedness of the writer’s own structural position, and by incorporating additional non-western thought and nonbinary theory and systems. It has sought to center the collective insights of this knowledge for understanding complex relations of change and difference, rather than present the author through a lens of authority or any one tantamount assertion of meaning; and it’s done its best to read these insights through the specificities of my own experience of difference and its associative relational agency within entanglement.

Nonetheless, writing from the position of an academic scholar in a colonial institution, my ability to even critique coloniality without the threat of violence, expropriation or dispossession, highlights the important distinction between high and low impact struggles, and the importance of attending to this difference. My western form of being is premised on the exploitation, dispossession, and displacement of black, Indigenous and other people of color; and being in academics, effectively distanced from lived experiences of struggle, means I am disproportionately afforded both authority and certain protections. To remain in the abstract, divorced from embodied realities of colonial systems, is to remain necessarily detached and in negligent contrast to those structurally excluded from (and whose subjugation drives and maintains) these systems to begin with.

This text has no lived experience with dispossession or displacement, residential schools, or racialized surveillance and discrimination. It has no lived experience of the struggles of Indigenous groups across the America's nor the threat of violence faced by those most outspoken to colonial systems. My body does not render as an existential threat to the colonial matrix like Black or Indigenous persons. Hence, frontline activists and Indigenous groups are likely to roll their eyes at the frivolity or indulgence of the particular form of my methods. As a mixed white westerner, the intimacy of this text could likely come across as overtly out of touch wailing and privilege. But the point of this text was to work through resonances and colonial ills that impede me from doing the work necessary to become a better accomplice<sup>61</sup>. Otherwise, I risk reproducing harm and colonial regimes inadvertently by not recognizing the patterns within myself that forward them.

So, though the theory of change accompanying this text is about offering people, all people, a certain language for recognizing the colonial habit within their experience, it is because I write from this specific epistemic position that I have imagined an audience that shares some aspects of my experience or plane of difference: I write to westerners, millennials and Z's, members of the general public and academics who benefit from or experience subjectivation through imperialism, settler-colonialism and/or whiteness.

It is because of this audience focus, that some parts of this work were articulated through rhetoric of the academy and potentially inaccessible to other audiences that might need to receive it, and in this way, reproduces aspects of colonial education and the critique being made of it (additionally, this project is still text heavy and not yet collaborative).

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<sup>61</sup> Anzaldúa writes about the necessity of the later stages of *conocimiento* that bridge internal knowledge with public acts, through the forming of holistic alliances and forms of spiritual activism. This latter stage is only possible through embodied on the ground coalition building and action. This text is a necessary stage of *conocimiento* but is not meant to replace this fundamental aspect of change and decolonial strategy. One of the major realizations of this project was the ways creative practice, though valuable and necessary, cannot in isolation, replicate or replace knowledge gleaned from on the ground activism, community or support networks. Doing this work alone was incredibly challenging. Divorced from necessary and important community feedback and interaction, hands on learning or engagement with the demands of frontline work and black and indigenous modes of being would help to deromanticize and more appropriately honor and understand the depth of other forms of knowledge and practice. This to me, is apart of going deeper: falling out of habits that require individualized or isolated gains, that service colonial matrices of power, and into relational and frictional demands of interconnected struggles for community and change, visceral knowledges of entanglement; forms of being that service each other.

However, treading lines of difference; walking between worlds, is the nepantlera's business, who engage the shadows of our inheritance across differential positions. So, much of this work was focused on offering a language for locating and understanding diffractive absences and colonial resonances that comes with these locations and epistemic positions; as well as, composting modes of being and shared traumas we have inherited without distorting or instrumentalizing difference nor seeking relief or escape from our own discomfort or affect(tedness).

I am accountable fundamentally to every being. A big part of this accountability means rejecting the claims of settler colonialism and whiteness that destroy, steal, erase or inhibit relationality, in order to invite instead forms of relationality that are open to change, discomfort, failure, complexity, and critical intimacy. It is my hope that the intimacy and openness provided by the creative practice in this project, in all its failures and missteps, highlights the importance of approaching decoloniality with honesty and humility. But also, a cognizance that challenges to purity or correctness offer in their place a deeply didactic and generative acceptance: both failure and death; desconocimiento and shadows, bring important lessons; that disorientation can bring both freedom and madness. So, may we walk-asking about decolonial resonances for re-existence; where to live is to change; and good is a practice.



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## Appendix.

### Critical Reflections on Decoloniality

#### Potholes in the road toward decolonization (for people in low-intensity struggle)

1. **Having a critique of colonialism means that you are already decolonized.**  
*Saying you are doing it does not mean you are actually doing it.*
2. **Seeing all resistance to authority as anti-colonial.**  
*Many forms of resistance are inherently colonial and/or imperial.*
3. **Celebrating all attempts to disrupt colonial patterns as contributing to decolonization.**  
*Most attempts to disrupt colonialism are still grounded in colonial patterns.*
4. **Extracting, selectively consuming and mis-interpreting Indigenous teachings.**  
*The perceived entitlement to access and mastery of Indigenous knowledges is a colonial entitlement.*
5. **Imagining entanglement as interconnection with beauty only.**  
*Rather than seeing entanglement as entanglement with “shit” as well.*
6. **Emphasizing entitlements and forgetting accountabilities.**  
*Attempting to transcend privilege without giving anything up.*
7. **Expecting other people (especially Indigenous people) to shoulder the costs of your learning.**  
*Attempting to decolonize without considering the impact of your work on different Indigenous peoples.*
8. **Confusing self-actualization with decolonization.**  
*Seeing individual free/creative self-expression as a decolonial gesture.*
9. **Erasing distinctions between high- and low-intensity struggles.**  
*Positioning yourself on the basis of individual choice rather than structural location. Flattening uneven struggles.*
10. **Being a victim of systemic oppression means you are not complicit in colonialism.**  
*No one is off the hook, ever.*

#### Hyper-self-reflexivity questions

1. To what extent are you reproducing what you critique?
2. To what extent are you avoiding looking at your own complicities and denials, and at whose expense?
3. What are you doing this for? Who (what communities) are you accountable to? What is your theory of change? What would you like your work to move in the world?
4. Who is your imagined audience? What do you expect from this audience? What compromises have you had to make in order for this to be possible? To what extent can these compromises compromise the work?
5. To what extent are you aware of how you are being read by communities of high-intensity struggle? Who would *legitimately* roll their eyes at what you are doing (i.e. find it indulgent and/or self-infantilizing)?

6. Who is this really about? How does integrity manifest in your work?
7. To what extent is the politics you are proposing based on the modern grammar of exceptionalism, entitlements and exaltedness?
8. How wide is the gap between where you think you are at and where you are actually at? Who would be able to help you realize that? Would you be able to listen?
9. To what extent can you respond with humility, honesty, humour and hyper-self-reflexivity when your work or self-image are challenged?
10. What would you have to give up or let go of in order to go deeper?

*All of the above is drawn directly from Gesturing Towards Decolonial Horizons', The Gifts of Failure, workspace for the review and critical reflection of decolonial gestures and experimentation.*