

Decolonizing the White Colonizer?

By

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Abstract

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This interdisciplinary study examines the question of decolonizing the white colonizer in the United States. After establishing the U.S. as a nation-state built on and still manifesting a colonial tradition of white supremacy which necessitates multifaceted decolonization, the dissertation asks and addresses two questions: 1) what particular issues need to be taken into account when attempting to decolonize the white colonizer and 2) how might the white colonizer participate in decolonization processes? Many scholars in the fields this dissertation draws on -- Critical Race Theory, Critical Ethnic Studies, Coloniality and Decolonial Theory, Language Socialization, and Performance Studies -- have offered incisive analyses of colonial white supremacy, and assume a transformation of white subjectivities as part of the envisioned transformation of social, political and economic relationships. However, in regards to processes of decolonization, most of that work is focused on the decolonization of political and economic structures and on decolonizing the colonized. The questions pursued in this dissertation do not assume a simplistic colonizer/colonized binary but recognize the saliency of geo- and bio-political positionalities. As a result of these different positionalities, white U.S. citizens committed to participating in our own decolonization and in the decolonization of our (social, political, educational, and economic) structures and relationships with others must learn from but cannot simply imitate or appropriate decolonial methodologies developed by indigenous people and people of color.

The title of this dissertation posits decolonization as an active ongoing process (through the use of the verb-form, i.e. “decolonizing”) without guarantees (through the use of the question mark). Each chapter addresses a different yet interrelated aspect of this process:

Chapter One intervenes in the reconstructionism versus abolitionism debate in Whiteness Studies, and offers *p/reparations* as a framework for redistributory practices and (inter)personal transformation and as a methodology through which the white colonizer might contribute to racial justice and decolonization projects. P/reparations processes are open-ended and include apologies, material and cultural redress, and structural change to ensure non-recurrence. By highlighting historical and contemporary processes of accumulation by dispossession, p/reparations processes emphasize interconnectedness and challenge the illusion of autonomous individuals, groups and nation-states. Thus, a p/reparations framework intervenes into discourses of meritocracy and equal opportunity; denaturalizes notions of citizenship, immigration, and the borders of nation-states; and provides counter-narratives to discourses of aid and charity which assume the assets being

redistributed were legitimately acquired and that acts of redistribution should thus be met with gratitude.

Chapter Two examines the ways in which the geographical control of bodies has been a key technology of white supremacist colonialism. Given the entanglement of geographical (im)mobility with social (im)mobility and an unequal racialized distribution of premature death, decolonization and the dismantling of white supremacy necessitates not only the redistribution of political and economic resources but divesting from U.S.-ness itself. As such, decolonization requires not only white abolitionism but also U.S.-abolitionism. This chapter interrogates the use of the trope of “the criminal” by both the nation-state and the prison industrial complex, and the ways in which these discourses are mobilized as threats to the white colonizer’s “home.” As such, this chapter argues that, for the white colonizer, one aspect of decolonization may require developing a relationship to *home as a foreign concept* as well as (in many cases) pursuing downward rather than upward mobility.

Chapter Three suggests power-conscious hybridity as a technology the white colonizer can employ in the face of this challenge of needing to claim whiteness and U.S.-ness even as we seek to participate in their abolition. Hybridity emphasizes that no one is reducible to any particular “identity.” In order not to disappear into colorblind “humanness,” engage in cultural appropriation, and/or revalorize whiteness, however, the white colonizer’s employment of hybridity must simultaneously involve *(de)facial whiteness*. (De)facial implies a double movement: facing whiteness, in all of its horror, without resorting to white flight; and defacing whiteness, both in the sense of destroying it and in the sense of de-facialing it, i.e. undoing the notion that whiteness is human.

Chapter Four examines issues of pedagogy and curricula inside and outside the classroom as they pertain to processes of recreating and transforming colonial white supremacy. This chapter critiques discourses of “equality of opportunity” as a primary ideological mechanism supporting colonial white supremacy in the current age of colorblind racism. Through participant-observation of two different attempts at “social justice” schooling (one at the high school level, one at the college level), it examines the creation of what Michel Foucault calls “docile bodies,” and draws on pedagogies from theater as possibilities for cultivating counter-disciplines of the body. This chapter ends with a list of specific skills the white colonizer needs to learn for the purpose of decolonization.

“Chapter” Five attempts to “practice what I preach” (in particular in relation to the colonial white supremacy institutionalized as epistemological hierarchies in the academy) by revisiting the topics of this dissertation in a live performance. This theoretical and methodological intervention enacts a response to critiques of the mind/body split in colonial epistemologies, and positions performance *as* analysis which must be engaged on its own terms -- rather than only as a methodology or phenomenon that is then analyzed in writing. This is also a pedagogical intervention which insists on the importance and legitimacy of multiple modalities of communication beyond writing within academia, and seeks to make academia feel accessible to a wider range of people with a range of learning and teaching styles.

The Inconclusion addresses the question of why the white colonizer would *want* to decolonize. It argues that the prerequisite for wanting to decolonize is recognizing oneself as colonizer and all beings as interconnected. Then decolonization becomes not so much a choice as a spiritual—which is also to say political—imperative. As such, this dissertation argues not only against the mind/body split, but also against the mind/body/soul split by emphasizing the importance of politicizing and embodying spirituality and infusing political movements with spiritual convictions.

Dedication

For my Mom, herself a perpetual student – check it out, I’m actually graduating! Thank you for sharing your life and love with me.

For my Dad, with gratitude for your unwavering love and support.

For all those who dare/have dared to speak and act in ways that move us closer to a world in which all beings can flourish – thank you. I hope that this “best I can do at this moment” offering contributes to that legacy, that it might be more useful than harmful. It is difficult to speak, knowing the impossibility of expressing the depth of the topics discussed here – and impossible not to. Please help me to listen and speak honestly, critically, with compassion, wisdom, humility, passion, humor, gratitude, hope, accountability, and fierce love.

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INTRODUCTION

Deal with your own pain as a first act of resistance to empire.

-- Reverend Lynice Pinkard

Affiliation, which is defined by the Chicana theorist Chela Sandoval as “attraction, combination, and relation carved out of and in spite of difference,” goes together here with non-indifference and responsibility, both of which presuppose listening to the cry of the condemned. To be sure, both listening and responsible action are only possible through embodiment. Action is in this sense no longer defined by the hand-that-takes but rather by receptive generosity and what Sandoval has aptly rendered as de-colonial love.

-- Nelson Maldonado-Torres

This dissertation is driven by attempts to deal with my pain as a result of witnessing, participating in, and resisting systems of domination as a white citizen in a colonial white supremacist United States. The dissertation asks and addresses two questions: 1) what particular issues need to be taken into account when attempting to decolonize the white colonizer and 2) how might the white colonizer participate in decolonization processes?

Many scholars in the fields this interdisciplinary dissertation draws on -- Critical Race Theory, Critical Ethnic Studies, Coloniality and Decolonial Theory, Language Socialization, and Performance Studies -- have offered incisive analyses of colonial white supremacy, and assume a transformation of white subjectivities as part of the envisioned transformation of social, political, educational and economic institutions and structures. However, in regards to processes of decolonization, most of that work is focused on the decolonization of institutions and structures and on decolonizing the colonized. The questions pursued in this dissertation do not assume a simplistic colonizer/colonized binary but recognize the saliency of geo- and bio-political positionalities. As a result of these different positionalities, white U.S. citizens committed to participating in our own decolonization and in the decolonization of our institutions, structures and relationships with others must learn from but cannot simply imitate or appropriate decolonial methodologies developed by indigenous people and people of color.

At first glance, the methodology proposed by Pinkard in the epigraph, i.e. to “deal with your own pain as a first act of resistance to empire,” might seem at odds with the methodology described in the quote by Maldonado-Torres above, which begins with hearing and responding to the cry of a condemned other. Pinkard’s project, however, assumes a relational self. That is, dealing with one’s own pain begins by recognizing how this pain is produced not only through experiences of oppression on one’s own body (which can serve as a means of empathy and connection to pain experienced by others), but also through hearing, witnessing and becoming aware of one’s own participation in the oppression of others.¹ By asking us to focus on our own pain, she seeks to counteract unidirectional savior-activism in which certain individuals are identified as broken and needy of others’ unilateral help and healing. Dealing with one’s own pain means recognizing that, in a colonial world, we are all broken beings. Healing necessitates a process of internal and external

¹ At an even deeper level of insight, one becomes aware that others are simultaneously autonomous and inseparable parts of oneself and of all which exists; the issue remains, however, of the *nature* of that interconnectedness, i.e. whether it is built around relations of domination or love. My continually developing understanding of this has been most profoundly fostered through engaged Buddhism. I return to these points in the Inconclusion.

decolonization, what Pinkard describes as contributing to the flourishing of all life and what Maldonado-Torres describes as appealing to love in the face of modernity's paradigm of war and deathliness. Moreover, the individual and the social are inextricably linked, and shifting the nature of these linkages from ones based on relations of domination to ones based on relations of love is, ultimately, a spiritual project, which is also to say a political project. John A. Powell provides a particularly eloquent explanation of these linkages, distinguishing between "ontological suffering" (which is inherent to life) and "social suffering" (which is surplus suffering and unevenly distributed):

[social] suffering is the result of social arrangements and as a result, it can be made better or worse by these arrangements...Much of the social suffering that we visit on each other is indeed spiritual at its base. We are greedy and jealous of each other. We deny each others' humanity because of our flawed spiritual understandings. Therefore if we correct our spiritual understanding, we would do less social harm to each other. But equally important, spirituality requires that we engage in something larger than ourselves...caring about others' suffering is not just about relieving their suffering—it is also about one's own spiritual development and relieving the suffering of the spiritual actor.²

Each of the chapters in this dissertation addresses a different yet interrelated aspect regarding material, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual processes of decolonizing the white colonizer in the United States. Chapter One offers *p/reparations* as a framework for understanding past and present inequities and as a methodology through which the white colonizer might contribute to racial justice and decolonization projects. Chapter Two argues that decolonization and the dismantling of white supremacy necessitates not only the redistribution of political and economic resources but divesting from U.S.-ness itself -- which ultimately entails not only white abolitionism but also U.S. abolitionism. Chapter Three suggests power-conscious hybridity as a technology the white colonizer can employ in the face of the challenge of needing to claim white U.S.-ness even as we seek to participate in its abolition. Chapter Four examines issues of pedagogy and curricula inside and outside the classroom as they pertain to processes of recreating and transforming colonial white supremacy. "Chapter" Five attempts to "practice what I preach" (in particular in relation to the colonial white supremacy institutionalized as epistemological hierarchies in the academy) by revisiting the topics of this dissertation in a live performance. The Inconclusion addresses the question of why the white colonizer would *want* to decolonize, arguing that this ultimately becomes not so much a choice as a spiritual—which is also to say political—imperative. I provide a more detailed synopsis of each of these chapters in the Chapter Overview section below.

This Introduction also includes the following sections: an explanation of how I characterize this dissertation's context, i.e. "The Colonial Tradition of White Supremacy and the Decolonial Turn," biographical information which connects the macro context of the dissertation to my personal context in relation to these topics, the methodologies I employed in this dissertation, and acknowledgements. My theoretical frameworks are woven throughout the Introduction and the entire dissertation. I include all these components within the Introduction rather than relegating them to separate sections because they are, ultimately, all variations on ways to introduce myself and this dissertation to you: the theoretical frameworks have enabled the articulation of the guiding questions of this dissertation, and are what I draw from to make meaning of my lived experiences

² John A. Powell, "Lessons from Suffering: How Social Justice Informs Spirituality," *U. St. Thomas LJ* 1 (2003): 103–4.

and to recognize and articulate the historical contexts in which they are lived; my exposure to those frameworks has been via those mentioned in the acknowledgements; the methodologies employed have grown out of those frameworks, and have, in turn, resulted in certain life experiences and the seeking out of particular teachers and theoretical frameworks.

THIS DISSERTATION'S CONTEXT: THE COLONIAL TRADITION OF WHITE SUPREMACY & THE DECOLONIAL TURN

My understanding of *white supremacy* is influenced by Zeus Leonardo's distinction between “white supremacy” and “white privilege.” He describes being at a conference at which someone argued that being white is “akin to walking down the street with money being put into your pant pocket without your knowledge.”³ While this metaphor makes us aware of the unearned advantages whites have, and the oblivion we often have about this fact, Leonardo argues it doesn't deal with white agency: who places the money in whites' pockets? It also doesn't help us understand the process of racial accumulation, that “whites take resources from people of color; often they also build a case for having earned such resources.”⁴ Rather than focusing on the process of appropriation, the discourse of white privilege “centers the discussion on the advantages that whites receive. It mistakes the symptoms for causes.”⁵ Leonardo writes,

the theme of privilege obscures the subject of domination, or the agent of actions, because the situation is described as happening almost without the knowledge of whites. It conjures up images of domination happening behind the backs of whites, rather than on the backs of people of color. The study of white privilege begins to take on an image of domination without agents. It obfuscates the historical process of domination in exchange for a state of dominance *in medias res*.⁶

I conceive of white supremacy as a *tradition*. While the word tradition is often used in a positive or benign sense, this need not be the case. Traditions are also not limited to foods, festivals, music, dances, clothing and religious practices. Rather, as Patricia Baquedano-López points out,

as a situated, recognizable, and socially sanctioned mode of thought or practice, tradition includes a sense of a people's daily practices and enduring dispositions that are also supported by social institutions (Lévi-Strauss 1964; Giddens 1984). But traditions also accrue moral value. As moral positionings, traditions mediate the quest for a collective, coherent cultural narrative (MacIntyre 1984).⁷

Such traditions are not necessarily static; in fact, the continuation of traditions tends to depend on their being lived, and thus also transformed. As such, Paul Gilroy defines tradition as “the living

³ Zeus Leonardo, *Race, Whiteness, and Education*. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 76.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid, page 77.

⁶ Ibid, page 76.

⁷ Patricia Baquedano-López, “Traversing the Center: The Politics of Language Use in a Catholic Religious Education Program for Immigrant Mexican Children,” *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2004): 224–5.

memory of the changing same.”⁸ In regards to white supremacy, then, drawing on Baquedano-López and Gilroy, there is a relationship between ideology (expressed in moral terms and as a “collective, coherent cultural narrative”), daily practices, and social institutions. White supremacy is a tradition in that it has been institutionalized as well as normalized as common sense⁹ in moral terms (for example, in cultural narratives about the United States as a country of immigrants, the “land of the free,” and defined by democracy, equality, meritocracy, and progress). The tradition of white supremacy is not benign, but brutal. It is ideology which allows it to be falsely experienced as not only benign, but even benevolent. The specific forms the racialized relations of white supremacist domination take have changed over time, as have the particular ideologies which support those forms, but the overall patterns of domination remain in place. The justifying ideologies may have shifted their primary emphasis from notions of biological superiority/inferiority, to notions of cultural superiority/inferiority, to the current form of what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva calls “color-blind racism.”¹⁰ Institutional practices that lead to racialized inequality may have shifted their primary forms from, for example, slavery, to Jim Crow, to mass incarceration, and from physically forced displacement to displacement through gentrification and economic policies. However, while these specificities are important to engage with, and can help us understand the multiple ways in which the colonial tradition of white supremacy functions and expertly shape-shifts in order to accommodate and adapt to resistance, the racial wealth gap is larger than it has ever been, the notion of U.S. citizenship and U.S. citizens’ control over the land called “the United States” is largely taken for granted, schools and neighborhoods are deeply segregated with vastly different resources, cognitive bias research reveals both conscious and unconscious functioning of racial schemas that demonstrate high levels of negative attitudes towards people of color, more African Americans are under the control of the prison industrial system today than were enslaved in 1850, and health disparities, quality of life, and length of life is markedly racialized. As such, Ruth Wilson Gilmore defines racism as “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.”¹¹ I use the word “tradition” because it also evokes the ways in which these patterns may be accompanied by a sense of nostalgia, pride, personal investment, and group solidarity. These components can make it all the more difficult to challenge a hegemonic tradition, especially when those who embody a given tradition assume themselves to be the only legitimate arbitrators of it. For example, when it comes to dealing with racism and white supremacy, it is not uncommon for white people to insist on being in agreement with how racial justice should be pursued or that white people’s support is necessary for something to be of universal concern rather than about “special interests.”

Finally, I name the tradition of white supremacy a *colonial* tradition, influenced by understandings of colonization from Coloniality Studies.¹² Ramón Grosfoguel, drawing on Anibal Quijano,

⁸ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 198.

⁹ Antonio Gramsci and David Forgacs, *An Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935* (New York: Schocken Books, 1988).

¹⁰ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in Contemporary America* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).

¹¹ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 28.

¹² Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215–232; Ramón Grosfoguel, “World-Systems Analysis in the Context of Transmodernity, Border Thinking, and Global Coloniality,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* (2006): 167–187; Maria Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/modern Gender System,” *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007): 186–219; Nelson Maldonado Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of*

distinguishes coloniality from colonialism by emphasizing that colonial relations (coloniality) can persist even in the absence of colonial administrations (colonialism). In the context of the U.S. we are arguably dealing with both: a settler colonial administration (albeit one which does not recognize itself as such) as well as colonial relations between various peoples residing within and outside of the borders claimed by the U.S. These colonial relations have psychological, cultural, and material manifestations that vary according to the particular logics of white supremacy employed in different contexts. I have found Andrea Smith's work incredibly helpful here.¹³ She outlines three primary logics of white supremacy in the U.S.: slavery/capitalism (this is the logic which commodifies people as workers along a racial hierarchy with Black people at the bottom as completely slaveable), genocide/colonialism (this is the logic which kills and disappears Native peoples in order to justify taking ownership of land), and orientalism/war (this is the logic which constructs Western civilizations as superior to other civilizations, resulting in the imagination of Asians, Arabs, and Latin@s as potentially dangerous foreigners, and justifying continual (threats of) war on other nations and peoples). Smith furthermore emphasizes the ways in which heteropatriarchy infuses all of these logics, reminding us that we must be attentive to all axes and relations of domination when engaging in decolonial struggle. This is what I also find helpful about the theoretical framework of Coloniality Studies, as it emphasizes a set of entangled global hierarchies. Grosfoguel outlines that these entangled hierarchies include a capitalist international division of labor, an inter-state system of politico-military organizations, a racial/ethnic hierarchy privileging Europeans, a gender hierarchy privileging males and European patriarchy, a sexual hierarchy privileging heterosexuals, a spiritual hierarchy privileging Christians, a linguistic hierarchy privileging European languages in the production of knowledge, and an epistemic hierarchy privileging Western knowledge and cosmology. Full decolonization requires the transformation of all these entangled hierarchies.¹⁴

Maldonado-Torres argues that we are currently living in a fourth moment¹⁵ in the decolonial turn. He argues that the decolonial turn

can be understood as an expression or a particular manifestation of the skepticism toward Western theodicy (a form of theodicy in which Western civilization itself takes the place of God and must be thus defended in the face of any evil)...It finds its roots in critical responses to racism and colonialism articulated by colonial and racial subjects since the beginnings of the modern colonial experience more than five hundred years ago. The decolonial turn is a simultaneous response to the crisis of Europe and the condition of racialized and colonized subjects in modernity. It posits

Modernity (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Walter D. Mignolo, "Islamophobia/Hispanophobia. The (Re) Configuration of the Racial/Imperial/Colonial Matrix," *Human Architecture. Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 1 (2006): 13–28.

¹³ Andrea Smith, "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy" in *Color of Violence*, ed. Incite! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge: South End Press, 2006): 66-73; Andrea Smith, "Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy" in *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Daniel Martinez HoSang, Oneka LaBennett, and Laura Pulido (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012): 66-90.

¹⁴ Grosfoguel, "World-Systems Analysis in the Context of Transmodernity, Border Thinking, and Global Coloniality."

¹⁵ Maldonado-Torres sees the first moment of the decolonial turn as coming out of the confrontation of African Diaspora peoples with the dilemmas of emancipation, and having been announced by W.E.B. Du Bois' assertion in 1903 that the problem of the 20th century would be the problem of the color line. A second moment came in the form of disenchantment with Europe during the two world wars and the de-colonization and nationalist movements after World War Two. This has been followed with a period focusing on epistemic decolonization and the production of knowledge from subalternized perspectives, including the institutionalization of academic departments supporting such work. See Maldonado Torres, *Against War*.

the primacy of ethics as an antidote to problems with Western conceptions of freedom, autonomy, and equality, as well as the necessity of politics to forge a world where ethical relations become the norm rather than the exception. The decolonial turn highlights the epistemic relevance of the enslaved and colonized search for humanity. It seeks to open up the sources for thinking and to break up the apartheid of theoretical domains through renewed forms of critique and epistemic creolization.¹⁶

In discussing the challenges of decolonization as a project much larger than the removal of colonial administrations, many scholars have offered critical theoretical tools. For example, Gloria Anzaldúa¹⁷ has offered the concepts of mestiza consciousness and nepantlismo, Chela Sandoval¹⁸ has developed a theory and methodology of differential consciousness and movement, Alessandro Fornazzari and Enrique Dussel¹⁹ speak of transmodernity and transcultural dialogue, Anibal Quijano²⁰ insists on the need for a socialization of power, Walter Mignolo²¹ emphasizes the importance of diversality and bilanguaging, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’O²² discusses alternative centers, Patricia Baquedano-López²³ argues for the strategic potential of “traversing the center,” and Sylvia Wynter²⁴ argues for the creation of a new “propter nos” – an expansion of our instinctive and intellectual understanding of who is part of our kin (those towards whom we feel committed and with whom we recognize ourselves as interconnected) to include all of humanity. These scholars offer incisive analyses of colonial white supremacy, and assume a transformation of white subjectivities as part of the envisioned transformation of social, political and economic relationships. However, the process of entré into and engagement with such decolonial strategies and processes will be different for individuals or groups depending on their/our positions within what Mignolo calls “the colonial difference.”²⁵

The title of the dissertation -- “Decolonizing the White Colonizer?” -- is phrased as a question. “Decolonizing” is a verb, which indicates an ongoing active process, rather than a singular event. The question mark indicates that, while I discuss various possibilities within the dissertation, there are no guarantees. The most controversial part of the title is the singular subject, “the white colonizer.” The point here is not to reduce anyone to any one thing or to deny the fact that

¹⁶ Maldonado Torres, *Against War*, 7.

¹⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 2nd ed (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999); Gloria Anzaldúa, “Now Let Us Shift...the Path of Conocimiento...Inner Work, Public Acts” in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, eds. Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002): 540–578.

¹⁸ Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

¹⁹ Alessandro Fornazzari and Enrique D. Dussel, “World-System and ‘Trans’-Modernity,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 3, no. 2 (2002): 221–244.

²⁰ Quijano, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America.”

²¹ Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

²² Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’O, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London; Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1986).

²³ Baquedano-López, “Traversing the Center.”

²⁴ Sylvia Wynter, “1492: A New World View” in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, eds. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995): 5–57; Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.

²⁵ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*.

everyone is complicit, in various ways, with various forms of colonial domination. Rather, my title insists that at this historical moment, colonial relations exist and (though we are all complex human beings) decolonization necessitates recognizing colonial structures, discourses, and the subjects who are differently positioned within them. This includes recognizing the fact that while, for example, poor, queer and/or female whites are differently positioned than rich white men, they/we remain white.²⁶ As Leonardo points out, the assumption that whites do not all benefit equally from their whiteness is erroneous – we *do* benefit equally from whiteness; it is along other lines of social identities (e.g. class, gender, sexuality, ability) that we do not benefit equally.²⁷ I see my title as functioning similarly to the title of George Yancy’s book, *Look, a White!* He points out that this declaration “returns to white people the problem of whiteness,”²⁸ and that this should be accepted as a gift “that is heavy laden with great responsibility.”²⁹ Yancy explains that

“Look, a white!” is a way of engaging the white world, calling it forth from a different perspective, a perspective critically cultivated by black people and others of color... “Look, a white!” does not, however, reinscribe a form of race essentialism. In Fanon’s case, “Look, a Negro!” was never intended as a gift; it functioned as a penalty... “Look, a white!” is not meant to seal white bodies “into that crushing objecthood” that Fanon speaks of vis-à-vis the white gaze... Instead, “Look, a white!” has the goal of complicating white identity... Whiteness as a site of privilege and power is named and identified.³⁰

Yancy points out that “Look, a white!” also identifies whites who study and/or engage in antiracism efforts, reminding us that racism is not just a matter of individual acts or intentions. His goal is for white people to learn to see ourselves and the world through the eyes of people of color. This process is distinct from Du Bois’ concept of “double consciousness.” The purpose of whites seeing ourselves through the eyes of people of color is to provide us with “a perspective that will challenge whiteness... [that is] *threatening* to a white self and a white social system predicated on a vicious lie that white is right—morally, epistemologically, and otherwise.”³¹

Thus, while Alastair Bonnett has emphasized the importance of attending to the “historical and geographical contingency of ‘whiteness’”³² and the danger of reifying the category by taking it for granted in anti-racism work, I believe there is simultaneously a danger of focusing so much on the trees of the contingencies that the forest of the overall patterns of domination is neglected. In an

²⁶ As it is a constructed category, the parameters of “whiteness” have themselves changed over time; moreover, participation in – and even (partial) benefit from -- the structures of white supremacy is not limited to bodies racialized as white. Rodríguez refers to this as “multicultural white supremacy.” Here, however, I am focusing on the particular challenges that arise in regards to decolonizing those bodies which are racialized as white in our current historical context. On multicultural white supremacy, see Dylan Rodríguez, *Forced Passages: Imprisoned Radical Intellectuals and the U.S. Prison Regime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Dylan Rodríguez, “Inaugurating Multicultural White Supremacy,” *The Journal for Critical Alternatives*, November 9, 2008, accessible here: <http://criticalalternatives.blogspot.com/2008/12/inaugurating-multicultural-white.html>.

²⁷ Leonardo, *Race, Whiteness, and Education*.

²⁸ George Yancy, *Look, a White!: Philosophical Essays on Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 6.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, 11.

³¹ Ibid, 12.

³² Alastair Bonnett, “Anti-racism and the Critique of ‘white’ identities,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 22, no. 1 (1996): 104.

article called “White socio-spatial epistemology,” Owen Dwyer and John Paul Jones III argue that while there are many historical and geographical forms of whiteness, “they share a common, non-relational, approach to knowing the world.”³³ This way of knowing assumes discrete and bounded objects, enabling dichotomous oppositions (for example, self/other, public/private, domestic/foreign) and a grid epistemology, i.e. “a spatial procedure for segmenting social life such that it can be measured and interrogated.”³⁴ Furthermore, that measuring and interrogating happens from a Cartesian perspective, which “lineates the world with respect to a single point.”³⁵ That single point being the heterosexual white Christian male. Many feminists, critical race theorists and coloniality theorists have long critiqued this perspective wherein the Cartesian subject places himself outside of and above the world, adopting a “god’s eye view,” from where he renders his knowledge in abstract universal terms rather than as emerging from a particular place in the world.³⁶ This assertion and assumption of disconnected distance is then valued as “objectivity.” Dwyer and Jones point out that while “this spatial epistemology predates whiteness, it has come to work in the service of it,”³⁷ providing a “rich epistemological field from which [whiteness can] gather its authoritative and distanced subjectivity.”³⁸ This non-relational approach to both identity and space enables, as they write, an “easy and innocent denial of any connection between spaces of privilege and those of suffering.”³⁹ A recurring theme in this dissertation is the issue of white escapism – the various ways in which white people seek to escape being marked as complicit with white supremacy and coloniality.⁴⁰ My title argues that there is no possibility for escape, but that there are possibilities – albeit without guarantees – for decolonial engagement.

A question seeks responses, and this dissertation shares some of the ways I pursued this question of decolonizing the white colonizer, and some of the responses I have received and developed. I turn now to a discussion of my personal history and positionalities as they informed the development and pursuit of these questions, followed by a description of the methodologies I employed in the creation of this dissertation.

THIS WRITER’S POSITIONALITIES WITHIN THIS DISSERTATION’S CONTEXT

I was born in 1976, in Germany. By the time I was 12 years old, our family had moved back and forth between Germany and the United States five times. After returning to Germany shortly before my 12th birthday, I remained there until age 19, when I completed my Abitur (this is the degree earned in Germany at the end of 13 years of schooling) and moved back to the U.S. for college. I

³³ Owen J. Dwyer and John Paul Jones III, “White Socio-spatial Epistemology,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 1, no. 2 (2000): 219.

³⁴ Ibid, 212.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ For a useful summary of some of these critiques, see Grosfoguel, “World-Systems Analysis in the Context of Transmodernity, Border Thinking, and Global Coloniality.”

³⁷ Dwyer and Jones III, “White Socio-spatial Epistemology,” 212.

³⁸ Ibid, 210.

³⁹ Ibid, 214.

⁴⁰ This escapism can take many forms, ranging from outright denial of racism to what Leonardo and Zembylas call “white intellectual alibis,” whereby the racist is always constructed as someone other than oneself. See Zeus Leonardo and Michalinos Zembylas, “Whiteness as Technology of Affect: Implications for Educational Praxis,” *Equity & Excellence in Education* 46, no. 1 (2013): 150–165.

grew up in Germany at a time when German nationalism was taboo. The memory of the ravages of Nazism loomed large, and nationalism was associated with fascism and genocide. Being immersed in a context in which an entire nation was grappling with the guilt of its recent genocidal past engendered in me a deep skepticism towards nationalism, militarism, and ideologies of supremacy and entitlement. However, it was not amongst the Germans that I saw these things being most powerfully manifested, but amongst the Americans in the U.S. military that had brought me to that country. Nationalism, renamed patriotism, was taken for granted and seen as benevolent, even in its overt militaristic form, with armed uniformed U.S. soldiers wandering the streets of Germany (where I never saw German flags, but frequently saw U.S. ones), and audiences standing en masse as the Star Spangled Banner played before all movies shown in the theaters on U.S. bases. My three years of elementary school in the U.S. taught me that these kinds of nationalistic rituals were not confined to overt military spaces – every morning in my public elementary school, we were expected to place our hands over our hearts while facing ubiquitous U.S. flags, and say the Pledge of Allegiance.

I was in Germany because my Dad worked for the U.S. military. Both of my parents were born in the U.S.; my Dad is a second-generation U.S. citizen, with Italian and Lithuanian ancestry; my Mom’s family tree is a mystery to me, but her ancestors have been in the U.S. for much longer than my Dad’s. Both of my parents, as well as my younger brother and I, are “white” within the context of U.S. racialization and “settlers” within the context of U.S. settler-colonialism.⁴¹ My family’s socioeconomic situation (“class”) has been marked by upward mobility – beginning working-class, becoming middle-class. The U.S. military provided the source of this mobility.

I was not a “military brat,” properly speaking – we never lived on-base, and I never attended Department of Defense schools. All of my K-13 schooling (with the exception of 4th-6th grade, when we lived in the U.S.) took place in German schools. In the sociological/anthropological literature, people with my residential history are referred to as “third culture kids.” This term was invented by Ruth Hill Useem,⁴² and taken up by sociologist David Pollock, who defines a third culture kid (TCK) as “a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any.”⁴³ This sense of in-between-ness, amplified in my case by identifying as queer,⁴⁴ has certainly shaped my manner of understanding and engaging in the world. Neither heterosexual nor homosexual, neither feeling a sense of loyalty to the U.S. nor to Germany, hybridity has been a kind of common sense to me from a young age. I was constantly asked, “Do you feel more American or

⁴¹ Some readers of drafts of this dissertation objected to my use of the term “settlers” to describe my family because they were not among the original European migrants who killed and displaced indigenous people in order to seize and settle on the land now commonly referred to as the United States. However, settler-colonialism is an ongoing process, not a singular event. The fact that my blood ancestors were officially classified as “immigrants” upon arrival to an already existing United States and/or born into settler status and/or critical of past and present practices and policies and/or not wanting or choosing to be settlers does not exempt them/us from membership in that status -- just as the fact that we were born into white supremacist structures does not change the ways in which we are impacted by and complicit in recreating them. For the status of “settler” to be changed requires collective transformation and full decolonization.

⁴² <http://www.tckworld.com/useem/art1.html>

⁴³ David C Pollock and Ruth E Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids: Growing up Among Worlds* (Boston: Nicholas Brealey, 2009), 13.

⁴⁴ “Queer” is an umbrella term, used to describe people whose sexuality and/or gender expression resists heteronormativity and/or cisgender norms.

German?” Neither. Why claim a nation-state, especially ones with such violent histories and presents? As I grew older, I began to recognize the dangers of asserting power-blind hybridity, issues discussed in Chapter Three. For example, while I experienced it as being marked as an “other” to constantly be asked whether I felt more German or more American, I did not question the fact that it was assumed that I could claim either. This was not the case, for example, for Turkish people in Germany who, regardless of citizenship status, were generally perceived as “perpetual foreigners,” a trope I later came to see as functioning within the U.S. as well. Eventually, I learned to claim U.S.-ness – specifically, white U.S.-ness -- not out of pride or entitlement, but to acknowledge my complicity with these systems of domination, issues discussed in Chapters One and Two.

Growing up in a military family, I experienced an existential crisis caused by the recognition that my very existence, immediately and directly, from the food on our table to the roof over my head, was tied to the extermination and degradation of many others’ existences around the world at the hands (and arms) of this military that was providing my Dad’s paycheck. As a teenager, I began to engage in protests – on the streets, and at the dinner-table. The U.S. was the target on the streets (the first Gulf War had just broken out); in my home, by proxy, the target was my father. I raged. Self-righteously and relentlessly. And I tried my hardest to be as financially independent from him as I could be, erroneously believing that if I could extricate myself from my military family, that I would cease being complicit with U.S. militarism. But in the face of my rejection of the life-choices my father was making, and even in the face of my occasional expressions of downright disrespect for him, my father never rejected nor silenced me, and I began to realize just how much he cared for and respected me, and that he was listening. And as I grew older, I began to try to do the same. In the process, I developed a greater understanding and compassion for the life circumstances that led him into the military, which resulted in him being the first person in his family to go to college – although I still believe that it is important to help each other pursue other options, and have published an essay on why this queer person does not celebrate the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.⁴⁵ The lesson of loving commitment across lines of difference has been a profound one, however, learned (over and over again) not only at the philosophical but the experiential level. Loving commitment, to me, is rooted in understanding that we are all interconnected. As such, we cannot be free from one another, we can only be free collectively. And we are not separate from each other, but are co-responsible for all that exists. This insight of interconnectedness might be characterized as “spiritual” yet could just as well be characterized as “empirical” or “scientific.” It is an insight which informs the entire dissertation and I discuss the implications thereof in greater depth in the Inconclusion.

In Germany, I only ever heard the terms “white supremacy” and “racism” used in reference to Nazism, and I did not study the history of German colonialism. It was not until returning to the U.S. that I began to really grapple with issues of colonialism and racism as white supremacy. My return to the U.S. took me to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where I studied theater. At the freshmen convocation, which took place at the football stadium, campus activists arrived and handed out flyers detailing their efforts to get the university to change its mascot, “Chief Illiniwek.” I became active in this effort, and this was my introduction to the genocidal founding of the U.S., the concept of settler colonialism, and the ongoing material and symbolic colonial violence enacted towards indigenous peoples. While we were not successful in getting rid of the mascot during my time at the university (1995-1999), the continued activism was finally successful in 2007. And yet

⁴⁵ Cecilia Lucas, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Serve” in *Against Equality: Don’t Ask to Fight Their Wars*, ed. Ryan Conrad. (Lewiston: Against Equality Publishing Collective, 2011).

there remain some who are trying to “bring back the chief,” who continue to promote the mascot imagery, and who chant “chief” at sporting events. The fervor of the “pro-chief” activists,⁴⁶ and their sense of themselves as honoring traditions they alone were entitled to define, is what first led me to begin thinking of white supremacy itself as a “tradition.”

It was also at the University of Illinois where the issue of institutionalized epistemic hierarchies became more visible to me. As theater majors, we were required to take two theater history courses. I took a course titled “Multi-Ethnic Theater,” taught by Professor Kathy Perkins. However, while this course taught about the history of theatrical forms from various traditions within and beyond the United States, I was informed that it did not fulfill one of the two theater history requirements, but merely counted as an elective. As I researched the courses that fulfilled the requirement, I discovered that all of them focused exclusively on European and Euro-American theater history. With the assistance of Professor Perkins and some fellow students, I created a petition to have this changed. However, even though the petition was signed by a majority of students in the department, we were unsuccessful in creating this institutional change. This issue of how challenging it can be to create and maintain even the slightest institutional changes in relation to white supremacist structures in academia is discussed in Chapter Four.

It was also in Professor Perkins’ class that I first began thinking through the politics of cross-racial performances, a topic discussed in Chapter Three. For my final project in the class, I played a character from Ntozake Shange’s play, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf*. Professor Perkins and my partner at the time, Allan Nuñez, who helped me rehearse for the project, taught me two important lessons that inform key assumptions in this dissertation: one, that it is possible—and essential—to move towards one another across power-laden lines of difference but that one should never assume full understanding/transparency; and two, that the pursuit of greater intimacy across power-laden lines of difference should only be undertaken if one is willing to be vulnerable, humble, take risks, and remain committed. I am particularly grateful for Allan’s explosive interruption of an early rehearsal in which I was holding back, tentative, hesitant: “Stop! If you are going to do this, you have to really do it! I have to feel that it matters to you! Deeply! Or else it is just incredibly insulting!” The anger he expressed at me in that moment, I still believe, should be understood as an incredibly compassionate response and intervention.

In the section on methodology below, I discuss Césaire’s critique of Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*, in particular his assertion that to overcome the willful blindness and self-deception to the humanity of others, we must go beyond Descartes’ method of skepticism as internal monologue and engage, instead, in intersubjective dialogue. I could not have articulated this in that way at the time, but it was a hunch about dialogue which led me to theater, and eventually to working with Chicago’s Albany Park Theater Project (APTP) for four and a half years between undergraduate and graduate school. Influenced by Augusto Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed work, in this youth theater company plays are created based on stories from Chicago’s Albany Park neighborhood. In contrast to the incredibly segregated nature of most Chicago neighborhoods, Albany Park is a mostly working-class diverse immigrant neighborhood, where multiple languages can be heard within one building.⁴⁷ In the course of creating theater with APTP, I came to see the potential of such community-based ensemble theater for engaging people in critical analyses of personal and social experiences; for

⁴⁶ This fervor is also documented in the 1997 documentary film, *In Whose Honor?*, directed by Jay Rosenstein.

⁴⁷ Dwight Conquergood, *Life in Big Red: Struggles and Accommodations in a Chicago Polyethnic Tenement* (Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, 1991).

fostering a sense of agency in terms of the ability to craft representations and to elicit responses from audience members; for humanizing stereotyped peoples; for expanding imaginations; and for fostering meaningful relationships across many lines of difference. (The pedagogical possibilities of community ensemble-based theater are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four, including an analysis of the potential and pitfalls of personal narrative performance.) And yet in spite (or because) of all this, I came to feel more and more like I needed additional tools to understand the production of the poverty, the looming threats of deportation, the Islamophobia, the sexual violence, the alienating schools, the homophobia, and the racism that surfaced as non-abstract issues within the stories we were telling.

I came to graduate school in the hopes of gathering some of those tools; to get a deeper understanding of oppression and ideas for conceiving of large-scale transformation alongside the more immediate pursuits of tactics and making do.⁴⁸ Engaging here in courses, conversations, and texts on coloniality, language socialization, and performance studies has deeply influenced the theoretical and methodological approaches of this dissertation. So have the vibrant arts and political activism scenes of the Bay Area. To learn through the arts, through activism, and through relationships, as well as through statistics and theoretical analyses, has enabled me to not only become overwhelmed by the quantity and brutality of the many atrocities of white supremacist coloniality, but to maintain critical hope.⁴⁹ The pain and destruction are beyond words...yet the human spirit is beyond destruction...especially if we nourish it.

I share these biographical details in order to locate myself within my historical, geographical, and socio-cultural contexts, which have influenced the questions pursued by this dissertation and the manner of pursuing them. I also share these stories in order to emphasize that neither I, nor my dissertation and the ideas it develops, are self-made, but made through constant dialogue with those and that around me, including engagements that predate (and enabled and influenced) my time in graduate school. Moreover, this subsection is not the only place in which I explicitly reflect on my positionalities and life experiences in relation to the topics the dissertation addresses. I agree with Maria Lugones' critique of writers who employ a "disclaimer," in which all self-reflexivity is cordoned off into a preface or a subsection of an introduction which admits to one's limitations as a result of one's positionalities, and then proceed to write in a universalized authoritarian voice without any further indication that their positionalities are continuing to influence their theorizing.⁵⁰ As such, I continue to weave analyses of my own life into the chapters of this dissertation.

It is true that complicity with colonial white supremacy is not limited to white bodies. Dylan Rodríguez speaks of this issue in terms of "multicultural white supremacy,"⁵¹ Andrea Smith's work, as discussed above, is also related to this issue, and many other scholars have addressed this issue in terms of internalized oppression. However, my participation in Recovery from Dominant Culture (RDC), a 12-step program founded by Lynice Pinkard and Nichola Torbett, and modeled off of Alcoholics Anonymous, has taught me to "stay on my side of the street." In RDC (a program open to everyone, not just white people), participants practice identifying the various ways in which we are

⁴⁸ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

⁴⁹ Jeffrey MR Duncan-Andrade, "Note to Educators: Hope Required When Growing Roses in Concrete," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 2 (2009): 181–194.

⁵⁰ Maria Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*, Feminist Constructions (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

⁵¹ Rodríguez, *Forced Passage*; Rodríguez, "Inaugurating Multicultural White Supremacy."

addicted to and complicit in processes of domination and exploitation, as well as how we have engaged in resistance to these processes and the creation of alternative ways of being. “Staying on your side of the street” means avoiding the temptation to be more concerned with “fixing” others than with dealing with one’s own issues. This does not mean we should not ever engage in critique of institutions, public discourses, or even others’ actions. It is about “*starting* with the [one] in the mirror,”⁵² and not shirking away from those mirrors (many of which are held up to us by indigenous people and people of color, as discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three). This dissertation seeks to honor that teaching by remaining focused on the white colonizer.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

It is good form to introduce a work in psychology with a statement of its methodological point of view. I shall be derelict. I leave methods to the botanists and mathematicians. There is a point at which methods devour themselves.

--Frantz Fanon

My ‘method’ is not fixed...it is based on what I read and how it affects me, that is, on the surprise that comes from reading something that compels you to read differently...I therefore have no method, since every work suggests a new approach.

--Barbara Christian

When I began graduate school in 2004, I had assumed I would conduct an ethnography. That was the kind of training I had already been primed for through the nature of our theater-making process at Albany Park Theater Project (AFTP). Dwight Conquergood, who was studying our theater company, described that process as “community auto-ethnography.”⁵³ My time with AFTP taught me to value the philosophy of staying that is embedded in the ethnographic approach: spending large amounts of time building multi-faceted relationships and focusing on the complexities of particular places, projects, and processes. However, as I pursued the questions of this dissertation, I unexpectedly found myself moving around more, in a purposeful search for decolonial strategies, pedagogies, and theories which could help me grapple with this issue of decolonizing the white colonizer. This is not to say that interesting and useful contributions could not have been made by focusing more exclusively and in greater depth on any one of the sites discussed here; in fact, I believe my future work will return me to such an approach. But the contributions of this particular dissertation necessitated a more hybrid process, similar to what Barbara Christian describes in the epigraph to this section. This has resulted in analyses of a range of sites and data sources and the use of multiple genres to communicate. My methodological approach could be described as inductive (based on responding to what is learned in particular places rather than remaining wedded to a preexisting plan) and as a mosaic methodology, i.e. drawing on a broad range of sources (rather than focusing on one or a few case studies) to construct a particular image/story, incorporating found objects (some sought out, some stumbled across) from along the journey. Part of the analysis of the dissertation lies precisely in the connections made between these varied sources, all of which provide distinct yet interrelated insights into the question of decolonizing the white colonizer.

⁵² Michael Jackson, “Man in the Mirror,” *Bad*. Epic, 1987.

⁵³ Dwight Conquergood died before publishing his work on Albany Park Theater Project. He used the term “community auto-ethnography” to describe the company in his letter of recommendation for my graduate school applications, which was shared with me after his death.

Initially, my research questions were framed around issues of pedagogy and curricula, topics taken up in Chapter Four. Many studies have long documented schools' roles in reproducing class, race, and gender stratification and I was interested in examining formal educational programs which placed social justice at the center of their missions. I wanted to reflect on how "social justice" is variously understood and how these understandings influence alternative curricula and pedagogies that might counter a colonial white supremacist common sense. During this phase of my research, which included participant observation at a Bay Area social justice themed high school and analysis of a university education course using a "democratic pedagogy," two themes regarding the question of decolonizing the white colonizer emerged which I believed could be more fruitfully pursued elsewhere: 1) the issue of how people develop a sense of our own and others' so-called "proper places" in the world (social and geographical), and 2) the framework of reparations as a philosophy for understanding the (re)production of inequality and as a methodology for addressing it. Both of these themes necessitated grappling with the ways in which people are differently positioned, and the implications thereof, and I began to think more deeply about the particular issues white U.S. citizens must deal with if we desire to contribute to social justice and decolonization efforts.

One of those issues has to do with recognizing white U.S. citizens as colonizers within a settler-colonial context. While this issue is practically nonexistent in popular discourses, I began to notice that the anti-immigrant sentiments of many U.S. "nativists" actually express a great deal of anxiety around the legitimacy of our presence on and authority over this land. As I examined these discourses, I found that nativist fears of a Mexican "reconquista" sometimes evoke the Israel/Palestine conflict as a warning of what might be in store for the United States. The evocation of Palestine/Israel is not limited to right-wing anti-immigrant groups, however. Anti-imperialist and anti-colonial organizations also highlight the parallels between the two contexts while promoting indigenous solidarity. My question regarding how people learn a sense of our own and others' so-called "proper places" in the world began to focus more specifically on how people in the U.S. come to understand the Israel/Palestine conflict and the implications this has for U.S. (im)migration policies and assumptions regarding who/what is considered domestic versus who/what is considered foreign. I felt (and still feel) like there are many parallels between the Israeli and the U.S. colonial nation-building projects (in spite of also obvious differences) and I hoped that engaging with the ongoing and highly visible battle around questions of citizenship, sovereignty and rights to land in Palestine/Israel might serve to illuminate the fact that these battles still exist in the U.S., too, but have been suppressed and invisibilized in mainstream discourses. Additionally, the creation of the state of Israel was partially funded by massive reparations payments by Germany after the Holocaust – this enabled me to think through the ways in which reparations do not always inherently function in decolonial ways when larger contexts are not taken into account.

As I continued reflecting on what was really at the core of my research questions, I realized that I needed to shift the center: rather than using the Palestine/Israel conflict to discuss U.S. historical and contemporary practices, I needed to begin with a focus on white supremacist coloniality in the U.S. and discuss U.S. support of Israel as one manifestation thereof. Starting with and centering Palestine/Israel risked avoiding coming fully face-to-face with the enormity of what it means to be white in the United States and to be a white U.S. citizen in the world. And so the guiding questions of this dissertation – what possibilities might exist for decolonizing the white colonizer and for the white colonizer's participation in such decolonial processes – led me to a new set of sites: organizations concerned with racial justice and colonialism which specifically (and some exclusively) target white people. I sought to document how whiteness is variously understood; how the role of white people in racial justice and decolonial movements is variously imagined; and the implications

of these various understandings/imaginings. These issues are addressed in Chapters One and Two, with my evolving analysis of reparations and p/reparations becoming the focus in Chapter One, and my analysis of the relationship between white supremacy and U.S. nationalism becoming the focus in Chapter Two. Additionally, Chapter One begins to deal with the question of white identity and how that impacts white people's participation in racial justice and decolonial movements, issues that are further taken up in Chapter Three. (Please see the Chapter Overview below for a more detailed description of the contributions of each chapter.)

Ultimately, all of the following constitute research sites and data which I analyze in this dissertation, even though some of these are not physical sites and some of the data consists of memories of experiences prior to my official dissertation research:

- the reconstructionism versus abolitionism debate in Whiteness Studies
- philosophies and practices of reparations (and what I call "p/reparations") as an approach to racial justice
- a San Francisco mural about breaking down barriers and borders
- a research trip to Palestine
- participant-observation on a bus which travels across the U.S. providing first-hand accounts of life under occupation in Iraq and Palestine
- my time with my Mom while she was dying from pancreatic cancer
- two of Michael Jackson's "short films" (*Ghosts* and *Black or White*)
- the concept of hybridity in relation to "race" and racism
- "equality of opportunity" discourses
- my experiences attending graduate school and teaching at UC Berkeley, in particular an undergraduate education course using a democratic pedagogy
- observations of faculty at a social justice themed high school in the Bay Area
- my time as a director with Albany Park Theater Project
- participant-observation with various Bay Area organizations concerned with racial justice which specifically (and some exclusively) target white people

Some of these sites are geographical locations; others are in the form of published literature, popular media/discourses and artistic productions. Some of the data was produced through interviews and informal conversations; some stems from participant-observation; some consists of life experiences which were not an official part of the dissertation research (design).

Methodologically, I am influenced by Donna Haraway's definition of "objectivity."⁵⁴ She argues that objectivity is not an illusory concept, but that true objectivity begins with the recognition that vision is embodied ("situated") and that thus only perspectives that recognize themselves as partial (as opposed to transcendental or omnipotent) can be considered objective.⁵⁵ However, not any perspective will do. She argues that we need to seek out subjugated perspectives as the perspectives that are most capable of constructing worlds that are less organized by axes of domination. Leonardo similarly argues for beginning an analysis of domination "from the objective position of

⁵⁴ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–599.

⁵⁵ See also Sandra G. Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives*, The Science Question in Feminism (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

those who receive policies of domination”⁵⁶ -- not to essentialize any racial group or to assume that one group has a truer understanding than the other but because it is not in the interest of those who are subject to domination to mythologize its processes. Taking up the issue of mythologizing that Leonardo raises, Maldonado-Torres⁵⁷ reads Césaire’s Discourse on Colonialism as offering a methodological response to Descartes’ Discourse on Method: as opposed to Descartes’ method of skepticism as an internal dialogue for overcoming the deception of one’s senses to arrive at truth, Césaire argues that deception must be overcome through dialogue and intersubjectivity. The negative function of skepticism (doubt) must be grounded on the ethical mode of reception of otherness with the positive goal of love.

One of this dissertation’s methodologies could be described as a process of reflexive dialogues with decolonial theorists. Of course, dialogue is rendered mute if it is not also made consequential in other actions. As such, this dissertation also employs an activist framework by describing, analyzing and proposing various actions that have been and/or could be taken in relation to the theoretical insights regarding decolonizing the white colonizer.

On Methodologies of Writing and Communicating

“Tell it the way they tell it instead of imposing our structure,” they repeat with the best of intentions and a conscience so clear that they pride themselves on it. ... What we “look for” is un/fortunately what we shall find. The anthropologist, as we already know, does not find things; s/he makes them. And makes them up. The structure is therefore not something given, entirely external to the person who structures, but a projection of that person’s way of handling realities...It is perhaps difficult for an analytical or analytically trained mind to admit that recording, gathering, sorting, deciphering, analyzing and synthesizing, dissecting and articulating are already “imposing our [/a] structure,” a structural activity, a structuring of the mind, a whole mentality...But it is particularly difficult for a dualistic or dualistically trained mind to recognize that “looking for the structure of their narratives” already involves the separation of the structure from the narratives, of the structure from that which is structured, of the narrative from the narrated, and so on. It is, once more, as if form and content stand apart; as if the structure can remain fixed, immutable, independent of and unaffected by the changes the narratives undergo; as if a structure can only function as a standard mold within the old determinist schema of cause and product.

--Trinh Minh-ha

Trinh Minh-ha has also been an essential teacher for me in regards to methodological questions, in particular regarding the lesson that form is content. In a methodology course I took with her in the Gender and Women’s Studies department at UC Berkeley, she drew our attention to the politics of the genre of expository writing: “why do we take expository writing for granted and separate it from “creative writing”?” The dominant is not being questioned, it is invisible, it is taken for granted. We are asked to justify the incorporation of what is coded as “creative writing” while the employment of what is coded as “academic writing” is left unquestioned.”⁵⁸ She and other scholars have pushed these boundaries, however. When Gloria Anzaldúa writes her mestiza consciousness (she not only writes *about* it, she *writes it*, demonstrates it, calls it into being, spreads it), it enters the worlds of her

⁵⁶ Zeus Leonardo, “The Color of Supremacy: Beyond the Discourse of ‘White Privilege,’” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 36, no. 2 (2004): 141.

⁵⁷ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Césaire’s Gift and the Decolonial Turn,” *Radical Philosophy Review* 9, no. 2 (2010): 111–138.

⁵⁸ Class notes, Spring 2007.

readers, is inscribed in me, and transforms me, intellectually-poetically-bodily.⁵⁹ Eduardo Galeano's books are to me manifestations of an understanding of the impossibility of portraying the whole of anything or anyone, but that well-crafted fragments can act as entry-ways, drawing readers/listeners closer to others in their infinities, and into re-cognition of (an unequally) shared humanity.⁶⁰ On the same page, Trinh Minh-ha deconstructs anthropological paradigms of research and representation, and re-constructs the knowledge produced in/through storytelling.⁶¹ When Reverend Lynce Pinkard writes/speaks love, she is not simply writing/speaking about love. In this case, the manifestation of love achieves its intended force in the translation from the written to the spoken, a translation that takes place in the presence of others.⁶² These authors not only demonstrate to me that form is content, but also that it is possible to transform (through) form. To me, performing (enacting, demonstrating, showing), rather than simply writing *about* something, is a move from mere intellectualization to creation; a move which allows the reader/listener/participant to feel that another way is not only possible, it exists. This is one reason why I have insisted on incorporating live performance in this dissertation. However, "performing" is not limited to live performance on a stage – our daily interactions and our written work also performs, as scholars in the fields of language socialization, discourse analysis, and performance studies have demonstrated.⁶³

For example, no writing, including a dissertation, is ever the creation of a singular author. When it is not edited out by others' conventions, I tend to follow the title of a piece of writing by the words "assembled by Cecilia Cissell Lucas." I do not use a pseudonym or attempt to remain anonymous because I think it is important to remain accountable for our particular assemblages. However, I like the phrase "assembled by" because it draws immediate attention to this fact that we are never alone when writing. Relatedly, my preferred format for citations consists of footnotes with the name of the person whose words or ideas I am quoting, along with publication information (if it is a published source) and the phrase, "Thanks to [her/him/zir/them] and to those and that on whom and which [she/he/ze/they] consciously and unconsciously draw(s)." I like this phrase because it signals that there are a multitude of sources within any one source and acknowledges those from whom I've learned even while recognizing that the sources I draw from may not necessarily be the "original" or the only relevant ones. My preference is to include this phrase in every footnote, even though it is wordy. For me, to do so is a *practice*. Studying taiko and meditation has taught me the importance of practice for developing and deepening new understandings, and I believe this is particularly important when we are attempting to transform that which has become hegemonic, that

⁵⁹ See, for example, Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*; Anzaldúa, "Now Let Us Shift...the Path of Conocimiento...Inner Work, Public Acts."

⁶⁰ See, for example, Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998); Eduardo Galeano, *The Book of Embraces* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991); Eduardo Galeano, *Voices of Time: a Life in Stories* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

⁶¹ Trinh, T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

⁶² Some of Reverend Lynce Pinkard's sermons can be accessed here: http://firstoakland.org/?Sermons_Online:Sermon_Archive:2008 and here: http://firstoakland.org/?Sermons_Online:Sermon_Archive:2009

⁶³ A formative text for the issue of "performativity" is John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975). See also Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*. (Harlow; New York: Longman, 2001); Paul B. Garrett and Patricia Baquedano-López, "Language Socialization: Reproduction and Continuity, Transformation and Change," *Annual Review of Anthropology* (2002): 339–361; Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. (London; Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997); Michel Foucault, *Power/knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

which we have internalized as common sense. For most critical scholars it is obvious that there are many sources in each source; however, there is a difference between knowing something intellectually and, through constant repetition and vigilance, having deeply internalized it in ways that then inform how we do research, how we write, and how we act in the world. There are many scales at which decolonization needs to happen, and practicing decolonial strategies as often as possible, including in the minutia of our daily actions, can help us to “rehearse for revolution,” to paraphrase Augusto Boal.⁶⁴ Scholars committed to decolonizing the white colonizer might usefully ask ourselves: have we fully developed the practices of humility that come from truly understanding that we only see a tiny fraction of the picture and that there are many people who have been working for centuries on the issues with which we are grappling? In this dissertation, however, I have had to compromise on this citation practice in order to align with disciplinary norms. And so I ask you, after each name mentioned and each citation, to imagine the phrase: thanks to her/him/zir/them and to those and that on whom and which she/he/ze/they consciously and unconsciously draw(s).

One practice that is in violation of common academic norms that I maintain throughout this dissertation is the use of lengthy quotes. Peer-reviewed journals will often read such a practice as displaying lack of rigor or ability to engage in analysis oneself.⁶⁵ However, there is another way to read this practice in regards to the dissertation’s topic of decolonizing the white colonizer. As mentioned above, such a process involves white U.S. citizens learning to understand ourselves and (our) history through the eyes of indigenous people and people of color by “listening to the cry of the condemned,” and hearing their accusations, theories and visions. Sara Ahmed emphasizes that such hearing “requires that white subjects inhabit the critique, *with its lengthy duration*, and to recognize the world that is re-described by the critique as one in which they live.”⁶⁶ Rather than constantly repositioning myself as the most important authority on the topics the dissertation addresses, I seek to share that which I have learned from others in their own words rather than paraphrasing for the sake of the academic norm of avoiding long block quotes.

Another way in which my writing attempts to perform/practice what it preaches is in the use of multiple genres, as well as in the inclusion of moments of doubt and sentences which begin with clauses such as “I believe,” “I think,” or “I feel.” It seems to me that the fact that such clauses are often read in academia as weakening one’s argument reveals something about the profession’s hegemonic understanding of knowledge. Their erasure feels like an attempt to remove (potential) multiplicity of meaning, and reminds me of the “statement of fact” form Roland Barthes identifies in his analysis of the rhetoric of supremacy. This is one of seven forms he articulated as part of a grammatical structure organizing Western social space and consciousness in supremacist ways that fix the world into a static, possessable object, and that prohibit humans from inventing themselves and transforming their environments.⁶⁷ The “statement of fact” form encourages the citizen-subject to speak and know with certainty, and to project his reality as if it were the only one. Barthes saw

⁶⁴ Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed* (New York: Urizen Books, 1979).

⁶⁵ Wendy Belcher, *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks*. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2009).

⁶⁶ Sara Ahmed, “Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-performativity of Anti-racism,” *Borderlands* 3, no. 2 (2004): 1–5.

⁶⁷ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972). The other forms Barthes articulates are: inoculation (cautious, manageable injections of difference), privation of history (an estrangement from the historical production of current relations and realities), identification (reducing all difference to sameness), tautology (a use of authority to simply state this is the way things are), neither-norism (a noncommitted, neutral or objective stance that appears to be taking the higher ground but ultimately serves the status quo), and the quantification of quality (whereby more is considered better).

this form as drawing on and perpetuating notions of the inevitable and what is perceived as common sense. Of course, it might be a useful strategic choice to employ the “statement of fact” form in one’s writing. Moreover, I am certainly not asserting that there is no such thing as “facts,” just that (as those in the constructionist camp in linguistics have long pointed out) multiple meanings can be made of those facts. This need not automatically lead to a situation of radical relativity in which all thoughts or beliefs are deemed equal, the concept of reality becomes meaningless, and all means of discernment and judgment disappear. Clauses such as “I think” or “I feel” do not prohibit the taking of strong stances, nor the presentation of data (including facts) on which those stances have been built. However, the signal that there might be alternative ways of making meaning (as well as alternatively relative facts/sources of information) creates an opening to discuss the implications of this particular way of seeing and of identifying and interpreting data.

Regarding my use of multiple genres of writing, one might ask why the insistence on broadening/transforming the academic genre, rather than recognizing that this is simply one genre that serves particular purposes, while there are other genres in which other types of writing and knowledge production can flourish: fiction, journalism, poetry, editorials, etc. Why the insistence on blurring these boundaries, thereby risking (some might assert) the rigor and/or artfulness of each genre? Why the fear of miscegenation, I wonder. I am not arguing that every piece of writing that every individual produces must (or even should) read as a multi-genre text. I do believe, however, that given current hierarchies of knowledge production, we (re)create a system of separate and unequal forms of knowledge when we fundamentally insist on segregating disciplines and genres, and when knowledge produced in non-academic spaces is repositioned as data to be analyzed rather than as analysis in its own right. I see such rigid segregation as an extension of the fragmentation Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes:

imperialism and colonialism brought complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world. It was a process of systematic fragmentation which can still be seen in the disciplinary carveup of the indigenous world: bones, mummies and skulls to the museums, art work to private collectors, languages to linguistics, ‘customs’ to anthropologists, beliefs and behaviors to psychologists.⁶⁸

This dissertation includes storytelling, expository “academic” writing, quotes, poetry, journal-like reflections, dialogue, song lyrics, music, videos, and art. Part of this dissertation is a performance – there is a link to a film of that performance, but a film cannot fully convey a live experience. Nor, however, can words or art fully convey lived experiences; nor does a lived experience, even a shared lived experience, result in fully understanding the experience of another. Yet the attempt to draw closer, to understand one another’s lives and our interconnectedness with as many of our senses as possible, strikes me as an important effort towards overcoming the separations which enable the violence we enact. As Anzaldúa argues,

Although all your cultures reject the idea that you can know the other, you believe that besides love, pain might open this closed passage by reaching through the wound to connect. Wounds cause you to shift consciousness...Using wounds as

⁶⁸ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London and New York: Zed Books; Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1999), 28.

openings to become vulnerable and available (present) to others means staying in your body.⁶⁹

This insight connects to the point Maldonado-Torres makes in the epigraph of this Introduction: the production of decolonial knowledge is a process of communication, of embodied listening and engaged responding. This, in turn, to evoke lessons learned from Trinh, entails a process of storytelling, of telling some stories, knowing one could be telling others, knowing it matters which ones are told—and how. Telling and re-telling stories, not as imitations but as re-creations. (Re)producing ideas, moving to(ward) understand(ing), being still and receiving with all senses, sharing humbly and generously and passionately and vulnerably. In Trinh’s words:

Something must be said. Must be said that has not been *and* has been said before...It will take a long time for living cannot be told, not merely told: living is not livable. Understanding, however, is creating, and living, such an immense gift that thousands of people benefit from each past or present life being lived. The story depends upon every one of us to come into being. It needs us all, needs our remembering, understanding, and creating what we have heard together to keep on coming into being.⁷⁰

The story is beautiful, because or therefore it unwinds like a thread. A long thread, for there is no end in sight. Or the end she reaches leads actually to another end, another opening, another residual deposit of duration...Tell it so that they can tell it. So that it may become larger than its measure, always larger than its own in/significance. In this horizontal and vertical vertigo, she carries the story on, motivated at once by the desire to finish it and the necessity to remind herself and others that “it’s never finished.” A lifetime story. More than a lifetime.⁷¹

The story pursued in this dissertation is indeed (more than) a lifetime story. This dissertation is merely one set of shared reflections along the way. There is so much missing from it. This is true both because of my limited view and because of the limitations of time, money and energy. Those of us schooled in critical analyses have learned to recognize and talk about issues of limited view as a result of our positionalities. We have grown weary of universalizing statements and theories. But often, driven by the ways in which we are asked to package our work as thorough and seamless investigations to potential funders and employers, we remain silent on the issue of limitations of time, money and energy – even though these are also entangled with differential subject positions. Attending school and writing a dissertation, even when it is a central project in one’s life, has to compete for time with other demands and priorities such as being a parent, working, activism, self-care in the form of physical, spiritual and recreational activities, nurturing relationships with partners and friends, illness (one’s own or that of loved ones), taking the time to mourn the issues that come up during the research and writing itself, etc. Although the methodologies I employed for this dissertation actually see those activities as also relevant to the dissertation, there are many other interviews I would have liked to pursue, many other books and articles I would have liked to read, many organizations I would have liked to spend some (more) time with. Not that doing so would have made the dissertation comprehensive – that would be a futile endeavor. I cannot claim that this

⁶⁹ Anzaldúa, “Now Let Us Shift...the Path of Conocimiento...Inner Work, Public Acts,” 571–2.

⁷⁰ Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other*, 119.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 149.

dissertation is thorough and seamless. But I can claim that it is a rigorous engagement with the material and the experiences I have encountered, and that these encounters, while not always fully mapped out in advance, were also not random, but driven by a very particular longing for liberation.

What I am offering here is simply that, an offering. My hope is that this offering might contribute to continued dialogue on the development of methodologies, writing and other communication techniques, pedagogies, and material practices that serve decolonial projects. I certainly do not believe that I have identified (or that I am even capable of identifying) all the ways in which I am enacting coloniality in my research, writing, teaching, performing, and living. I hope that my interlocutors will help me see when this is happening, and that we might collectively try to develop strategies to continually make such practices more visible, to deconstruct them, and to create and practice alternatives.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter One, An Articulation of a Philosophy and Praxis of P/Reparations, begins with a discussion of the term “white people” and provides an analysis of the reconstructionism versus abolitionism debate within Whiteness Studies. I offer an alternative to the ontological question of white racial identity posed by that debate, suggesting that in order to deal with the pedagogical issue of white nihilism and/or backlash vis-à-vis the abolitionist emphasis on whiteness as inherently oppressive – without retreating into the racial recovery project of reconstructionism – white people could be encouraged to simultaneously claim both whiteness (as inherently oppressive) and hybridity (as a reminder of the constructed nature of all categories and the irreducibility of any individual to any one of them). The potentials and pitfalls of this turn to hybridity are taken up in Chapter Three. In Chapter One, I proceed to argue that white U.S. citizens attempting to participate in racial justice and decolonization efforts might usefully do so by adopting a philosophy and praxis of p/reparations as a framework for redistributory practices and (inter)personal transformation. While the social constructedness of racial categories emphasized by abolitionism, reconstructionism, and hybridity are recognized in a p/reparations framework, the primary focus is on concretely shifting the material and psychological/representational bases which continually recreate those constructed categories. Issues of white identity are secondary. The framework of p/reparations builds on the theoretical and activist work regarding reparations, while emphasizing that the nature of the necessary transformations cannot be fully predicted. P/reparations processes begin with engaged listening to the specific claims, demands, and visions of those who have been on the receiving end of practices of domination, and include apologies, material and cultural redress, and structural change to ensure non-recurrence. P/reparations processes are relationship-driven, without the assumption of reconciliation, and highlight historical and contemporary processes of accumulation by dispossession. As such, a p/reparations framework challenges the illusion of autonomous individuals, groups, and nation-states. This intervenes into discourses of meritocracy and equal opportunity (issues discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four); denaturalizes notions of citizenship, immigration, and the borders of nation-states (issues discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two); and provides counter-narratives to discourses of aid, charity, welfare, development, handouts, debt forgiveness and giving (when the white colonizer is presumed as the giver) – discourses which assume the assets being redistributed were legitimately acquired and that acts of redistribution should thus be met with gratitude. Chapter One inconcludes with some possibilities for action and the reminder that none of these actions result in redemption.

Chapter Two, ImMobility and the Possessive Investment in White U.S.-ness, argues that what George Lipsitz calls the “possessive investment in whiteness”⁷² is frequently entangled with a possessive investment in U.S.-ness. This chapter examines the ways in which the geographical control of bodies has been a key technology of white supremacist colonialism. I begin with an analysis of a mural in San Francisco’s Mission District, titled “Building Bridges of Solidarity: Breakin’ Down Barriers!” This mural paints an alternative vision of life that is not rooted in U.S. or other colonial nationhood, and in which whiteness is non-existent. I then provide an analysis of the use of the trope of “the criminal” by both the nation-state and the prison industrial complex to bolster possessive investment in whiteness and in U.S.-ness, and the ways in which these discourses are mobilized as threats to the white colonizer’s “home.” I argue that, for the white colonizer, one aspect of decolonization may require developing a relationship to “home” as a foreign concept. This, however, must be practiced not in the abstract, but in one’s concrete circumstances, as I discuss through an analysis of the disconnect between Levinas’ radical theories on ethical relations as rooted in responsibility for the other (including “the inability to occupy a place”) and his political support for Zionism and the Israeli nation-state building project. Drawing on fieldnotes from my research in Palestine, as well as reflections on my own life as a white U.S. citizen, I discuss the banality of much of the white colonizer’s production of violence, and the ways in which this is manifested in seizing the unilateral rights to both unhampered settling and mobility. I conclude Chapter Two with a reflection on my mother’s illness and death, connecting the issue of geographical (im)mobility to that of social (im)mobility, and emphasizing the entanglement of both with an unequal racialized distribution of premature death. I argue that decolonizing the white colonizer often entails committing to downward mobility rather than pursuing upward mobility. The topic of social (im)mobility is taken up in greater detail in Chapter Four.

Chapter Three, Michael Jackson on the Line: the Politics of Performing Hybridity, examines the possibilities and pitfalls of performing hybridity in relation to the project of decolonizing the white colonizer. Through a detailed analysis of some of Michael Jackson’s work, I argue that the hybridity he models does not manifest a colorblind message of multiculturalism, but offers a vision of color-conscious interculturalism⁷³ which includes multiple critiques of white supremacy, including denunciations of liberal white racism and reflections on his own complicity with white supremacy. Jackson simultaneously challenges common-sense notions of racial categories, affirms a particular African American tradition, and affirms a universal humanness. He holds up a mirror to white people, while also extending an invitation (sometimes expressed as a demand) to join him in his vision of intercultural love. For white colonizers, however, appropriating his hybrid strategies runs the risk of either disappearing into a colorblind “humanness,” engaging in cultural appropriation, or revalorizing whiteness. To avoid this, I argue that white people need to learn from the specific liberatory understandings and strategies that particular people(s) of color have developed while simultaneously – and as a result of this learning – (de) facing whiteness. (De) facing implies a double movement: facing whiteness, in all of its horror, without resorting to white flight; and defacing whiteness, both in the sense of destroying it and in the sense of de-facing it, i.e. undoing the notion that whiteness is human. While whiteness is antithetical to humanness, people who are currently racialized as white are also human. This entails a certain existential crisis: until whiteness has been abolished, we can neither escape nor take pride in it, but must reject it without removing ourselves

⁷² George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, Rev. and expanded edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

⁷³ Lynice Pinkard, “Beyond Multiculturalism: The New Life Before Us,” *Tikkun Daily* October 29, 2009: <http://www.tikkun.org/tikkundaily/2009/10/29/beyond-multiculturalism-the-new-life-before-us/>.

from it. As such, for those of us who embody the falseness and oppressiveness of whiteness in this historical moment, the question arises about how to “be” in the world as we work to “become” something else. Chapter Three suggests that so long as it is employed color- and power-consciously, hybridity is a useful technology the white colonizer can employ (rather than succumbing to nihilism) in the face of this challenge of needing to claim white U.S.-ness even as we seek to participate in its abolition. This, for the white colonizer, necessitates holding multiple contradictory elements in tension: the in/humanity already discussed; a faith that it is possible to hear the Other without assuming transparency; a commitment to moving towards loving intercultural relationships while recognizing that, as bell hooks has said, “love and domination cannot coexist”⁷⁴ and that (as explained in Chapter One) participation in domination is not simply a matter of individual choice; and a recognition that liberatory realities already coexist with oppressive ones, however not as a place into which we can escape but one which can only be inhabited by recognizing and dismantling oppression.

Chapter Four, *What’s School Got to Do With It?*, begins with a discussion of debates around competing purposes of schooling, and argues that even the purpose of preparing students for participation in democratic society serves colonial white supremacy when the inherently hierarchical and dehumanizing capitalist and colonial character of the U.S. is not questioned. I also provide a critique of “equality of opportunity” as a conservative paradigm, and discuss the ways in which it has become one of the primary ideological mechanisms supporting colonial white supremacy in the current age of colorblind racism. I then analyze two different attempts at “social justice” schooling (one at the high school level, one at the college level) in order to highlight the importance of pedagogical (as opposed to just curricular) interventions. I turn to an exploration of two different approaches to theater as a means to reflect on some alternative pedagogical strategies, and to offer ideas for integrating certain lessons from theater into the classroom in order to counter the creation of what Foucault calls “docile bodies”⁷⁵ with the development of counter-disciplines. I in conclude the chapter with a list of skills the white colonizer needs to learn for the purpose of decolonization, including: learning to see ourselves and (our) history through the eyes of indigenous people and people of color; understanding the difference between prejudice and racism, between equality and sameness, and between guilt and shame; developing the skills of staying engaged, including in the face of conflict; learning to accept shifting strategies and insecurity of outcomes; developing an understanding of interconnectedness; cultivating hope, humility, joy, and a sense of humor; recognizing the unknowability of an other yet still trying to draw closer in understanding; letting go of senses of entitlement; recognizing that there is no space of purity from which to act and that individual redemption is impossible; developing physical and emotional resilience; and learning how to take concrete action in solidarity with oppressed communities.

“*Chapter*” *Five* is a performance. I think it is important when doing research on white supremacy and coloniality to recognize, as Gilroy has pointed out, that racial [and colonial] terror has often been unspeakable but not inexpressible,⁷⁶ and to deal not only with the discursive and material elements but also with what Raymond Williams calls “structures of feeling.”⁷⁷ I believe this is of special

⁷⁴ bell hooks, “Toward a Worldwide Culture of Love,” June 3, 2010. Accessed here:

<http://www.pbs.org/thebuddha/blog/2010/jun/3/toward-worldwide-culture-love-bell-hooks/>.

⁷⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd Vintage Books edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

⁷⁶ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 73.

⁷⁷ Raymond Williams, “Structures of Feeling” in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977): 128–35.

importance in regards to the question of decolonizing the white colonizer, where a range of distancing techniques function as what Mab Segrest has described as “the anesthetic aesthetic of racism,”⁷⁸ whereby “people don’t...respond to what they can pretend they do not know, and they don’t know what they can’t feel.”⁷⁹ Furthermore, as I discuss in Chapter Three, live performance lends itself to holding that tension which is a recurring theme in this dissertation: white people must reject whiteness without removing ourselves from it. In a live performance, even as the white performer voices critiques of whiteness, even as she speaks and aligns herself with the words of decolonial theorists of color, her embodied whiteness remains on display. Incorporating performance in the dissertation is also a theoretical/methodological intervention in relation to the colonial white supremacy institutionalized in the academy, in particular in relation to epistemological hierarchies. Many scholars have critiqued the mind/body split and, to a great extent, this is what the discipline of Performance Studies has grown around. Performance Studies, Conquergood argues,

makes its most radical intervention...by embracing *both* written scholarship *and* creative work, papers and performances...the struggle to live betwixt and between theory and theatricality, paradigms and practices, critical reflection and creative accomplishment...a comingling of analytical and artistic ways of knowing that unsettles the institutional organization of knowledge and disciplines...A number of performance studies-allied scholars create performances as a supplement to, not substitute for, their written research.⁸⁰

The inclusion of a performance as a chapter of this dissertation, however, is a methodological/theoretical intervention which insists on not only engaging in performance “as a supplement to...[my] written research” but as an integral part of it; and not only as a methodology which is then analyzed in writing, but *as* analysis which must be engaged on its own terms. This is also a pedagogical intervention. I would like for academia to feel accessible to a wider range of people with a range of learning and teaching styles. Many scholars who have come from marginalized positions have managed to transform academic norms, insisting on the importance of previously delegitimized topics of study, methodologies, and even genres of writing. My dissertation seeks to contribute to this legacy by also insisting on the importance and legitimacy of multiple modalities of communication beyond writing *within academia*, not just as phenomena for academics to write about.

I am grateful and indebted to the experiences and the people which/who have influenced the construction of this dissertation and the construction of myself. I conclude this introduction by naming those teachers of whom I am conscious. I apologize for any forgetfulness. I also apologize for the woeful inadequacy of this offering in relation to the issues it attempts to address. An apology itself feels almost laughable, insulting even. As Soo Hyun Han has pointed out,

spiritual regret has to be followed up with something material...and power is lived out institutionally. Reparations has to happen as we live it out. It is kind of laughable when talking about reparations for African Americans, for example, to talk about apologies. It is like asking a bully to say “sorry” while he is punching you...It is like

⁷⁸ Mab Segrest, *Born to Belonging: Writings on Spirit and Justice* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 162.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Dwight Conquergood, “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research,” *TDR/The Drama Review* 46, no. 2 (2002): 151-2.

the alcoholic saying, “sorry, it won’t happen again,” but not going to group to actually do the work to make sure it won’t happen again...It needs to be real, not just about being a do-gooder or an activist. What does it mean for you and your life?⁸¹

The politics of apologies and their connections to material practices are discussed in greater detail in Chapter One, and I provide a more extensive answer to Soo Hyun’s question in the *Inconclusion* to this dissertation, where I seek to respond to the question “Why would the white colonizer *want* to decolonize?” Here, however, I would like to at least (re)state the essence of that answer: the number one driving force in my life is a desire and need to be in deep loving reciprocal relationships with others. This is impossible under conditions of domination. That is a source of both anger and heartbreak for me. Anger and heartbreak at the impossibility of adequacy; at the destruction and death occurring as I sit here writing this, questioning this use of the body, mind, soul and resources over which I have some modicum of control; and, above all, at the separation, at the impossibility of fully loving reciprocal relationships. As Aimé Césaire has said, colonization dehumanizes the colonizer.⁸² I long to become more fully human and thus more fully capable of being in relationship with other humans and other beings. That is what is at stake for me, personally. Throughout this dissertation, I describe the ways in which I attempt to work towards this possibility. But first, I need to share the voices that guide, accompany, challenge, help, influence, provoke, pause, and push me along this journey.

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⁸¹ Group conversation on p/reparations, June 17, 2012.

⁸² Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).

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CHAPTER ONE: **AN ARTICULATION OF A PHILOSOPHY AND PRAXIS OF P/REPARATIONS**

In the Introduction, I argued that there is a colonial tradition of white supremacy in the United States, a tradition which must be abolished via decolonization and racial justice. This chapter asks and begins to reflect on what options might exist for white people who want to participate in such a project, recognizing that “decolonizing the white colonizer” only happens insofar as larger societal structures are decolonized. The goal, then, is broad-based transformation of society. Yet, to the extent that society (including its categories, institutions, policies, and discourses) is made up of countless actions by individuals, what psychological, relational, and material transformations do people currently racialized as white need to pursue? And how – through what frameworks and practices – might we go about pursuing these? As one woman I interviewed commented, “Waiting on the government to do something? We can forget that crap...We might not be able to shift the government, but we can just do something, anyway, as best we can, even if it is not perfect.”⁸³ This imperfect chapter reflects on some imperfect frameworks for imperfect practices which might help us move – imperfectly but insistently – towards greater justice and decolonization.

Zeus Leonardo suggests that we might regard white people who engage in anti-white practices as “neither enemy nor ally but a concrete subject of struggle.”⁸⁴ If, as Leonardo asserts, we are subjects of struggle, one must then ask: what are the frameworks which inform the nature of that struggle? In this chapter, I discuss the two dominant frameworks addressing that question within Whiteness Studies, reconstructionism and abolitionism. I then briefly touch on the framework of hybridity (which is discussed in depth in Chapter Three) and offer an articulation of a philosophy and praxis of p/reparations as a potentially fruitful framework for effectuating processes of “decolonizing the white colonizer.”

RECONSTRUCTIONISM AND ABOLITIONISM

Within the field of Whiteness Studies, there are two major camps regarding what should be done about the problem of whites and whiteness: reconstructionism and abolitionism. However, my first introduction to these concepts came not through the study of academic debates but when I sought out therapy for depression. I explained to the intake therapist that I believed this new difficulty I was experiencing in *handling* depression was due to having started graduate school and, in the process, neglecting physical and spiritual practices that bring me joy, while also not yet having found deep community in this new home. However, I told her, I believed the *source* of the depression itself was rooted in the fact of ongoing immense racialized brutalities and being deeply confused about how to live ethically while white, and whether this is even possible. The intake therapist was a woman of color who recommended that I read an essay by Janet Helms⁸⁵ which discusses the importance of “developing a positive white identity.” She gave me a copy of the essay and instructed me to return the following week, when I would meet with a therapist specializing in “racial identity issues.” The

⁸³ May 2, 2012.

⁸⁴ Leonardo, *Race, Whiteness, and Education*, 186.

⁸⁵ Janet E. Helms, “Toward a Model of White Racial Identity Development” in *College Student Development and Academic Life: Psychological, Intellectual, Social and Moral Issues*, eds. Karen Arnold and Ilda Carreiro King (New York: Garland, 1997): 49–66.

new therapist was a white woman who was also a proponent of Helms' theories and prescriptions. (I mention the fact that one of the therapists was a woman of color and the other therapist was a white woman in order to emphasize that while we might debate whether particular paradigms are more or less liberatory and/or useful for the projects of racial justice and decolonization, alliance with the various paradigms being discussed here should not be assumed to be predictable according to race.) I went home and eagerly read Helms' essay. However, aside from my distaste for the teleological developmental progress of the model being proposed, I found myself so enraged by the prescription of developing a "positive white identity" that I ended up writing a three-page reaction to the essay (excerpted here) which I gave the new therapist to read when we met:

What if there are certain things which need to die to make room for other things to live?...I refuse to have this depression simply taxonomized as one of "the phases of grieving" where the goal is to come out on the other side fully intact with a "positive white identity." Whiteness is precisely the problem...Yesterday someone told me, "The problem is you think you don't have a right to exist." That is NOT the problem. None of us have a "right" to exist. We exist. All beings exist at the expense of other living beings, yes. But some of us exist so gluttonously, so parasitically, in such excess based on mass extinction, exploitation, and displacement...I know I am not reducible to whiteness – if I did not know this, there would be no convincing me that suicide is not the most loving act one could commit as a white person. But since none of us is reducible to any one identity, why this insistence that every single part of us has to be positive, something we can feel good about?...Maybe we need to learn to live with the fact that the answers aren't so simple and that there is no escape until the entire system has been transformed. Maybe we need to develop some resilience for feeling the pain of that rather than medicating it away through all manner of addictions and dissociations, including the delusional dissociation that whiteness could be recodified as positive...How willing are we to radically alter our lifestyles to create new possibilities...without developing savior complexes, without insisting on being the agenda-setters, without asking for acknowledgement and praise, without guarantees?...I feel stuck. I feel weak. I need help. I need an approach that can handle rage and grief – and not just as a phase that ends. I need compassion, yes, but I also need an approach that insists on accountability. I need to stay in touch with joy and hope, yes, but as part of the immensity of life, not as an escape. I need an approach that sees revolutionary changes not as punishing whites, but as loving us enough to insist on destroying whiteness...even without knowing exactly what that means. Can you help me?

Her answer ended up being "no." Although the therapist cried while reading what I wrote, making me think this was going to be a productive relationship in which we would both bring ourselves authentically to the table, when she finished reading she said she felt overwhelmed and that, because she believes strongly in the Helms model, she could not help me if I am completely rejecting it. She did, however, say I might find inspiration in white people who advocate being "race traitors" but that she doesn't believe in that approach. Although this experience led me to give up on therapy for the time being, it also made me aware that these issues are being debated in academic and activist spaces. And it propelled me to search for guidance and possibilities for healing in other places, within and outside of academia, ultimately leading to this dissertation itself.

It feels a bit risky to share this story of my introduction to these concepts. I worry that talking about the existential crisis of whiteness, and the pain that accompanies it, runs the danger of narcissism and/or positioning whites as victims. However, I also wonder whether not feeling personally implicated and not seeing ourselves as victims as well as perpetrators of white supremacy (albeit a victimization which takes on different forms than that of people of color) brings even greater risks. Particularly the risk of engaging in savior-activism: imagining one's actions to be benevolently for others rather than seeing one's own life as just as dependent on revolutionary change, seeing oneself as in desperate need of others' help and guidance in pursuing such change, and perhaps even seeing oneself as in need of being saved. In sharing this story (and others throughout the dissertation) I seek to

- a) not write myself out of my discussion of whiteness;
- b) be as honest and vulnerable as possible, thus enabling more accountability to and fruitful critique from others engaged in racial justice and decolonization projects, especially those most severely impacted by white supremacist colonialism: people of color and indigenous peoples;
- c) provide possible concrete points of connection and/or contention for other white people grappling with similar questions;
- d) give an accounting of what has led me to focus on these issues in order to answer the question, so to speak, of what my skin is in the game; and
- e) point out that these debates and frameworks are not confined to classrooms and academic journals – they circulate through various societal institutions, affecting our conceptions and practices, including informing the advice given by therapists specializing in “racial identity issues.”

The notion of developing a “positive white identity” is one expression of what in Whiteness Studies is referred to as the reconstructionist approach.⁸⁶ The idea behind reconstructionism is that since race is a social construction rather than something inherent, it can be remade. Reconstructionists take inspiration, for example, from the ways in which Black people have resignified blackness through “Black is Beautiful” campaigns, and they envision a multiculturalism in which whiteness ceases to be a supremacist identity and is, instead, one racial-ethnic identity among others. The project for white people is to develop what is variously described as a “positive white identity,” an “anti-racist white identity” or a “non-supremacist white identity” and to use whatever privileges one has to create greater justice. The notion of discrete and bounded racial categories is maintained, but they are arranged horizontally, rather than vertically. Difference ceases to be a justification for hierarchical power and becomes, instead, something benign or something to celebrate – part of the diversity of life. This approach is quite wide-spread in the United States. Prominent education theorists such as Giroux⁸⁷ and Kincheloe and Steinberg⁸⁸ recommend it for working with white

⁸⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the reconstructionist approach see, for example, Janet E. Helms, *A Race Is a Nice Thing to Have: A Guide to Being a White Person or Understanding the White Persons in Your Life* (Topeka: Content Communications, 1992); Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Henry A. Giroux, “Rewriting the Discourse of Racial Identity: Towards a Pedagogy and Politics of Whiteness,” *Harvard Educational Review* 67, no. 2 (1997): 285–321; Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997); Alice McIntyre, *Making Meaning of Whiteness: Exploring Racial Identity with White Teachers* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997); Joe L. Kincheloe and Shirley R. Steinberg, “Addressing the Crisis of Whiteness” in *White Reign: Deploying Whiteness in America*, eds. Joe Kincheloe et al. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998): 3–29.

⁸⁷ Giroux, “Rewriting the Discourse of Racial Identity.”

⁸⁸ Kincheloe and Steinberg, “Addressing the Crisis of Whiteness.”

students within the field of social justice education. The reconstructionist framework, and Helms' "positive white identity" model in particular, is also endorsed in Beverly Tatum's best-selling book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, a book that is required reading for all Teach for America teachers, thus further proliferating this approach among K-12 educators. There are also numerous workshops, dialogue groups, and trainings geared towards white people outside of school contexts which use this approach.

In Whiteness Studies, the "race traitor" approach my therapist mentioned is referred to as abolitionism. The abolitionist approach argues that you cannot resignify whiteness as something positive or anti-racist and critiques the implication in reconstructionism that it is possible to distinguish between "good whites" and "bad whites."⁸⁹ Abolitionists emphasize the historic specificity of how the racial category "white" was constructed against and above non-whiteness, and thus argue that it is inherently supremacist. As Tamara K. Nopper puts it, "The term itself, 'white anti-racist,' is an oxymoron...whiteness is a structure of domination. As such, there is nothing redeemable or reformable about whiteness."⁹⁰ Inspired by the James Baldwin quote, "As long as you think you're white, there's no hope for you,"⁹¹ abolitionists call on white people to repudiate our whiteness in order to reject and denaturalize the category. In response to criticisms that this runs the risk of becoming another version of color-blindness by emphasizing the false *idea* of whiteness so much that the material *consequences* of that false idea are neglected, they emphasize that repudiation is not simply about declaring "I am not white" but about ceasing to act white, i.e. combatting and divesting from the privileges of whiteness. As with the reconstructionists, this approach also assumes discrete bounded racial categories. However, rather than shifting from a vertical arrangement to a horizontal one, the category "white" vanishes altogether – albeit with many unresolved questions about the nature of that vanishing, what becomes of the people formerly known as white, and how/whether this affects the existence of other racial categories.⁹²

While a primary objection reconstructionists level against abolitionists has to do with concerns that the latter are essentializing whiteness, not all reconstructionists reject the abolitionist project on ideological grounds – for some, the issues of pedagogy and pragmatism are foregrounded. For example, Giroux⁹³ worries that teaching white students that, in Roediger's words, whiteness is

⁸⁹ In my participant observation in white anti-racism workshops which use a reconstructionist approach there were also objections to creating good white/bad white divisions. However, in these contexts the objections were a result of insisting on the need to extend compassion towards each other and to avoid entering into relations of superiority vis-à-vis other white people. The premise advanced by abolitionists, however, i.e. that whiteness is inherently bad, was rejected. Interestingly, it has been among those who identify as white abolitionists that I have witnessed the most extreme examples of what I would consider enactments of the good white/bad white dichotomy. This takes the form of distancing oneself from and expressing superiority vis-à-vis other white people by dismissing those who do not ascribe to abolitionism as inferior participants in racial justice projects.

⁹⁰ Tamara Nopper, "The White Anti-Racist Is an Oxymoron: An Open Letter to 'White Anti-Racists'," 2003, <http://racetractor.org/nopper.html>.

⁹¹ Karen Thorsen, *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket*, Documentary, 1989.

⁹² For more on the abolitionist approach see, for example, Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey, *Race Traitor* (New York: Routledge, 1996); David R. Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (London; New York: Verso Books, 1994); Nopper, "The White Anti-Racist Is an Oxymoron: An Open Letter to 'White Anti-Racists'"; David Ingram, "Toward a Cleaner White(ness): New Racial Identities," in *The Philosophical Forum* 36 (2005): 243–277; Ian Lopez, "Colorblind to the Reality of Race in America," *The Chronicle Review* 53, no. 11 (2006): B6–B9; For a helpful discussion of both the reconstructionist and abolitionist approaches, see Leonardo, *Race, Whiteness, and Education*.

⁹³ Giroux, "Rewriting the Discourse of Racial Identity."

“nothing but oppressive and false”⁹⁴ will lead to nihilism or backlash. A similar concern is raised by Kincheloe and Steinberg,⁹⁵ who do not consider it likely that a mass movement of oppositional whites can be created around abolitionism. The fact that the reconstructionist model is so much more widespread in trainings and workshops outside of academia is perhaps an indication that this may be true – especially as the popularity of the reconstructionist approach is not due to a lack of awareness of the abolitionist approach, but a rejection of it. This is exemplified in my therapist’s comments and in this introduction given by the facilitators of an ongoing Bay Area white anti-racism training that I attended on 11 occasions as part of my research:

We focus on strengthening our racial identities, on building an anti-racist white identity. Others work with a traitor or white abolitionist frame, but we do not believe we can give up on white identity. We are using whiteness and privilege to struggle against white supremacy. We see ourselves as characters in a *system* that is oppressive and dehumanizes and divides. If we see *ourselves* as oppressors, we feel powerless, guilty, like bad white people. So instead of a simple oppressor/oppressed model, we have a model of recognizing that there is a white supremacist system that grants privilege to the privileged group (white people) while dehumanizing and dividing us from the oppressed group.⁹⁶

Of course, just because a given approach is more popular, does not mean it is more effective for the goal of moving towards greater racial justice and decolonization. John Fiske has argued that, “Popular texts may be progressive in that they can encourage the production of meanings that work to change or destabilize the social order, but they can never be radical in the sense that they can never oppose head on or overthrow that order.”⁹⁷ In fact, this is what enraged me when I first read Helms’ work – I felt like I was being asked to develop greater capacities to continue participating in a lie, rather than to expose “that order” as fundamentally flawed. However, if the goal is to institutionalize a different common sense, in the Gramscian sense, that is, to build a counter-hegemonic bloc, it may be important not to give up on strategies that have more popular appeal to the extent that they might, indeed, contribute to destabilizing the social order. In this regard, Leonardo does not see the reconstructionist and abolitionist camps as in inherent conflict with one another, but argues that

reconstruction may offer the means to an abolitionist end...if after having participated in recognizing and reconstructing whiteness, whites realize the emptiness of the category, the abolitionist position may not have started the story but would likely end it...there is a way that reconstructionism would provide the entrance into whiteness and abolitionism its exit.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness*, 13.

⁹⁵ Kincheloe and Steinberg, “Addressing the Crisis of Whiteness.”

⁹⁶ This particular version of the introduction is from October 15, 2011. However, variations on this introduction were given at each meeting at which new people were present.

⁹⁷ John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 134.

⁹⁸ Leonardo, *Race, Whiteness, and Education*, 105. For a more in-depth discussion of the nuances of various scholars’ contributions to the reconstructionist and abolitionist paradigms, please see Chapter 6 in Leonardo, *Race, Whiteness, and Education*.

Regardless of whether one is engaging in a reconstructionist or an abolitionist project, however, racialization is not a matter of individual choice – after all, whiteness is not an “identity” so much as it is a system of domination with a set of justifying ideologies and discourses. Of course, in a racialized society, questions of identity must be dealt with. However, as has been pointed out by Alcoff,⁹⁹ Kincheloe and Steinberg,¹⁰⁰ and Leonardo,¹⁰¹ individuals who repudiate their whiteness (as encouraged by abolitionists) are not exempted from being recognized and treated as white by racialized structures and institutions, and individuals who practice an “anti-racist white identity” (as encouraged by reconstructionists) cannot entirely avoid being the beneficiaries of white privilege and contributors to a white supremacist society. Individual redemption is not possible. So long as white supremacy exists, each of us who is racialized as white will continue to embody that oppressor identity. The oppressor identity “white” will only cease to exist when whiteness itself (which is synonymous with white supremacy) has been abolished.

In the meantime, the goal of abolitionism in itself does not solve the problem of white racial identity during this concrete historical moment in which race, while a social construct, still carries salient consequences. As such, I agree with reconstructionists that white people need to claim, not repudiate our whiteness. However, I disagree with the insistence that claiming it necessitates transforming it into something positive. I see no reason why recognizing the inherently oppressive nature of whiteness need necessarily lead to paralysis, fatalism, and/or disengagement on the part of white people. We can’t wait for a space of moral purity from which to act because such spaces do not exist. Nor are they necessary for continued engagement, which can be rooted in simultaneously surrendering to the current inescapability of whiteness while remembering that none of us is reducible to any category, racial or otherwise.

Thus, in regards to the ontological question of white racial identity in this historical moment, and the pedagogical issue of avoiding white nihilism and/or backlash as a result of fixating on the inherent oppressiveness of whiteness, I would suggest an approach of assisting white people in simultaneously claiming both whiteness (as inherently oppressive) and hybridity (as a reminder of the constructed nature of all categories and the irreducibility of any individual to any one of them).¹⁰² Hybridity, discussed at length in Chapter Three, can provide a place from which to disinvest from whiteness, even while recognizing that whiteness will remain a constant part of one’s identity until white supremacy writ large has been abolished. This may provide an alternative path towards abolitionism than the white racial recovery¹⁰³ project of reconstructionism. Why, after all, should one’s contributions to racial justice and decolonization need to be made in the name of whiteness? Why should it be necessary to insist that absolutely everything about ourselves must be positive? Is this not veering dangerously close to assumptions of perfection and purity that contribute to “good

⁹⁹ Linda Alcoff, “What Should White People Do?,” *Hypatia* 13, no. 3 (1998): 6–26.

¹⁰⁰ Kincheloe and Steinberg, “Addressing the Crisis of Whiteness.”

¹⁰¹ Leonardo, *Race, Whiteness, and Education*.

¹⁰² This is somewhat distinct from what Leonardo refers to as “schizoid whiteness,” which is the ability to simultaneously remember and forget one’s whiteness. Simultaneously claiming both whiteness and hybridity does not so much involve a forgetting, but a supplementation. On “schizoid whiteness,” see Zeus Leonardo, *Race Frameworks: Towards a Multidimensional Theory of Racism and Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013).

¹⁰³ Aaron David Gresson, *The Recovery of Race in America*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995). Gresson uses the term “white racial recovery” to refer to white backlash and rhetorics of victimhood (e.g. ‘reverse racism’) as a result of racial justice efforts, e.g. affirmative action. However, I believe that the reconstructionist goal of a positive white identity can also usefully be described as white racial recovery in that it refuses to disinvest from the category itself, choosing instead to ‘recover’ it.

guys versus bad guys” categorizations which enable hierarchical divisions of people to begin with? I asked this question of why our agency needs to be asserted in the name of a white identity at two different white anti-racism trainings which I attended as part of this research. Both times, I received similar responses: in order to be in reciprocal relationships where we have something to bring to the table, white people need to “get in touch with our roots” so we can engage in cross-cultural exchanges – otherwise we risk cultural appropriation.

The issue of cultural appropriation is indeed a key issue to interrogate when white people turn to hybridity. But it is important to remember that the cultures of “our roots” with which the trainings encourage us to get in touch are not “white” cultures. As Pinkard has argued, “whiteness is not a culture” – rather, whiteness destroys cultures; it is cannibalistic and nihilistic and, as such, “white customs are “cultural” only in the way that necrophilia is “sexual.””¹⁰⁴ Moreover, there is no such thing as cultural purity (that is itself a colonial trope) – however, this fact does not invalidate the issue of power-laden practices of cultural usurpation and appropriation. Hybridity must be employed tactically by whites, otherwise it can become another form of extraction and/or a power-blind escape valve for white people which ultimately reinforces white supremacist structures while critiquing essentialism and declaring “boundaries are social constructions – we’re all a mix of things!” On the one hand, the recognition of hybridity offers an important critique of both reconstructionism and abolitionism by pointing out that although these approaches may acknowledge the constructedness and/or falseness of, for example, “whiteness” and “blackness,” they still promote these as distinct categories, thus reifying false notions of purity that enable hierarchical systems to begin with. However, while it is true that borders themselves are not natural or inherent, but constructed, *not all crossings are equal -- how any one of these constructed borders can be approached or inhabited depends on where one is coming from.* It is crucial to maintain a power analysis when engaging hybridity – as Kien Nghi Ha points out, this initially politically charged concept developed by marginalized peoples has even become a key element in the production of new desires and commodities under late capitalism.¹⁰⁵ These issues are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three. For now, I would like to turn my attention to a key framework informing this dissertation: reparations.

REPARATIONS

Unlike reconstructionism, abolitionism, and hybridity, the central focus in reparations is not on (white) racial *identity* per se, although a reparations framework does have implications for conceptions of self and other. A reparations approach is not so much in opposition to the other approaches discussed, but complementary, in that it provides a framework for redistributory practices which attend to relations of domination, recognize processes of accumulation by dispossession, and are informed by visions of an egalitarian future. Although the social constructedness of racial categories is recognized as part of the historical analysis that accompanies reparations, the main focus is on concretely shifting the material and psychological bases which continually recreate those constructed categories.

¹⁰⁴ Pinkard, “Beyond Multiculturalism: The New Life Before Us.”

¹⁰⁵ Kien Nghi Ha, “Crossing the Border? Hybridity as Late-Capitalistic Logic of Cultural Translation and National Modernisation,” *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies* (2006). Accessible here: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1206/ha/en>

The term “reparations” has been used to mean many different things. Historically, it referred to post-war compensation which a defeated nation paid to cover the victors’ costs of war.¹⁰⁶ Today it is generally understood to imply redress for harms and inequalities that have been produced by past and present structures, practices, and relationships of domination, dehumanization and exploitation. Much of the scholarship on the topic makes the case for why reparations are justified (in legal and/or moral terms) for specific cases, discusses the amount and nature of the debts owed, and/or analyzes the feasibility and desirability of achieving reparations.¹⁰⁷ Some describe reparations as apology plus material redress, as distinguished from settlements which are material redress without apology.¹⁰⁸ Others also include the principle of non-recurrence in their definition of reparations, focusing on the need for policy changes to avoid recurrence of the same wrongs. Yamamoto et al,¹⁰⁹ have developed a framework of “reparations as repair” with the goal of achieving “social healing through justice.”¹¹⁰ Here, reparations is listed as one key component of a process entailing recognition, responsibility, reconstruction, and reparations:

Group healing requires some combination of recognition, responsibility, reconstruction and reparation. People must *recognize* the humanity of others and the historical roots of group-to-group grievances...The afflicting party must accept *responsibility* for healing group-based wounds, whether grounded in personal culpability, receipt of privileges and benefits, or a simple desire to build community. Acts of *reconstruction* are aimed at building a new productive relationship, including apologies and other acts of atonement, along with efforts to restructure social and economic institutions. *Reparations* encompasses public education, symbolic displays, and financial support for those in need...In order to heal, acknowledgements and actions must entail significant changes in institutional structures, public attitudes, and economic support for those still hurting—lest the danger of empty apologies, all words and no action, or “cheap grace.”¹¹¹

Still others, such as Robin Kelley,¹¹² Jennifer Harvey,¹¹³ and Andrea Smith,¹¹⁴ use the word reparations to encompass all these elements, emphasizing that reparations is not simply an economic issue or even just a means of righting past wrongs, but a framework for an ongoing broad-reaching social justice movement with the potential to fundamentally restructure our present and future in

¹⁰⁶ Oxford English Dictionary, definition 1c. “Compensation paid to make amends for war damage. In early use chiefly with reference to reparations paid by the nations defeated in the First World War.”

¹⁰⁷ For useful overviews of various emphases in reparations theory and practice, see Eric K. Yamamoto, Sandra Hye Yun Kim, and Abigail M. Holden, “American Reparations Theory and Practice at the Crossroads,” *Cal. WL Rev.* 44 (2007); Kaimipono D. Wenger, “Too Big to Remedy? Rethinking Mass Restitution for Slavery and Jim Crow.” *Loy. L.A. Law Review* 44, no.1 (2010): 177-232; Raymond A Winbush, *Should America Pay?: Slavery and the Raging Debate on Reparations* (New York: Amistad, 2003); Alfred Brophy, “Reconsidering Reparations,” *Indiana Law Journal* 81 (2006): 811.

¹⁰⁸ Roy L Brooks, *When Sorry Isn't Enough: The Controversy over Apologies and Reparations for Human Injustice* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁹ Yamamoto, Kim, and Holden, “American Reparations Theory and Practice at the Crossroads.”

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 48-9.

¹¹² Robin D. G Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

¹¹³ Jennifer Harvey, *Whiteness and Morality: Pursuing Racial Justice through Reparations and Sovereignty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

¹¹⁴ Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2005).

egalitarian ways, including not just policy changes but the abolishment of meta-structures such as capitalism and nation-state forms of government.

The framework and practice of reparations is not inherently decolonial¹¹⁵ and, aside from definitional disputes, the core components of apology, redress, and policies to ensure non-recurrence of harm are themselves debated. For example, while some see an apology as inherently useful in that recognition is a necessary first step in the pursuit of justice and places the apologizer in a position of vulnerability and responsibility, others argue that an apology which is not accompanied by redress and structural change is an attempt at cheap grace, at best, or even a promulgation of white supremacy “by covertly thwarting reparations claims or other racial justice efforts.”¹¹⁶ Moreover, there are complicated questions when dealing with group-based harms regarding who should apologize, in what context, and to whom.¹¹⁷ In any case, as Martha Minow argues, apology – whether or not it is accompanied by material redress and/or structural change – should never assume forgiveness:

An apology does not compel forgiveness. Forgiveness itself is and must remain unpredictable. Survivors acquire and retain the power to grant or withhold forgiveness. They, and others, know that some acts are unforgivable... The authority to view a violation as beyond forgiveness marks one of the survivors’ contributions to the community’s moral sense.¹¹⁸

In regards to the issue of redress, there are debates surrounding what form(s) redress should take (for example, material redress in the form money, land, health care, education funds, affirmative action; cultural redress in the form of monuments, museums, changes in street and building names, curricular and pedagogical reform in education, media reform), whether redress should be given directly to individuals or to organizations working on behalf of communities (and whether, in the case of material redress, all members of the injured group should be equally compensated or if compensation should happen in proportion to individuals’ current economic situations), who should pay (the government, corporations, religious institutions, all citizens, only citizens who are members of the offending group), and whether to accept any forms of redress at all or to reject such efforts as blood money.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, in the case of the multifaceted harms committed via a white supremacist United States, there are also potential conflicts among injured groups regarding the

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Eric K. Yamamoto, “Racial Reparations: Japanese American Redress and African American Claims,” *BC Third World LJ* 19 (1998): 477; David L. Eng, “Reparations and the Human,” *Colum. J. Gender & L.* 21 (2011): 561; and The Boarding School Healing Project, “Reparations and American Indian Boarding Schools: A Critical Appraisal” (2008), accessible here:

http://www.boardingschoolhealingproject.org/files/A_Critical_Appraisal_of_Reparations_final.pdf

¹¹⁶ Angelique M. Davis, “Racial Reconciliation or Retreat? How Legislative Resolutions Apologizing for Slavery Promulgate White Supremacy,” *The Black Scholar* 42, no. 1 (2012): 37.

¹¹⁷ For helpful discussions of the complexities of apologies, in particular in relation to group-based harms, see Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); Yamamoto, Kim, and Holden, “American Reparations Theory and Practice at the Crossroads”; Davis, “Racial Reconciliation or Retreat?”

¹¹⁸ Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*, 116.

¹¹⁹ For discussions of these debates see, for example, Charles P. Henry, *Long Overdue: The Politics of Racial Reparations* (New York: NYU Press, 2007); Michael T. Martin and Marilyn Yaquinto, *Redress for Historical Injustices in the United States: On Reparations for Slavery, Jim Crow, and Their Legacies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Winbush, *Should America Pay?*; Brooks, *When Sorry Isn't Enough*.

form redress should take. As Tuck and Yang remind us, “the attainment of equal legal and cultural entitlements [via the U.S. government] is actually an investment in settler colonialism.”¹²⁰ As such, Smith points out that:

indigenous peoples generally oppose the demand that the U.S. government give land to African Americans and other peoples of color...because the U.S. has no land to give – the land belongs to indigenous peoples.¹²¹

The example of German reparations for the Shoah paid not only to Jews in the diaspora but also to support (the creation of) the state of Israel – with no regard for the fact that this nation-state building process resulted in the Nakba, involving the mass displacement, dispossession, massacre and occupation of Palestinians – also reveals the dangers of myopic approaches to accountability. Finally, in regards to the issue of policies to ensure the non-recurrence of harm, there are differing assumptions regarding whether the purpose of reparations is to level the playing field within existing systems (e.g. through affirmative action policies) or to fundamentally transform those systems themselves. For example, Robin D.G. Kelley argues,

without at least a rudimentary critique of the capitalist culture that consumes us, even reparations can have disastrous consequences. Imagine if reparations were treated as start-up capital for black entrepreneurs who merely want to mirror the dominant society. What would really change?¹²²

Furthermore, the issue of structural change and being cautious of not fighting battles for greater justice for some at the expense of increased oppression for others who are also struggling against the intertwined nature of capitalism, white supremacy, colonialism, imperialism, and heteropatriarchy, highlights the importance of maintaining a global analysis. In a critique of the Occupy Wall Street framework, Chairman Omali Yeshitela argued:

We have to be careful Occupy Wall Street doesn't become another way of saving Wall Street. Wall Street was the site of a slave market. The actual wall of Wall Street was built by slaves to stop indigenous people who were trying to take their land back. The slave rebellions were fighting against Wall Street...People say there are booms and busts in the economy, but every time capitalism rescues itself it is on the backs of the oppressed...They're saying “occupy” in order to get more. Steve Jobs' I-Phones and 401ks. But how are you going to get more without it being at the expense of others around the world?...You can't be progressive by saying Occupy Wall Street...You have to say Occupy Wall Street BUT NOT Occupy Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, the reservations, the barrios, African communities. That's what you have to say.¹²³

Indigenous activists argued that what we should instead be saying is “Decolonize Wall Street.” In Oakland, the proposal to change the name of the movement from “Occupy Oakland” to

¹²⁰ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 18.

¹²¹ Smith, *Conquest*, 47.

¹²² Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 133.

¹²³ October 15, 2011.

“Decolonize Oakland”¹²⁴ led to one of the most contentious General Assemblies in which I participated. The proposal unfortunately did not pass, but its introduction and the ensuing debate contributed to the insertion and proliferation of decolonization discourses and led to subsequent teach-ins on the meaning and moral imperative of decolonization. Explaining the significance of this change in language in a speech given to Occupy Oakland, Waziyatawin argued:

There is no separation between colonial expansion, the ongoing subjugation of indigenous life, and the capitalist exploitation of life for economic gain...From the time of invasion, indigenous people understood that the ways of the invaders were incompatible with life... every day more lands are plowed and drain-piled to support a few more acres of industrial mono-crop agriculture; every day more pesticides and fertilizers are dumped on these crops; every day more lumber is cut from our forests; more iron is mined from our mother; and more toxins spew from coal and nuclear power plants...When these movements use the language of occupation, it invokes all the destruction of the last 519 years. It precludes indigenous involvement...any population living under occupation will cringe at that word...Further, if you are just interested in acquiring your fair share of the economic pie, I hope you understand that this would only be a short-lived solution to a major economic crisis that is just one crisis among many... it is time for everyone to recognize the harm of the existing systems and institutions and to seek to dismantle them completely to save all life before it is all destroyed.¹²⁵

In the remainder of this chapter, I would like to outline what I see as the decolonial potential of a reparations approach, in particular in regards to the questions of possibilities for white people’s involvement in the projects of decolonization and racial justice, and particular issues that arise relating to decolonizing the white colonizer. Because I am inspired by the framework of reparations but am also a) weary of the assumptions made when the word “reparations” is heard, due to the many different ways in which it is used and b) desiring to emphasize that the nature of the necessary transformations of the logics, institutions, and structures shaping our lives cannot be fully predicted, I have taken to using the word “p/reparations.”¹²⁶

TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY AND PRAXIS OF P/REPARATIONS

P/reparations resists one-off actions of making amends for something that was done wrong in the past as well as the notion that one could return to an imagined pristine state that used to exist. It is about learning from the past, loving in the present, and looking to the future while we do the work of transforming ourselves, our relationships, our institutions, and our policies in ways that enable the greatest possible flourishing of all life. As Reverend Lynice Pinkard commented,

¹²⁴ The full text of this October 28, 2011 proposal, “Memorandum of Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples” can be read here: <http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2011/10/29/18695950.php>

¹²⁵ November 12, 2011. Full speech can be viewed here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naY3VFdTKEc>

¹²⁶ The word “p/reparations” originally emerged out of a conversation with the other two members of my cohort in the Social and Cultural Studies program in the Graduate School of Education at UC Berkeley, José Arias and Kathryn Moeller.

I like the word p/reparations because we are talking about something we've never seen before, that we haven't yet fully conceived. It's about cross-fertilization and about healing. We need action. We can and must take steps. It is preparation for a new humanity...The material is constitutive, so that is not off the table, either.¹²⁷

P/reparations is a methodology (not an end, but a means to an end) that is informed by a guiding utopian vision of an egalitarian society. I believe it is useful to articulate guiding utopian visions because, as Robin Kelley has pointed out, it is the dreams and the alternative visions of society that inspire people to continue struggling for change.¹²⁸ Such visions should not be confused with blueprints – it would be impossible to attempt to map out all the concrete forms change will take, especially as many possibilities will only become thinkable as change is happening – but conscious visions can serve as ethical guides when making decisions about courses of action to pursue. Actual work on the ground ends up being much messier and necessitates the kinds of “differential movement” Chela Sandoval discusses in Methodology of the Oppressed:

this is the activity of the trickster who practices subjectivity as masquerade, the oppositional agent who accesses differing identity, ideological, aesthetic and political positions. This nomadic “morphing” is not performed only for survival's sake...It is a set of principled conversions that requires (guided) movement, a directed but also a diasporic migration in both consciousness and politics, performed to ensure that ethical commitment to egalitarian social relations be enacted in the everyday, political sphere of culture.¹²⁹

Of course, a holistic and liberatory p/reparations approach will contend with all axes of domination as they are intertwined. To accept patriarchy, homophobia, xenophobia or any other manifestation of domination as tolerable while working against white supremacist colonialism and capitalism would undermine the radical potential of the movement. However, especially when seeking methodologies for decolonizing the white colonizer, I think it is important to centralize an analysis of white U.S.-ness. All too often simply positioning this as one form of oppression among many has been used as a means of evading the extreme forms racialized colonial domination has taken and continues to take. In addition to the issues of sovereignty and vast material inequities, globalized colonial white supremacy has divided the world into a zone of being and a zone of nonbeing, as Fanon pointed out in Black Skin, White Masks, erasing the parity between Self and Other by positioning some bodies beyond the realm of the human.¹³⁰

One of the ways in which I've observed white supremacy continue to be asserted, including in leftist circles, is in agenda-setting. Crucially, p/reparations processes *begin with the claims and desires of those who have been on the receiving end of policies of domination*. As Tiny aka Lisa Gray-Garcia points out:

Who knows how to best meet the needs of poor people and other marginalized communities—a wealthy funder with a master's, or an *indigena* elder who's been in

¹²⁷ Personal conversation, April 5, 2012.

¹²⁸ Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*.

¹²⁹ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 62.

¹³⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967); For a helpful discussion of Fanon's contributions in this book, see also Lewis R. Gordon, “Through the Zone of Non-being: A Reading of *Black Skin, White Masks* in Celebration of Fanon's Eightieth Birthday,” *Worlds and Knowledge Otherwise* 1, no. 3 (2006): 1–29.

poverty their whole life? Revolutionary giving is about recognizing that having wealth doesn't qualify you to direct movements. And it doesn't entitle you to keep that wealth—that's what community reparations is about.¹³¹

This doesn't mean that education received in schools is necessarily useless, that wealthy people are completely ignorant, or that “poor people and other marginalized communities” *automatically* have more enlightened perspectives and plans of action. Rather, it is a recognition that, as Zeus Leonardo has argued, it is not in the interest of those who are subject to domination to mythologize its processes.¹³² And it is an insistence that paternalistic interventions be replaced by those who are most affected by poverty and marginalization setting the agenda for how to create change. Thus, a p/reparations approach not only respects the deep knowledge of those who have been most affected by these intertwined systems of domination, but simultaneously starts to break down internalized supremacy and senses of entitlement on the part of white people.

P/reparations processes thus begin with engaged listening to the specific claims, demands, and visions of those who have been on the receiving end of practices of domination. While none of the components of p/reparations are singular actions or proceed in a linear fashion, engaged listening is a prerequisite to and ongoing requirement for any other forms of action. For example, a meaningful apology can only happen if one understands why it is necessary and supports it being made. (And, as discussed above, an apology must not be offered with an expectation of forgiveness, but only with recognition that no amount of redress and structural change can undo the damages inflicted by over 500 years of heteropatriarchal white supremacist colonialism.) For an apology to be meaningful, it also has to be accompanied and/or prefaced by relevant consequential action – to simply continue with business as usual would make of the apology a lie. The specific forms that relevant consequential action takes will depend on the particular injustices being described and the claims being made. Thus, there is no p/reparations blueprint – reparative practices and policies emerge through discussion of both the common and distinct ways in which different groups of people have been brutalized by the various logics of white supremacy in their entanglement with gender, class, sexuality, nationality, religion, and various racial constructions. As discussed above, this necessitates discussion between various groups of people of color as well, to ensure that one group's claim is not undermining that of another's. While there is no blueprint, I would like to highlight some overarching theoretical interventions enabled by a p/reparations approach which guide the emergence of reparative practices and policies.

A p/reparations approach assumes, requires and (re)creates relationships.

By developing practices based on a process of making and listening to claims and visions, a p/reparations approach intervenes in Cartesian philosophies which depend on the splitting of subject and object, mind and body. In the Cartesian model, the individual (more specifically, the heterosexual white Christian male) is taken out of the world and placed above it, like an omnipotent god. His knowledge is rendered in abstract universal terms rather than as emerging from a particular place in the world. He autonomously develops ethical conclusions and courses of action as a result of internal dialogue. (“I think, therefore I am.”) A p/reparations approach, on the other hand,

¹³¹ “Community Reparations Now! Tyrone Boucher and Tiny Aka Lisa Gray-Garcia Talk Revolutionary Giving, Class, Privilege, and More,” <http://www.enoughenough.org/2010/05/community-reparations-now-tyrone-boucher-and-tiny-aka-lisa-gray-garcia-talk-revolutionary-giving-class-privilege-and-more/>.

¹³² Leonardo, “The Color of Supremacy”; Leonardo, *Race, Whiteness, and Education*.

reflects Césaire's critique of the Cartesian method, as discussed by Maldonado-Torres in the Introduction.¹³³ Rather than being based on internal dialogues, a p/reparations approach depends on intersubjective dialogues which are attentive to positionalities. Thus, in Grosfoguel's terms, the Cartesian "ego-politics of knowledge" is replaced by situated "body-politics of knowledge."¹³⁴ However, in contrast to poststructuralist projects of moral relativity, in a p/reparations approach the perspectives of oppressed people are privileged.

This relationship-centered approach should not, however, be confused with the assumption of reconciliation. There is enormous work to do to even enable the *possibility* of reconciliation. Tuck and Yang argue, furthermore, that the focus on reconciliation can itself be another version of white escapism:

The settler, disturbed by her own settler status, tries to escape or contain the unbearable searchlight of complicity, of having harmed others just by being one's self. The desire to reconcile is just as relentless as the desire to disappear the Native; it is a desire to not have to deal with this (Indian) problem anymore.¹³⁵

They continue:

Reconciliation is about rescuing settler normalcy, about rescuing a settler future. Reconciliation is concerned with questions of *what will decolonization look like? What will happen after abolition? What will be the consequences of decolonization for the settler?* Incommensurability acknowledges that these questions need not, and perhaps cannot, be answered in order for decolonization to exist as a framework...we will find out the answers as we get there...To fully enact an ethic of incommensurability means relinquishing settler futurity, abandoning the hope that settlers may one day be commensurable to Native peoples...The Native futures, the lives to be lived once the settler nation is gone – these are the unwritten possibilities made possible by an ethic of incommensurability.¹³⁶

Their insistence on incommensurability reminds me of Fanon's definition of decolonization as "the replacing of a certain 'species' of men [sic] by another 'species' of men [sic]...the veritable creation of new men [sic]."¹³⁷ Arguably, this will entail transformation for all; however, as Tuck and Yang point out, the trajectory is one of creating "Native futures" and "relinquishing settler futurity." The settler identity enacts repressive violence and thus the point is not to figure out a means of coexistence between settlers and Natives, but the abolition of a "species" (settlers) for whom colonization is thinkable/actable. This abolition, as Tuck and Yang argue, cannot be based on knowing what will become of the settler; that cannot be known until "we get there." This is another reason why I like the word "p/reparations" – it is open-ended; there are no guarantees, just invitations to move towards "unwritten possibilities." This, it seems to me, necessitates a decentering of white-identity focused debates such as those fueling the reconstructionism versus abolitionism camps. Answers to questions about white identity (whether it will continue in a

¹³³ Maldonado-Torres, "Césaire's Gift and the Decolonial Turn."

¹³⁴ Grosfoguel, "World-Systems Analysis in the Context of Transmodernity, Border Thinking, and Global Coloniality."

¹³⁵ Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 9.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 35-6.

¹³⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 29.

reconstructed form and/or what will take its place) will emerge “as we get there.” White identity is a secondary issue to white ideology. This does not, however, mean that issues of white identity do not need to be addressed as part of the process of our decolonization – just that they are not primary and cannot be resolved in advance. Certainly part of decolonization necessitates deep transformations of our understandings of ourselves and of our histories, a topic which is taken up at various points in this dissertation. However, these understandings must not only be intellectual but also spiritual and embodied in material practice. After all, as Fanon pointed out long ago, philosophy and intelligence alone have “never saved anyone.”¹³⁸

A p/reparations approach highlights processes of accumulation by dispossession.

David Harvey is frequently cited as having coined the term “accumulation by dispossession.” He uses the concept to talk about a particular mode of capitalist accumulation which is focused less on investment in wage labor and production, and more on the seizing of natural resources and people’s private property (e.g. via eminent domain) and nullifying people’s “rights” (for example, to pensions and affordable health care). With accumulation by dispossession, wealth, as Harvey conceives of it, is redistributed rather than produced.¹³⁹ I am not only using the term in this sense, but as a broader concept. I am less concerned here with tracing a history of the various ways in which capitalist accumulation has been manifested. Rather, I use the term to refer to any processes by which some people accumulate (land, resources, wealth, power, privileges, sovereignty, free time, etc.) at the expense of others. In my usage, “accumulation by dispossession” is a constitutive logic to colonialism and capitalism writ large, not just to particular manifestations thereof. The term highlights relationships that are extractive in nature, i.e. unequal due to dispossession. I include the exploitation of others’ labor as one form of dispossession.

By emphasizing processes of accumulation by dispossession, a p/reparations approach challenges the illusion of autonomous individuals, groups, and nation-states. This moves us away from simply talking about privilege which, as Leonardo pointed out, can take a very passive form, emphasizing unearned advantages while erasing the agents of domination.¹⁴⁰ This attention to accumulation by dispossession is incredibly important in the current context of color-blind racism.¹⁴¹ By analyzing extractive relationships, we see the interconnectedness of wealth/poverty and success/failure. Thus a p/reparations approach can help deconstruct color-blind ideologies of meritocracy and equal opportunity, a point which is further developed in Chapter Four.

The framework of accumulation by dispossession also denaturalizes notions of citizenship, immigration, and the borders of nation-states, reminding us of the violence that accompanies the drawing and sustaining of such lines. We might, for example, take a cue from some of the placards at immigration rights rallies which remind us of the colonial process of Manifest Destiny by declaring, “We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us.” Such an analysis might help us rethink “immigration” from a p/reparations perspective by asking us to contend with issues such as what responsibility the U.S. has for creating the conditions that lead people to attempt to migrate (e.g. warfare, unfair trade policies that create poverty, environmental destruction). Furthermore, with

¹³⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 29.

¹³⁹ See, for example, David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); David Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital: And the Crises of Capitalism* (London: Profile Books, 2011).

¹⁴⁰ Leonardo, “The Color of Supremacy”; Leonardo, *Race, Whiteness, and Education*.

¹⁴¹ Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in Contemporary America*.

this framework, the authority of the U.S. to determine and police the terms of migration and dwelling on the land is called into question writ large. As Andrea Smith argues, “our overall strategy should not be premised on the notion that the U.S. should or will always continue to exist.”¹⁴² She goes on to extend this logic to the nation-state form of governance itself:

In questioning the legitimacy of the U.S., it necessarily follows that we question the nation-state as an appropriate form of governance. Doing so allows us to free our political imagination to begin thinking of how we can begin to build a world we would actually want to live in...Helpful in this project of imagination is the work of Native women activists who have begun articulating notions of “nation” and “sovereignty” which are separate from nation-states. Whereas nation-states are governed through domination and coercion, indigenous sovereignty and nationhood is predicated on interrelatedness and responsibility.¹⁴³

These issues are taken up in more detail in Chapter Two.

Another intervention enabled by the accumulation by dispossession framework of a p/reparations approach is the offering of counter-narratives to discourses of aid, charity, welfare, development, handouts, debt forgiveness, and “giving.” All of these discourses assume the assets being redistributed were legitimately acquired and that acts of redistribution are thus generous and benevolent gestures to be met only with gratitude. However, if we recognize, as Césaire said, “Truly, there are sins for which no one has the power to make amends and which can never be fully expiated,”¹⁴⁴ the tables turn regarding who should be asking for debt forgiveness. How, after all, can the debts of millions upon millions of lives slaughtered, enslaved, dispossessed, raped, incarcerated and dehumanized ever be repaid? Impossible. The impossibility is not because of the inability to change the past. The past is with us in the present. In Thich Nhat Hanh’s words,

All your ancestors continue in you, and when you transform the habit energies that they have transmitted to you, you are being reborn in the past...I am present everywhere on this planet. I am also present in the past and in the future.¹⁴⁵

The impossibility of repayment lies in the incalculability of life and of relationships.

A p/reparations approach can enable us to recognize discourses of aid, charity, welfare, development, handouts, debt forgiveness, and giving as discourses of bad faith, depoliticized discourses which obscure the histories and actions which created those needs the “aid” is now (supposedly) trying to address. It can also help us to recognize and imagine alternative social/economic relationships to that of the capitalist balance-sheet-keeping, everything-can-be-commodified exchange-value system.¹⁴⁶ The Sartrean term “bad faith” refers to the attempt by individuals to deceive themselves and others, generally with the goal of bringing advantage to

¹⁴² Smith, *Conquest*, 50–1.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 185-6.

¹⁴⁴ Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 42.

¹⁴⁵ Nhat Hanh, *No Death, No Fear: Comforting Wisdom for Life* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2002), 131.

¹⁴⁶ For a provocative discussion of “credit as a means of privatization and debt as a means of socialization,” see Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, “Debt and Study,” *E-flux Journal* 14 (2010), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/debt-and-study/>.

oneself.¹⁴⁷ It is a more or less willful blindness to certain aspects of a situation or, alternately, the deployment of selective vision so that one might feel at ease with one's choices and actions. The concept need not be limited to the analysis of individuals, however. We might also apply it to discourses that have become unquestioned frameworks, directing our vision and limiting our perceived range of possible actions, shaping our understandings of problems and, thus, the solutions that we propose, in ways that are blind to certain constitutive aspects of the problems in question.

In his essay, "Césaire's Gift and the Decolonial Turn," Maldonado-Torres draws on Fanon and Césaire to discuss the relationship of the colonizer to the colonized as a situation in which "gifts are not received but taken before they are even offered. Dispossession and possession take precedence over the logic of the gift."¹⁴⁸ In stealing resources from the colonized, the colonizer simultaneously steals the possibility for those resources to have been offered as a gift, thus also erasing the possibility for one method of receiving recognition and enacting one's humanity: gift-giving. The flip side of this relationship is that in this process of accumulation by dispossession, the colonizer's resources and gift-giving capacities increase. He thus acquires the means to provide, at will, selective "aid" to the impoverished colonized. The colonized is no longer in a position of exchange-partner but rather positioned as needy and thus dependent. To add insult to injury, the colonized is expected to display gratitude for the colonizer's "generosity." However, this "aid" or these "gifts" given by the colonizer are no longer true to the spirit of those terms and, as such, can no longer serve as an expression of the colonizer's humanity. While this renders it impossible for the colonizer to give to the colonized, the reverse is not true. "Césaire's gift," referenced in the title of Maldonado-Torres' article, and the decolonial gift more generally, is "the reason of the enslaved or the condemned."¹⁴⁹ This reason diagnoses the inhumanity of the colonizer and offers a method for him to regain that humanity by participating in decolonization. Yancy describes this gift as

an invitation to see more, to see things differently. It is a special call that reframes... Whites must also be humbled by the gift of seeing more of themselves, more of the complex manifestations of their whiteness, as seen through black experiences of whiteness. As whites use the mirror to see and name whiteness, they do not magically become black...After the gift has been given, one still remains white, ensconced within a white social structure¹⁵⁰

By insisting on redistribution of wealth and power based on a logic not of "aid" or "giving" but of insufficient returning, a p/reparations framework provides a paradigm through which white people might accept the decolonial gifts being offered and participate in decolonization. As Jennifer Harvey points out, these gifts are what provide us with opportunities to move through periods of depression-induced paralysis such as that which sent me to the therapist's office many years ago:

White U.S.-Americans are fortunate that movements for reparations and self-determination continue to exist...Such struggles offer those of us who are white a response other than the paralysis and guilt that often accompany the recognition that we are white U.S.-Americans in an implicitly imperialist, white supremacist nation.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness; an Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).

¹⁴⁸ Maldonado-Torres, "Césaire's Gift and the Decolonial Turn," 132.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Yancy, *Look, a White!*, 10.

¹⁵¹ Harvey, *Whiteness and Morality*, 170.

A p/reparations approach attends to multiple scales.

The component of apology attends to the psychological scale by dealing with individual and collective accountability issues and necessitating a rethinking of identities, positions, and relationships. Material and cultural redress deal with the institutional scale, concretely shifting the distribution of resources, wealth, power and knowledge production from their current hierarchical state towards greater democracy. Policies to ensure non-recurrence address the structural scale, so that these shifts are not just singular actions but fundamentally transformative, so as to avoid renewed cycles of genocide, oppression, dehumanization, and accumulation by dispossession, whether through white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy, nationalism, or any other systems of domination.

A holistic p/reparations movement is not focused on the transformation of individuals, but of society. However, society is composed of individuals in dialogue and action with one another. Because meaningful transformation is not just an intellectual process but takes place through material practice, relationships, emotional engagement, and spiritual grappling, decolonizing the white colonizer requires white people to engage on all these levels. When material practice takes place without intellectual analysis and/or (inter)personal work, it can take the form of charity and/or savior-ism, thus reinforcing rather than dismantling white supremacy. When the intellectual study of white supremacy and racism takes place without material practice and/or (inter)personal work, white supremacy can be reinforced through discourses of expertise which are used to justify occupying even more positions of power and/or may result in the illusion that one is creating change because of feeling intellectually stimulated by new (to us) knowledge.¹⁵² When the (inter)personal work is done without intellectual analysis, it can result in multicultural white supremacy and/or colorblind racism. Finally, when (inter)personal work and intellectual analysis are pursued without material practice, white people become hypocrites.

One common pattern I have observed in my research on white people seeking to move towards racial justice is an obsession with whether one looks or sounds racist which fixates in a narcissistic way on one's individual self, disabling an analysis of how white supremacy functions structurally and institutionally. (This can also take the form of silence out of fear of making a mistake and/or internal or physical removal of oneself in moments of conflict.) However, a converse pattern I have observed among white people who keep their/our focus at the structural level is a lack of creativity and/or willingness to engage in material practices in the here and now of our own lives. This is a denial of personal agency. Decolonization is a process, and this process is not complete until all land has been repatriated and we have created local and global economic, political, educational, and social structures which do not enable the flourishing of some through the premature death of others.¹⁵³ However, the overwhelming nature of that process does not excuse us from contributing to it in the here and now, as limited and imperfect as those contributions may be.

¹⁵² For a more detailed discussion of these issues, please see Zeus Leonardo and Ronald K. Porter, "Pedagogy of Fear: Toward a Fanonian Theory of 'safety' in Race Dialogue," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 13, no. 2 (2010): 139–157; Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor."

¹⁵³ Gilmore defines racism as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-based differentiated vulnerability to premature death." Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007): 28.

SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR ACTION

Before sharing some concrete possibilities for action, I feel compelled to share a note of caution offered by Sara Ahmed, who writes about the frequent question she receives from white people in classrooms and workshops where racism is discussed: “Okay, but what do we DO with this knowledge?” Ahmed argues that while “the impulse towards action is understandable and complicated,”¹⁵⁴ it can actually be another version of white escapism. That is, rushing towards action can entail an avoidance of fully facing our complicity in the present in the name of focusing on the future:

To hear the work of exposure [of racism] requires that white subjects inhabit the critique, *with its lengthy duration*...The desire to act in a non-racist or anti-racist way when one hears about racism, in my view, can function as a defense against hearing how that racism implicates white subjects.¹⁵⁵

This cautionary note is a reminder that the act of listening must never end, and that other actions – while essential if one is to be accountable for what one hears – should not result in the illusion that one is thus escaping complicity with whiteness. Moreover, as Pinkard has pointed out, rushing into action in the absence of having internalized decolonial analyses and developed relationships of accountability can do more harm than good.¹⁵⁶

P/reparations is not only about material resources, and I will discuss some possibilities for action in relation to the non-material elements of p/reparations in Chapter Four. In fact, I believe it is essential that the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, relational and ideological work discussed in that chapter happen in an ongoing way in order to avoid engaging in material practices in a manner that undermines decolonial goals. At the same time, I also believe it is important that the internal and interpersonal work not replace material practices or lead to attempts to disengage from the messiness of our societal institutions, but that all of these spheres of work should inform and strengthen each other. As John A. Powell argues, “not only is there a relationship between spirituality and social justice, but...this is a recursive relationship that runs in both directions.”¹⁵⁷

Here, however, I would like to give some attention to possibilities for material practices. At numerous workshops and dialogues on racial justice I have attended which have stated goals of healing and/or truth and reconciliation, the topic of reparations and material redress is not raised or, when it is, there is a tendency to leave concrete transfers of material resources off the table. However, without including the component of material resources, it is impossible to create the conditions for truly reciprocal and democratic relationships. In Martin Luther King, Jr.’s words:

The comfortable, the entrenched, the privileged cannot continue to tremble at the prospect of change in the status quo. When millions of people have been cheated for centuries, restitution is a costly process. Inferior education, poor housing, unemployment, inadequate health care--each is a bitter component of the oppression

¹⁵⁴ Sara Ahmed, “Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-performativity of Anti-racism,” *Borderlands* 3, no. 2 (2004): 1–5: paragraph 56.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, paragraph 57.

¹⁵⁶ Personal conversation.

¹⁵⁷ Powell, “Lessons from Suffering,” 102.

that has been our heritage. Each will require billions of dollars to correct. Justice so long deferred has accumulated interest and its cost for this society will be substantial in financial as well as human terms. This fact has not been fully grasped, because most of the gains of the past...were obtained at bargain rates. The desegregation of public facilities cost nothing; neither did the election and appointment of a few black public officials.¹⁵⁸

The issue of material resources is not just a question of uni-directional redistribution of wealth, but is about all of our relationships to the concept of wealth itself, as well as to notions of ownership and resource consumption. We need to think through how we might we move away from practices which individualize risk, thus reinforcing current power dynamics. We need to experiment with practices which tie us to one another in more mutually and beneficially dependent ways. As Dean Spade argues:

In a culture with a decreasing safety net, there is enormous fear-based pressure to save for retirement, unemployment, disability, children, and other life changes. A system that individualizes risk encourages people to look out for themselves alone and steel themselves against harm, knowing that they may face vulnerability alone. What kinds of structures would our communities need to put in place together so that we could trust that we would be cared for and that hoarding does not make the world safer for us?¹⁵⁹

Especially given that “our communities” are generally still very segregated along racial and/or class lines, I would add to Spade’s question: how might we simultaneously pursue the goal of decolonizing whiteness by developing such practices and structures in ways that explicitly take the differential impacts of white supremacy into account? I offer a few possibilities here, noting that these are not universal prescriptions but kernels of ideas which may be more or less relevant for particular contexts. Many of the ideas offered focus on possibilities for action at the individual and local scales. This is not meant to shift the focus away from the necessity of large-scale structural change – in fact, many of the suggestions under the “time and labor” sub-section are precisely about participating in broad-based social movements. However, for the project of decolonizing the white colonizer, I believe it is pedagogically important for us to include concrete changes in our daily material practices as part of a process of (inter)personal transformation. Furthermore, one theory of change is that existing structures and institutions can be supplanted most successfully not only via protest and/or violent opposition but by being crowded out by the development of more desirable alternatives. Such theories of “visionary organizing,” as championed, for example, by Grace Lee Boggs and by activists in the prison abolition movement, maintain direct opposition to repressive practices and structures but also focus on the development and proliferation of institutions and values which foster more liberatory and just ways of being.¹⁶⁰ These efforts are connected to the “utopian visions” discussed above – they are experiments that are guided by such visions, some of

¹⁵⁸ *Martin Luther King Jr. A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Ed. James Melvin Washington. New York: Harper & Row, 1986: 314–5.

¹⁵⁹ Dean Spade, “It’s So Queer to Give Away Money,” *Tikkun Magazine*, July 1, 2010. Accessed here: <http://www.tikkun.org/nextgen/its-so-queer-to-give-away-money>.

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, Grace Lee Boggs, *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-first Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Angela Y Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003).

which may provide models that can be scaled-up, while others may be more particular to one specific context.

Homeownership

Everyone needs a place to live yet homeownership (and ownership of property more generally) is one of the ways in which white supremacist settler colonialism has been and continues to be institutionalized. However, given the option, choosing to pay rent to a landlord who buys into the status quo is hardly a more decolonial choice. What if, inspired by the community land trust model (which is one means of keeping housing more affordable) as well as by a p/reparations analysis, white people considering buying a home (or all non-indigenous people, following the point made by Tuck and Yang that settlers of all “colors” are enticed to buy into the U.S. white supremacist colonial project) were to coordinate with local indigenous groups on practices which would seek to acknowledge and begin to redress (albeit in a miniscule way) the history of land theft? Perhaps this would take the form of transferring money for a down-payment on a home to local indigenous groups, and paying the mortgage and taxes in exchange for living in and maintaining the home. Or perhaps it would take the form of transferring ownership of properties once they have been paid off. The details would need to be worked out in specific contexts, and these may not even be desirable courses of action, depending on local circumstances. As with all p/reparations actions, priorities and processes must be determined through conversations with those most affected by the issues being addressed – there is no blueprint. However, it strikes me as useful to at least begin having conversations about possibilities for processes of land repatriation that do not depend upon governmental or corporate actions, even though pressures on those bodies should continue to be exerted as well.

While my purpose in raising the issue of homeownership has to do with attempting to think about options for immediate land transfer, the issue of land is much larger than just the issue of homeownership; there are important issues regarding agenda-setting over land use in general. To give just one of many local examples: the East Bay Regional Park District has continually ignored Ohlone, Miwok, and Yokut activists’ requests to be defining partners in regards to land use, and has rejected the insistence that Brushy Peak – the site of multiple tribes’ origin stories – not be desecrated with a hiking/biking trail and the encouragement of recreation.¹⁶¹ Across the country there are countless battles over land use which can be supported, dealing with issues of sovereignty over sacred sites, resistance to nuclear testing and other forms of environmental destruction, control over natural resources, and, of course, agenda-setting power in regards to (im)migration. Most forms of material support for these struggles would fall under the “time and labor” category, for example, signing petitions, writing letters of support, showing up at protests, prayer vigils and relevant meetings, bringing food and water to people participating in encampments to protect sites, etc. In some cases financial support may also be desired, which would fall under the “daily financial practices” and/or “inheritance” categories.

Inheritance

One of the reasons for the persistence of a racial wealth gap (as distinct from an income gap) has to do with inheritance practices. Expanding our notion of “kin” from immediate offspring – and

¹⁶¹ To learn more about the struggle over Brushy Peak, see the documentary Buried Voices, which can be viewed here: <http://vimeo.com/43092751>.

asking, along with John A. Powell, “not simply whether we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, but whether we are our brothers’ and sisters’ brothers and sisters”¹⁶² – inherited assets might be passed on to organizations doing decolonial and racial justice work. I discuss my own process of passing on the inheritance I received after my Mom’s death in Chapter Two. Here I will just note that while a few individuals’ personal financial choices may not be of tremendous consequence regarding overall patterns of white supremacy, I believe they are pedagogically useful for decolonizing the white colonizer, which includes the need to dismantle internalized notions of entitlement and desert. And such practices do also matter materially at the local level, even if in small ways. To quote Dean Spade:

The systemic conditions that produce capitalism and its violence are not going to be resolved just by my monthly donations or by someone else giving away a trust fund. However, these practices are also not separate from systemic change. They are about building resources for our resistance movements, and they are about doing the difficult emotional work of examining internalized capitalism. We know that the personal is political, both because material realities are composed of our collective practices, and because broad-based transformation often emerges from experiments taken up at the local level.¹⁶³

Again, in order to work against patterns of those with material resources setting the agenda for how those resources get used, the redistribution of assets should be determined by those engaged in decolonial and racial justice activism who are most impacted by colonial white supremacy. This requires getting to know local activists and inviting various people into the conversation about how assets should be used. Also, while I have been emphasizing “local circumstances” and “local activists,” this does not mean a global analysis is not essential. Rather, the emphasis on the local here has to do with recognizing that part of the tendency in white supremacist thinking is to believe it is possible to be omnipotent, to be able to survey everything and then choose a best course of action. The approach I’m suggesting here is to start from where we are at, from our very particular circumstances with our very particular capacities, rather than acting based on abstractions. Furthermore, because everything is interconnected, our local actions do also have global reach, even if the impact is not easily measurable and even if the direction of outcomes is never guaranteed.

Daily Financial Practices

P/reparatory personal financial practices need not be limited to larger-scale gestures such as restituting land and passing on inheritances. For example, one white friend of mine used to hire someone to clean her apartment. Because she recognized the racialized aspects leading to certain people’s time being valued at much higher rates than that of others, and the history of white women advancing economically by exploiting women of color,¹⁶⁴ she paid the woman of color who cleaned her apartment the same amount she was making at the time as a tutor: \$75/hour. Other possibilities¹⁶⁵ include

¹⁶² Powell, “Lessons from Suffering,” 123.

¹⁶³ Spade, “It’s So Queer to Give Away Money.”

¹⁶⁴ For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Evelyn Nakano Glenn, “From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor,” *Signs* 18, no. 1 (1992): 1–43.

¹⁶⁵ It has become impossible for me to trace where I first encountered many of these ideas, but I thank all those on whom and which I and they consciously and unconsciously draw.

- “revolutionary giving” – this is the term POOR Magazine uses to counter philanthropic or charity models; the revolutionary giving model argues that “giving and donating for the giver or donor is not a privilege, an option, or a nice idea, rather, it is a duty.”¹⁶⁶ Revolutionary giving could entail donations to organizations, paying double registration costs at events so that someone who does not have the means to pay can still attend, paying for childcare for someone who would not otherwise be able to attend an event, etc.
- developing and/or participating in less-capitalist or non-capitalist economic practices (e.g. cooperatives, fair trade, alternative currencies, community development credit unions, barter, community gardens, urban agriculture, dana, sliding-scale pricing, etc.)¹⁶⁷; this is also not a straightforward process, for example, as Nichola Torbett pointed out, while it may seem more financially responsible to support a local organic ice cream business than to buy ice cream made under poor labor conditions and from poorly treated cows whose food is poisoned with pesticides, the organic ice cream shop in Temescal (an Oakland neighborhood) is also part of a gentrification process which has led to the displacement of many low-income residents of color¹⁶⁸
- in general, paying attention to how one spends money and making as ethical of choices as possible regarding both quantity and quality of consumption (this is not a straightforward process and there is certainly no way to be a purist so long as we are still living in a capitalist system)
- engaging in complete personal financial transparency and establishing redistributory mechanisms in the context of a cross-racial and cross-class community (this can be a complex process as issues of shame can come up on all sides – as one woman I interviewed commented, “financial transparency feels more intimate than sex” – as such, such a process should be pursued with great sensitivity, and it may be helpful to have such a group initiated and anchored by two or more people who already have deep established relationships across these lines of difference)

It is essential that any projects pursued not take the form of a disengaged insular bubble, a kind of eco/hippy version of the gated community. In order to be a part of decolonial p/reparations, it is important that the actions pursued remain part of a larger effort to chip away at existing colonial capitalist heteropatriarchal structures, and are coordinated with and accountable to indigenous peoples and people of color.

Time and Labor

Material resources are not limited to money and property, but include time and labor. As such, engaging in p/reparations does not necessitate having access to wealth and/or power within the dominant culture. For example, one can do support work for racial justice organizations and movements (e.g. stuff envelopes, prepare the space for events, clean up after events, provide childcare during events, cook for events), participate in demonstrations, rallies and city council

¹⁶⁶ See http://poormagazine.org/rev_donor.

¹⁶⁷ For a discussion of many of these practices as well as other possibilities, see Ethan Miller, “Solidarity Economy: Key Concepts and Issues” in *Solidarity Economy I: Building Alternatives for People and Planet*, eds. Emily Kawano, Tom Masterson, and Jonathan Teller-Ellsberg. (Amherst: Center for Popular Economics, 2010): 25–42. Also accessible here: <http://www.geo.coop/archives/SolidarityEconomicsEthanMiller.htm>

¹⁶⁸ Sermon delivered at First Congregational Church of Oakland on February 24, 2013. The entire sermon can be accessed here: http://firstoakland.org/audio/2013_sermons/02242013/index.shtml

meetings, engage in acts of civil disobedience, write op-eds and letters to editors to change public discourses, engage in lobbying efforts, provide tutoring or workshops in skills one may have, etc. As always, to fall within the framework of p/reparations, these activities should be designed in accordance with the priorities of those most impacted by the colonial white supremacy one is seeking to help dismantle.

The word “p/reparations” itself points to the fact that any of these actions are imperfect and incomplete. And so when we look more closely at certain examples, some of the components described within the framework laid out here may not be (fully) present. To provide just one example to illustrate these issues within the “time and labor” category, I’d like to share with you a glimpse at some of the actions of a man I met and came to admire in 2007 when I spent two weeks volunteering with the Wheels of Justice bus, a biodiesel bus crisscrossing the United States to bring first-hand accounts of life under occupation in Iraq and Palestine to high schools, colleges, houses of worship, community centers and street corners. Bill, 65-years old at the time, was the driver of that bus, and had been driving it for nine months out of the year since 2000. In the summers, he drives buses for Pastors for Peace and buses taking high school students to New Orleans to help out with post-Katrina reconstruction. He receives no compensation for these 24/7 engagements other than room (often on the bus) and board. Nor does he have any savings that he was living off of. Bill would be considered poor, economically. He grew up in the foster care system and stayed in 17 different families by the time he was 18. As he described it, “they would use you as slave labor, take you for the summer to work on the farms and then send you back to the orphanage when they don’t need you anymore.” At 18, he joined the marines after recruiters made a strong sell to him, emphasizing that the training he would receive in the military would mitigate against the challenges he was facing having only completed formal schooling through the 8th grade. Not too long after he enlisted, U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War started, and he was sent there. He commented, “When we got there, they told us to be careful of the gooks. I was looking around trying to spot some kind of animal, assuming it was something that likes to bite people. But really that’s part of how they train you to kill, to not see others as human.” While there, he drove a flame-shooting tank which shot agent orange and “turned whole villages into crispy critters. That’s what we called them, we crispy crittered them. Touch them and they fall apart.” Transferring the driving skills he learned in Vietnam to driving buses for anti-war and anti-occupation projects is what he says keeps him alive today – he viscerally experienced his own survival as tied to others’ deaths and now experiences working against militarism as fundamental to continuing to live. The journey from the tanks to the buses was a difficult one, though, involving addictions, single fatherhood of two girls, self-imposed rehab (after his nine-year old asked, ‘If you die, who is going to take care of us?’), and struggling to make ends meet and to avoid his daughters being taken into the foster care system.

During the weeks I spent with Bill, I noticed that he listened intently to the speakers’ testimonies about life under occupation in Iraq and Palestine. While he was passionate about sharing his experiences in Vietnam in order to discourage young people from entering the military and to disillusion people of all ages who cling to the notion of the U.S. military as a benevolent force in the world, he did not seize space for this purpose but shared his experiences in Vietnam either when directly asked to or in one-on-one conversations. Bill, a white man, did not often talk in terms of anti-racism or racial justice or white supremacy or colonialism or reparations. He was, however, committed to constantly learning and developing an ever-evolving analysis based on the people he encountered along the way. For example, at one event, he had a long conversation with a Navajo woman about her pain surrounding indigenous people, including her boyfriend, being recruited for the Iraq war. Having asked her permission to do so, at a future event, he incorporated this issue of

“indigenous killing of indigenous in the service of our own colonizers” into what he shared. While he expresses deep distrust for the U.S. military, I do not know whether Bill sees whiteness as inherently oppressive or whether he thinks that all the land of the U.S. should be repatriated. I do know that if we recognize a key component of p/reparations as fundamentally transforming our lives in the service of dismantling oppressive institutions, he is arguably walking that path with greater integrity than many of the white people writing and teaching about these issues, myself included.

INCONCLUSION

Just as I believe guiding utopian visions are useful, I also believe guiding frameworks are important. They can help us maintain a rigorous analysis of what our work is and is not doing. However, it is important to beware of treating the frameworks themselves as complete and/or dismissing anything which does not perfectly conform to their strictures. Furthermore, while I’ve found myself thinking and speaking a lot in terms of p/reparations, I would like to emphasize that these ideas are not new, and this kind of work happens under various frameworks which may be more or less meaningful to different people. For example, at a recent gathering in Oakland to talk about these ideas, Patricia St. Onge commented:

My own work is culturally-based; which means that we recognize that we are all cultural beings and that informs how we move in the world. My consulting is called Seven Generations Consulting and Coaching. I chose that name because as a person of Haudenosaune descent, I take the long view; a seven generations perspective. I understand that we stand on the shoulders of the generations who came before us, and that the decisions we make now will have impact for seven generations. There may be a lot of overlap between that and p/reparations. It is a frame, just as p/reparations is a frame, and like any frame it becomes something you draw inside. We have to ask: what does it mean to take on that or any frame?¹⁶⁹

I don’t know exactly what all it means to take on the frame of p/reparations but, for the reasons outlined in this chapter, today I believe that it has a lot of potential for contributing to a process of decolonizing the white colonizer.

Ultimately, I believe there are no perfect practices possible and that there is no space of moral purity from which to act. So we need to commit ourselves to continuing to stumble through the messiness, trying various ideas out, bringing ourselves authentically to the table, and remaining open and engaged in the face of critiques. And we need to remain flexible, shifting our tactics according to the current moment. In this vein, perhaps it is useful to revisit the critiques of reconstructionism, abolitionism, and hybridity which I have offered. I believe it is actually impossible to predict or even determine how change happens. Due to this belief, I have grown weary of weighing in on debates about the comparative efficacy of attempting to create change through politics, law, civil disobedience, armed resurrection, boycotts, education, the arts, community organizing, creating alternative institutions, etc. Perhaps it is similarly futile to assess the comparative efficacy of white people working under reconstructionist, abolitionist, hybridity, or p/reparations frameworks. The work to be done is so immense that it strikes me as desirable to have people plugging in as much as

¹⁶⁹ June 17, 2012.

possible, with whatever capacities we have and with whatever frameworks help us to stay engaged and keep going – while simultaneously continuing to engage in the process of critique, constantly assessing whether the implications of the discourses and actions we are choosing at any given moment seem to be more or less decolonial or liberatory, seem to be leading towards greater life or fueling the deathliness of our current structures of domination.

While I see p/reparations as a philosophy and praxis encompassing multiple tactics, I think it is also important to remember that, regardless of the forms of p/reparations pursued or the scale at which they are enacted, individual redemption is not possible. We will all remain complicit with these systems of domination – albeit to varying degrees and in different ways – until they have been fundamentally transformed. In that sense, even our concrete material practices, while they may have important ameliorating effects at the local level, might currently be considered primarily pedagogical in nature (understanding that pedagogy is not just an intellectual process but that learning is also embodied and takes place through physical, material, spiritual, emotional, as well as intellectual practice), helping to transform our own as well as broader cultural frameworks. Reparative actions which attempt to develop alternatives to domination -- whether directed at internal, interpersonal, institutional or structural transformation -- are not solutions in and of themselves, but are part of an ongoing process of chipping away at this white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, capitalist colonial system writ large. My hope is that as we continue to chip away, new (or renewed) visions, energies, and possibilities will emerge that may be beyond what we can imagine right now, let alone what we can imagine as possible.

Vision can only be as effective and sturdy as our determination to practice, emphasis on the practice. Daily practice will bring about the necessary shifts in perception that make change possible. – M. Jacqui Alexander

CHAPTER TWO: **IMMOBILITY AND THE POSSESSIVE INVESTMENT IN WHITE U.S.-NESS**

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the geographical control of bodies has been a key technology of colonial white supremacy, expanding George Lipsitz's concept of "possessive investment in whiteness"¹⁷⁰ to speak of "possessive investment in white U.S.-ness." I explore the topic of decolonizing the white colonizer through a reflection on the ways in which both settling and mobility are impacted by racialized citizenships.

I begin with an analysis of a mural in San Francisco's Mission District, titled "Building Bridges of Solidarity: Breakin' Down Barriers!" This mural paints an alternative vision of life that is not rooted in U.S. or other colonial nationhood, and in which whiteness is non-existent. I then provide an analysis of the use of the trope of "the criminal" by both the nation-state and the prison industrial complex, and the ways in which these discourses are mobilized as threats to the white colonizer's "home." I argue that, for the white colonizer, one aspect of decolonization may require developing a relationship to "home" as a foreign concept. This, however, must be practiced not in the abstract, but in one's concrete circumstances, as I discuss through an analysis of the disconnect between Levinas' radical theories on ethical relations as rooted in responsibility for the other (including "the inability to occupy a place") and his political support for Zionism and the Israeli nation-state building project. Drawing on fieldnotes from my research in Palestine, as well as reflections on my own life as a white U.S. citizen, I discuss the banality of much of the white colonizer's production of violence, and the ways in which this is manifested in seizing the unilateral rights to both unhampered settling and mobility. I conclude the chapter with a reflection on my mother's illness and death, connecting the issue of geographical (im)mobility to that of social (im)mobility, and emphasizing the relationship of both to an unequal racialized distribution of premature death.

PAINTING AN ALTERNATIVE VISION: SOLIDARITY MURAL IN THE MISSION

On the corner of Capp Street and 24th Street in San Francisco's Mission District, there is a mural that was created in 2007 by young artists working with H.O.M.E.Y. (Homies Organizing the Mission to Empower Youth), in collaboration with over 200 community members. (See Figure 1) The mural is titled "Building Bridges of Solidarity: Breakin' Down Barriers!" The title panel summarizes the inspiration for the imagery: "From the heart of the Mission, to the barriers around the world that separate our families...La Lucha Continua!" A border around the title panel reads, in Arabic, English, and Spanish, "We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us!" (See Figure 2) The 117-foot long mural began with youth taking a neighborhood walk and brainstorming themes: "solidarity, blending ancient and modern, indigenous not illegal, walls and borders, fences don't fix problems, revolutions throughout history and old 'skool' transformations."¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.

¹⁷¹ Minutes from project coordinator Nancy Hernandez' presentation to the Visual Arts Committee Meeting August 15, 2007. Accessed here:
<http://www.sfgov3.org/archive.aspx?dept=3108&sub=3116&year=2007&dtype=3177&file=68482>



(Figure 1)

The mural itself is located along the back wall of a parking lot that is surrounded by a fence. One of the artists commented:

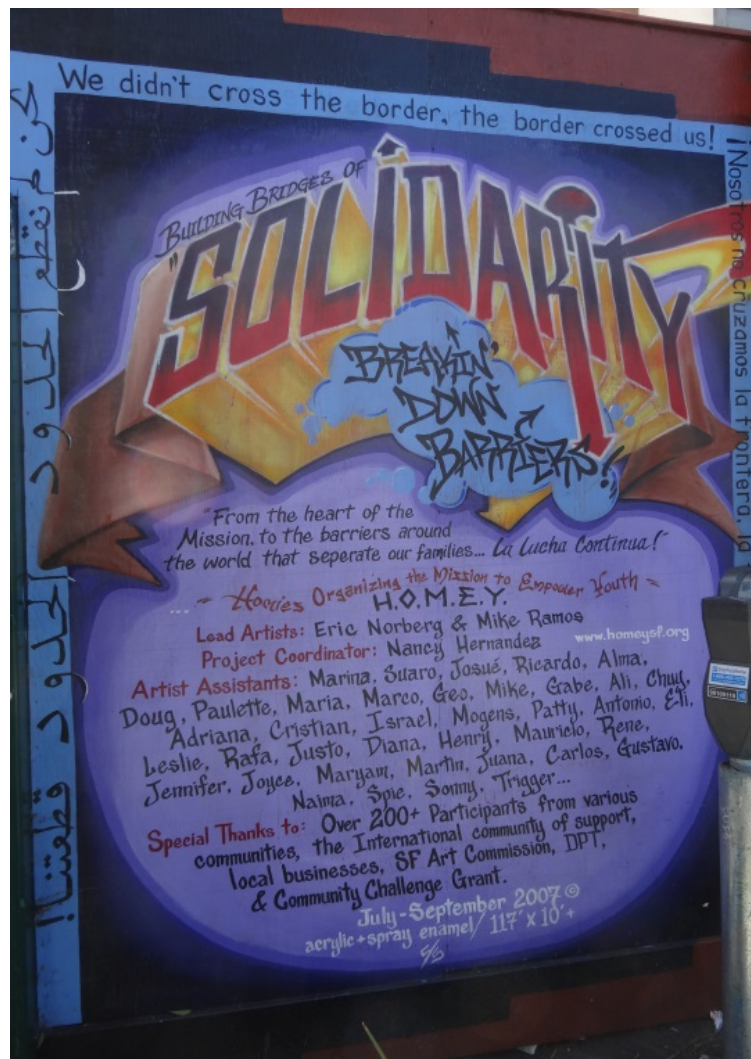
The fence all around here kind of gave us the basis for the theme here. We're commenting on a lot of stuff as far as content here. The theme is loosely about fences, walls and prisons in a sense being utilized to solve problems because this [the metal fence] is supposed to be put up to curb gang violence, which is not a healthy solution to a problem -- it's the gating and jailing of a community in a lot of ways. So we are making a comment about that and a comment about relating it not just to local issues but worldwide from the Mexican/American border immigration issue that is going on right now. And you've got the Palestine wall right here which is a big issue...Overall it is about solidarity of communities of color and oppressed people.¹⁷²

By connecting local and global issues of “gating and jailing” people through “fences, walls and prisons,” the H.O.M.E.Y. artists are offering similar analyses to those of postcolonial urban theorists.¹⁷³ While world systems and dependency theorists rooted in Marxist urban theory emphasized center/periphery models of geographical disparities (e.g. First World/Third World), postcolonial urban theorists have pointed out that there are peripheries in centers and centers in

¹⁷² <http://www.amoeba.com/blog/2007/08/jamoeblog/mural-captures-solidarity-of-oppressed-communities.html>

¹⁷³ Thank you to Hiba Bou Akar for helping me to think through these connections and deepening my understanding of urban theory.

peripheries. They point, for example, to colonial practices enacted in so-called First World cities through ghettoization, gentrification, and incarceration.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, postcolonial urban theorists expand the capitalist critiques of Marxist urban theory to emphasize the ways in which these spatial processes produce racialized and gendered geographies as well as identities.¹⁷⁵ Of course, the structures producing unequal material conditions of life as well as the discourses producing identities (and the meanings attached to them) are continually contested and negotiated. The Solidarity mural participates in that process.



(Figure 2)

¹⁷⁴ Loïc J. D Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: a Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity, 2008); Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996); Teresa Pires do Rio Caldeira, *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993); Rodriguez, *Forced Passages*.

¹⁷⁵ Jane M Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996); Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004).

Just as is the case with language, images (such as murals) construct our realities. Not in a simple fill-the-blank-slate way, but in complex co-constructed relationships. Michel Foucault¹⁷⁶ has argued that the work done by visual representation depends both on the creator(s) of a work of art and those viewing it. As such, its meaning is not fixed. However, both the creator(s) and the viewer(s) bring our preexisting frames of reference into the creative and interpretive processes. As Stuart Hall explains, we “interpret the completed signs in terms of the wider realms of social ideology – the general beliefs, conceptual frameworks and value systems of society.”¹⁷⁷ Society, of course, is not monolithic, and one component of social change efforts includes struggles over the means and the meanings of representation, i.e. the power to proliferate certain images and discourses over others, and the power to promote certain interpretations as authoritative.¹⁷⁸ So while, as Michel de Certeau points out, we cannot predetermine how any given person will “read” a “text,” he also argues that the words and images we (re)create and (re)interpret have effects in the world: “the story...does not limit itself to telling about a movement. It *makes* it.”¹⁷⁹ However, as Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argue,

It is not enough to say that art is constructed. We have to ask: constructed for whom? And in conjunction with which ideologies and discourses? In this sense, art is a representation not so much in a mimetic as a political sense, as a delegation of voice.¹⁸⁰

To the extent, then, that our interpretations are an integral part of artistic creations, we are co-responsible for the ideologies and discourses we thus promote. I return to these issues in Chapter Three. Here I simply seek to highlight that while my interpretation of this mural is certainly not the only (possible) one, it seeks to do a particular kind of work, i.e. contribute to processes of decolonizing the white colonizer.

As the mural is located in a parking lot, it was difficult to photograph all the details, however the photos below (Figures 3 – 10) hopefully provide a sense of the artwork:

¹⁷⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things; an Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

¹⁷⁷ Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 39.

¹⁷⁸ Leigh Raiford, “Lynching, Visuality, and the Un/Making of Blackness,” *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 20, no. 1 (2006): 22–31.

¹⁷⁹ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 81.

¹⁸⁰ Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Untinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 180.



(Figure 3)



(Figure 4)



(Figure 5)



(Figure 6)



(Figure 7)



(Figure 8)



(Figure 9)



(Figure 10)

From left to right, the first panel in the mural depicts a young person looking out the window of a San Francisco bus, marker in hand, as though drawing and/or writing – in short, creating – the world in which s/he lives. On this bus is also a circle of young people learning from and being watched over by revolutionary elders. The advertisements on the bus are for jobs, education, housing, and health. Outside the window, there is a bus moving in the opposite direction: the bus “Empire.” The next panel depicts a May Day demonstration, with banners and signs reading “We’re indigenous 2 this land,” “No one is Illegal,” “Si Se Puede The Workers Struggle Has No Borders,” and “Who’s the illegal alien, Pilgrim?” There are Zapatistas coming down from the hills in the background. Flying above the demonstrators’ heads is one of only two flags depicted in the entire mural: the Unity Flag representing “the coming together of all peoples of the Original Nations of Great Turtle Island, North America, A'nowara'ko:wa.”¹⁸¹ The other flag featured in the mural is that of the United Farm Workers. The U.S./Mexico border wall, decorated with crosses indicating lives lost in crossings, begins in this panel, and continues into the next one. In this panel, as it recedes, it is swallowed up by the sea. (*Miro el mar atacar la cerca...The sea cannot be fenced, el mar does not stop at borders...This land was Mexican once, was Indian always and is. And will be again.*¹⁸²) The sun, visually echoed in the Unity Flag, shines over all. Subsequent panels feature Aztec and Mayan imagery; a symbol of Sureño-Norteño unity; memorials to youth who have been the victims of gang violence; members of the Black Panthers, Brown Berets, and People’s Army; depictions of “black brown unity” and intergenerational “old skool meets new skool” interactions; a declaration of “amnesty for all”; an image of the Virgen de Guadalupe; the Bay Bridge; a group of Palestinians breaking through a wall with signs reading, “Breaking down Borders” and “OUR MISSION: Self-Determination for ALL!”; an enormous blue hand breaking through chains and barbed wire; and an image of seven men behind bars declaring “Libertad Para Los Siete de La Raza!!! Unidad entre los pueblos Latinoamericanos de la Misión”.¹⁸³

The title panel revealed that the city had funded the mural – a fact which intrigued me, given its content. And, indeed, there was quite a bit of controversy that erupted over the mural. However, all the conflict was centered around the Palestine panel. The Jewish Community Relations Council and the Anti-Defamation League had voiced objections to this panel to the San Francisco Arts Commission and, as a result, payment of the stipends that the 39 youth artists working with H.O.M.E.Y. were supposed to receive for their work was delayed due to the city holding on to the grant money until the conflict was resolved. Two months of organizing and debates ensued, with the Arts Commission ultimately approving a revised image designed by H.O.M.E.Y. In the revised image, the break in the wall is no longer in the shape of Israel, the woman who had a Keffiyeh covering her face now wears it as a headscarf, and blue sky and an olive tree were added as symbols of hope. (The olive tree is very malleable as an image – while “extending an olive branch” is a common phrase used as a metaphor for offering a truce, within the Palestinian liberation movement the olive tree is a symbol of the many trees and people who have been uprooted yet remain steadfast

¹⁸¹ <http://anowarakowa.blogspot.com/2011/11/unity-flag.html>

¹⁸² Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 24–5.

¹⁸³ In 1969, seven Latino men, many active in community organizing and providing college readiness courses and health care, were accused – and ultimately acquitted – of burglary and murdering a police officer. The case highlighted issues of racial profiling and police brutality. To read more about the case, see <http://www.unz.org/Pub/Ramparts-1971mar-00019>

in the face of occupation.¹⁸⁴) The original pre-altered image of the Palestine panel looked like this (Figure 11)¹⁸⁵:



(Figure 11)

In both its original and altered versions, the wall in the Palestine panel is contiguous with the U.S./Mexico wall – the two walls bleed into each other, continue each other. In real life, the surveillance and “security” systems of both walls have been partially built by the same company, Elbit Systems (an Israeli company which also sells drones to the United States) and its U.S. subsidiary, Elbit Systems of America (which also owns Kollsmann, a subcontractor of Boeing).¹⁸⁶ However, while the visual imagery in the mural invites comparison between the walls built by the U.S. and Israel, neither of these countries is actually named. The names which appear on the wall are: Turtle Island, Aztlan, Ohlone, Vietnam, Iraq, Ireland, Palestine, Quilombo, Haiti, Okinawa, Roma, Maori, East Timor, Afrika, Afrikan Diaspora, Philippines, Moro, Chamoru, Puerto Rico, Dalit, Viequez, and Hawai'i. Walls and chains are being broken, and literal and figurative bridges are being built between places and people, between the living and the spirits. While indicated by walls, chains, bars, and barbed wire, the places and faces of empire are not depicted. The figures on the

¹⁸⁴ See, for example, this poster, “Steadfast as an Olive Tree”: <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/steadfast-as-an-olive-tree>

¹⁸⁵ Accessed here: https://sites.google.com/a/araborganizing.org/www/IMG_3108.JPG.

¹⁸⁶ For more on Elbit Systems, see <http://www.stopthewall.org/downloads/pdf/companiesbuildingwall.pdf> and <http://www.globalexchange.org/economicactivism/elbit/why>. The cooperation between Israeli and U.S. “security” forces is also highlighted by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in this 2010/11 Issue Memo on “U.S.-Israel Homeland Security Cooperation”: http://www.aipac.org/~media/Publications/Policy%20and%20Politics/AIPAC%20Analyses/Issue%20Memos/2010/11/Homeland_Security.pdf

“Empire” bus are shadows, in contrast to the particularities of the faces of the revolutionaries. There are no white people depicted. And the colonial countries remain unnamed even as they are evoked via the naming of those people and places resisting them. Words and images are powerful, they literally (re)inscribe, call forth. To me, this mural enacts an understanding of this, in the words and images (not) used. As Anzaldúa explains,

Invoked art is communal and speaks of everyday life. It is dedicated to the validation of humans; that is, it makes people hopeful, happy, secure, and it can have negative effects as well, which propel one towards a search for validation.¹⁸⁷

I choose words, images, and body sensations and animate them to impress them on my consciousness, thereby making changes in my belief system and reprogramming my consciousness. This involves looking my inner demons in the face, then deciding which I want in my psyche. Those I don't want, I starve; I feed them no words, no images, no feelings. I spend no time with them, share not my home with them.¹⁸⁸

Beyond the public statements made by some of the artists discussing that the purpose of the mural is to represent solidarity between oppressed people in the world breaking down borders,¹⁸⁹ I do not know the individual or collective intentions of any of the artists. However, to me, the mural feels like a manifestation of what Anzaldúa describes in the two quotes above – powerful both in its “validation of humans” and in its silences and absences, that which is being starved, the demons which are not welcome here.

Those objecting to the Palestine panel were arguably engaging in a “search for validation.” For example, at the public hearings held by the city to discuss the mural, multiple local residents who identified as Jewish and as supporters of Israel argued that the mural was contradicting its stated purpose of breaking down barriers by creating a wall between “the Jewish community” and H.O.M.E.Y. They argued that the wall built by Israel is not liked by anyone, including Israelis, but is necessary to save people's lives from suicide bombers, and that the image of it being broken through by Palestinians is “a frightening image to Jews living in the Mission.” These speakers all conflated critiques of Israel with attacks on Judaism, an equivocation which was challenged by other Jewish-identified speakers at the meetings who spoke out in support of (and some of whom had helped paint) the mural; these speakers also challenged the narrative that it is primarily Israelis who are in need of protection from acts of violence. Interestingly, most of the speakers critiquing the mural emphasized that they were very happy with the rest of it, that it was educational and inspirational. There were no objections to the covering of other revolutionary faces in the mural, even though one of the changes made to the revised image was responding to the critique that the Palestinian woman's covered face evoked terrorism. And there were no objections to the many ways in which the borders of the United States, and that nation itself, are arguably portrayed as illegitimate.

Why the silences around the mural's denying the legitimacy of the United States? One friend active in the Palestinian liberation movement hypothesized that, in the context of San Francisco, you have many “PEPs” – people who are “Progressive Except on Palestine.” For such people, this person suggested, supporting uprisings against the U.S. can actually serve to strengthen their resistance to

¹⁸⁷ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 89.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 92-3.

¹⁸⁹ <http://www.sfgov3.org/archive.aspx?dept=3108&sub=3116&year=2007&dtype=3177&file=68482>

Palestinian liberation in that they position themselves as supporters of anti-colonial movements while arguing that the case of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict does not fall into that category. This analysis could, indeed, explain the rhetorical strategies of many of the speakers critiquing the mural at the public hearings. However, in a context of a U.S. “war on terror” in which billions are being invested in border enforcement and deportations, anxieties are expressed in public discourses around “threats to the American way of life,” Ethnic Studies and bilingual programs are under attack, affirmative action programs are being dismantled, the prison industrial complex continues to expand alongside manufactured fears of black and brown “criminals,” and the topic of reparations and repatriation of land are virtually taboo, it remains intriguing that there was no resistance by anyone at the public hearings (or online, based on an extensive web search), progressive or conservative, objecting to the mural’s depiction of indigenous and people of color insurrections and the visual erasure of the United States and whiteness. Jon Jackson mused that this might be because there is no iconography in the mural that would trigger those who might object to the mural’s message, i.e. there is no U.S. flag being altered, destroyed or opposed, no image of U.S. borders, etc.¹⁹⁰ The fact that it was a successful compromise to change the hole in the Palestine panel from resembling the shape of Israel to an amorphous hole seems to support this hypothesis. The mural relies on the viewer having a certain lexicon through which to interpret it – the extent of its message may not be legible to casual viewers in the absence of iconography which makes them feel addressed.

While some might argue that the absence of triggering U.S. empire iconography renders the mural less radical (exemplified in that it did not incite opposition), that absence can also be seen as precisely part of the power of this mural. The “search for validation” by Israeli or U.S. citizens, by remaining invested in the persistence of a colonial nation-state, is not equivalent to the “search for validation” Anzaldúa discusses in relation to people who have been dehumanized by such states. In fact, we might consider the absence of white people and other iconography of empire in the mural to be an act of what Fanon describes as “revolutionary violence,” which he deems a necessary component of decolonization. Decolonization is defined by Fanon as “quite simply the replacing of a certain ‘species’ of men [sic] by another ‘species’ of men [sic]...the veritable creation of new men [sic].”¹⁹¹ This is not a vision of simply turning the tables of oppressor and oppressed, colonizer and colonized, but of abolishing the colonial relation altogether: “colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence.”¹⁹² The goal is not dialogue or negotiation or coexistence, but the replacement of a species (e.g. those invested in white U.S.-ness) for whom colonization and oppression is thinkable/actable. The agents in the mural are literally moving in a different direction than the Empire bus – the riders of which are already rendered as shadows. The mural is about solidarity, unity and breaking through barriers – this necessitates refusing to spend time with or share homes with colonial forces, forces which are antithetical to coexistence. While the mural acknowledges the present moment as one of struggle to create an ethical world, that future world is also already being asserted in the here-and-now by a) images that are not only of resistance/protest but also of hanging out and enjoying life, and b) refusing to even engage the terms, including the names (e.g. United States, Israel) and the iconography (e.g. flags of nation-states, white heroes) of the colonial forces whose erasure is necessary for justice. Rather than a visual depiction of two warring forces between which a viewer could “choose sides,” with the implication that either side

¹⁹⁰ Personal conversation.

¹⁹¹ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 29–30.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, 48.

could be considered legitimate and/or victorious, as a viewer of the mural one can either imagine oneself participating in the struggle for, and a life of, justice – or on the Empire bus, which is almost out of the picture (on the far left panel of the mural) and symbolically out of the future.

To me, this mural provides powerful lessons in regards to the question of decolonizing the white colonizer. Regarding the absence of white people in the mural, it is not that there is no role for those currently socialized as white to play in decolonization – in fact, everyone was invited to help paint the mural. However, in contrast to common depictions of the abolition of slavery which, as Françoise Vergès analyzes, frequently depict white people as saviors (the iconographic images are of tied-up or chained slaves and freedom is “shown as having been a gift given to the “Blacks” by the “Whites””¹⁹³), in the mural people currently socialized as white who participate in the liberation movements are de-centered from the narrative, relegated to the background, invited to participate in the production – but not as leaders or saviors.

HOME AS A FOREIGN CONCEPT

The mural identifies borders, barriers, fences, prisons, walls, and separation as central to what must be broken down in liberatory struggle. This points to the way in which a key technology of white supremacist colonialism is the geographical control of bodies. This control has taken many forms: genocide, displacement (through kidnapping, occupations, colonization, warfare, deportations, environmental devastation, the creation of economic refugees due to unfair trade agreements or the relocation of employment opportunities, gentrification), imprisonment, internment, slavery, indentured servitude, nation-state border creation and enforcement, virtual walls (e.g. Jim Crow laws, redlining, racial covenants, immigration quotas, citizenship requirements) and literal and virtual walls in “private” domains (e.g. ghettoization via gated communities, gentrification, discrimination, intimidation).

Many of these forms of bodily control rely on the naturalization of the nation-state (and its institutions) as the legitimate arbitrator over who belongs where, and the related construction of threats or enemies, both from “outside” and “within.” Gilmore argues that

in the contemporary world, racism is the ordinary means through which dehumanization achieves ideological normality, while, at the same time, the practice of dehumanizing people produces racial categories...Where classification and militarism collide is in the area of defining an enemy.¹⁹⁴

Similarly, Aimé Césaire describes colonization as “thingification”¹⁹⁵ and Andrea Smith points out that this reduction of people to “things” renders certain bodies inherently violable. She goes on to

¹⁹³ Françoise Vergès, “The Slave at the Louvre,” *Manifesta Journal* 16 (2012): 20. Accessible here: <http://www.manifestajournal.org/sites/default/files/issues-pdf/mj16-regret-and-other-back-pages/MJ-16-screen.pdf>. I learned of this exhibit thanks to a talk given by Ruth Gilmore at the 2012 Decolonize the City conference in Berlin. The movie *Lincoln* (2012) is a recent example of such narratives of white heroes giving the gift of freedom to black slaves. Also see Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, for an extensive discussion of the hegemony of Eurocentric representations of history and the world’s peoples, enabled by control over the means of (cinematic) production.

¹⁹⁴ Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 243–4.

¹⁹⁵ Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 42.

elaborate the role patriarchy plays in this process: “In order to colonize a people whose society was not hierarchical, colonizers must first naturalize hierarchy through instituting patriarchy.”¹⁹⁶ In Paula Gunn Allen’s words, the white colonizers had to convince “both men and women that a woman’s proper place was under the authority of her husband.”¹⁹⁷

When resisting these normalizing designations of “proper places,” however, it is important to beware of bolstering one manifestation of oppression while fighting another. For example, the recent celebrations over the “right” of women to now serve in combat roles in the U.S. military (a location previously seen – and still seen by many – as not being a “proper place” for women) fail to acknowledge that this is a key institution in the maintenance of white supremacist U.S. colonialism/imperialism. The same can be argued in regards to the strategies of people of color, undocumented migrants, and/or queer people seeking (and/or being offered) recognition, respect and (full) citizenship through serving in the U.S. military, e.g. through the federal Dream Act rules or the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.¹⁹⁸

Lipsitz speaks of a “possessive investment in whiteness”¹⁹⁹ to discuss white people’s active participation in recreating a white supremacist system wherein whiteness has “cash value,” for example, as a result of discriminatory housing markets (including gentrification processes), unequal education, the role of social networks in securing employment, intergenerational transfer of wealth via inheritances, a discriminatory prison industrial complex, slavery, and cheap labor. I argue that we need to examine how this “possessive investment in whiteness” is entangled with what I call a “possessive investment in U.S.-ness.” In his book, Lipsitz offers important critiques of anti-immigrant sentiments, of the exploitation of undocumented labor, and of what he calls “the new patriotism.” However, his critique has to do with a particular form of U.S. patriotism rather than with the problem of possessive investment in the U.S. per se. For example, the concept “immigrant” itself is left unquestioned, rather than asking, as Andrea Smith did at the “Race and Religion at the Golden Gate” panel: “What are the political assumptions that make the category ‘immigrant’ legible?”²⁰⁰ The possessive investment in U.S.-ness is a means through which many people, not just “whites,” participate in colonial white supremacy.²⁰¹ However, as stated in the introduction, I am choosing “to stay on my side of the street” in this dissertation and to thus remain focused specifically on white investment in U.S.-ness, which Smith refers to as white investment in Nativeness.²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ Smith, *Conquest*, 23.

¹⁹⁷ Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions: With a New Preface* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 38.

¹⁹⁸ For more detailed analyses on this issue, see Tamara Nopper, “Why I Oppose Repealing DADT & Passage of the DREAM Act,” 2010, <http://bandung1955.wordpress.com/2010/09/19/1156/>; Lucas, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Serve”; Smith, “Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy.”

¹⁹⁹ Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.

²⁰⁰ October 30, 2012, Pacific School of Religion.

²⁰¹ As Tuck and Yang argue, “the attainment of equal legal and cultural entitlements [via the U.S. government] is actually an investment in settler colonialism.” Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor.” For further analysis of investments in U.S.-ness by people of color, including debates over the term “settlers of color” and a discussion of indigenous activism which by focusing on recognition does not question the legitimacy of the U.S. per se, see Smith, “Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy.”

²⁰² Smith, “Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy.”

The term “nativism” does not, in dominant discourse, refer to indigenous resurgence but is used to describe mostly white political philosophies which center anti-immigration. Interestingly, some white “nativists,” such as Samuel Huntington, attempt to create coalitions between white and black U.S. citizens, in particular vis-à-vis the threat of a “Mexican invasion.”²⁰³ The irony here looms large within Huntington’s writing, given that he explains that his anxiety over this particular group of “immigrants” is rooted in their being the only “immigrant group in U.S. history [that] has asserted or could assert a historical claim to U.S. territory.”²⁰⁴ Indigenous peoples are completely erased from the narrative. This is not surprising since, as Smith points out, indigenous erasure is necessary for non-Native people to feel they can rightfully claim ownership over land in this area they named the United States.²⁰⁵

The trope of the “criminal” is key to both possessive investment in whiteness and possessive investment in U.S.-ness. In U.S. nationalist discourses, dark-skinned migrants are criminalized and dehumanized as “illegal aliens”; in white supremacist discourses dark-skinned bodies (regardless of documentation) are depicted, dehumanized, and targeted as paradigmatic “criminals.” In an era in which naming race as the basis of domination is no longer acceptable, discourses of (il)legality and criminality function in purportedly race-neutral (colorblind) ways. Joseph Nevins argues that these discourses are so effective because of a dominant perception of the law as ahistorical and apolitical, resting on immutable principles.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, Michelle Alexander argues that it is hard to mobilize mass resistance to the prison industrial complex because those incarcerated are perceived not as the victims of injustice but as having “chosen” to commit crimes.²⁰⁷

There is, of course, the issue of what is and is not constructed as a crime. For example, instead of criminalizing the conditions which lead to migration (e.g. warfare, environmental destruction, and unfair trade policies such as NAFTA), the migrant is criminalized. This requires, as Nevins points out, that the territorial state maintain a monopoly not just on force but also on the legitimate means of movement. This control of residence and movement maintains a racial and economic “global apartheid,” leading Nevins to argue that freedom of movement and residence must be considered basic human rights.²⁰⁸ However, in addition to the issue of what is and is not constructed as a

²⁰³ Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America’s National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004); Samuel P. Huntington, “The Hispanic Challenge,” *Foreign Policy* 141, no. 2 (2004): 30–45.

²⁰⁴ Huntington, “The Hispanic Challenge,” 36.

²⁰⁵ In his book, Huntington mentions indigenous nations; he argues that the U.S., after centuries of conflict with indigenous peoples, *ceded land to them* (note the way in which rightful ownership is asserted through this linguistic construction designating the U.S. as the ceder and indigenous nations as the recipients). He asserts that such conflicts have thus been resolved. This argument is a variation on the disappeared Native trope, in that the Native is relegated to a space beyond the national boundaries of the U.S. and is no longer perceived as a threat. Huntington writes, “Americans fought Indians fairly continuously for over two centuries; Indian tribes were recognized in American law as separate dependent nations; and they are, apart from the Puerto Ricans, the only ethnic groups that have been explicitly assigned pieces of territory as theirs.” Huntington, *Who Are We?*, 276.

²⁰⁶ Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the “Illegal Alien” and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

²⁰⁷ Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. (New York: New Press, 2010).

²⁰⁸ Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper*, 184. The maintenance of racial and economic apartheid through control of residence and movement can also be observed at the urban and national scales; see, for example, Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Thomas M. Shapiro and Melvin L. Oliver, *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Meizhu Lui, Barbara Robles, and Betsy Leondar-Wright, *Color of Wealth: The Story Behind the US Racial*

criminal act, Alexander documents in great detail the fact that white people “choose” to commit identical acts at the same or higher rates as people of color – but racialized surveillance, arrest, and sentencing practices result in the vastly disproportionate incarceration of black and Latino people.²⁰⁹ This process is fueled by images and discourses of white innocence and dark criminality, images that have become so entrenched that it is easier for white job applicants *with* a criminal record to receive employment than black applicants *without* one.²¹⁰

Currently, one of the major processes expanding the prison industrial complex is the increased targeting and detention of undocumented people.²¹¹ And, as Sylvanna Falcón documents, there has been a steady increase in the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border since the 1982 Department of Defense Authorization Act “nullified a one-hundred year statute prohibiting cooperation between the army and civilian law enforcement.”²¹² This militarization has turned the border into a war zone. (US Citizenship and Immigration Services is now part of the Department of Homeland Security.) This has also led to an increase in rape because, as Falcón reminds us, “sexual assault is in the arsenal of military strategies.”²¹³ Moreover, as she points out, “the absence of legal documents positions undocumented women as “illegal” and as having committed a crime...the existence of undocumented women causes national *in*security, and they are so criminalized that their bodily integrity does not matter to the state.”²¹⁴

From the point of view of the white colonizer, the stakes are often described in terms of creating and protecting one’s home. As Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling point out, home-making processes often involve carving out spaces of exclusivity, with home and belonging defined in opposition to others who, should they enter into ‘our’ home-place, are deemed out-of-(‘their’)-place.²¹⁵ And Benedict Anderson argues that the emotional attachment to the nation-state itself is fostered

Wealth Divide (New York: The New Press, 2006); Melvin Oliver, “Sub-Prime as a Black Catastrophe,” *The American Prospect* September 20, 2008: <http://prospect.org/article/sub-prime-black-catastrophe>.

²⁰⁹ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*. See also the resources compiled by Critical Resistance:

<http://criticalresistance.org/resources/> and the documentary Visions of Abolition: <http://www.visionsofabolition.org/>

²¹⁰ Devah Pager, “The Mark of a Criminal Record,” *American Journal of Sociology* 108, no. 5 (2003): 937–975; Devah Pager, Bruce Western, and Bart Bonikowski, “Discrimination in a Low-Wage Labor Market A Field Experiment,” *American Sociological Review* 74, no. 5 (2009): 777–799.

²¹¹ Seth Wessler, “How Immigration Reform Could Expand Incarceration of Immigrants,” *Colorlines*. February 6, 2013: http://colorlines.com/archives/2013/02/how_immigration_reform_could_mean_more_incarceration_of_immigrants.html.

²¹² Sylvanna Falcón, ““National Security” and the Violation of Women: Militarized Border Rape at the US-Mexico Border,” in *Color of Violence*, ed. Incite! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge: South End Press, 2006): 119. These developments have effects beyond the border regions as well. On the militarization of the U.S. police forces see, for example, Peter B. Kraska, *Militarizing the American Criminal Justice System: The Changing Roles of the Armed Forces and the Police* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001). Also see Ellen Moore (dissertation forthcoming) on the development of “militarized common sense” on college campuses.

²¹³ Falcón, ““National Security” and the Violation of Women: Militarized Border Rape at the US-Mexico Border,” 120.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 121. Bodies deemed “out of place” are also frequently described as “impure.” Smith, *Conquest*, points to the ways in which this trope continues to justify sexual violence against women of color and indigenous women. There is a history of quarantining and fumigating migrants entering the United States (<http://angelisland.org/history/quarantine-station/>) and of characterizing non-white bodies as “dirty.” See also Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Mike Davis tracks how this discourse is used to criminalize homeless people as belonging to dirty, drug-filled, unsafe places; see Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London; New York: Verso, 1990).

²¹⁵ Alison Blunt and Robyn M Dowling, *Home* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006).

through discourses of the nation as home and the place of kinship.²¹⁶ These discourses are naturalized in schools, where children color in the lines on maps and “learn to divide the world”²¹⁷ and its inhabitants, placing people in their/our proper places. These mapping projects socialize students into what Dwyer and Jones call a “white socio-spatial epistemology” which assumes discrete and bounded objects and enables an “easy and innocent denial of any connection between spaces of privilege and those of suffering.”²¹⁸

As a result of analyses of the immense violence that ensues from these nation-state-based home-making-and-protecting processes, a number of theorists have been developing alternative visions to nationalism. Drawing on Paolo Virno’s work, Peter Nyers argues for choosing defection and exodus as a politics of “engaged withdrawal” from the sovereign state.²¹⁹ Jacqui Alexander takes up June Jordan’s question – “What if we declared ourselves *perpetual* refugees in solidarity with all refugees?” – and offers an invitation of “Not citizen. Not naturalized citizen. Not immigrant. Not undocumented. Not illegal alien. Not permanent resident. Not resident alien. But refugees fleeing some terrible atrocity far too threatening to engage, ejected out of the familiar into some unknown still to be revealed. Refugees forced to create out of the raw smithy of fire a shape different than our inheritance, with no blueprints, no guarantees.”²²⁰ Avtar Brah offers the concept of “diaspora space” as a concept which accounts for “a homing desire, as distinct from a desire for a ‘homeland’...[and] foregrounds the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of ‘staying put’.”²²¹ Gloria Anzaldúa suggests making the borders themselves home – the bridges, the “spaces between worlds, spaces I call nepantla, a Nahuatl word meaning tierra entre medio. Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. Nepantla es tierra desconocida, and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement.”²²² Stewart Motha advocates living in the fragility of liminal space and argues that decolonization ultimately requires “eschew[ing] a sovereign mode of being” and an end to nationhood itself.²²³

While Andrea Smith agrees that the nation-state form of governance must be fundamentally transformed, she argues that most critiques of nationhood take a Western understanding of the concept for granted, in which the subject is assumed to be an “individualized self who connects with others through a fiction of nationhood that then positions itself over and against others who are not part of the nation.”²²⁴ This need not be the case, however. In fact, Smith goes on to argue that

²¹⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2006).

²¹⁷ John Willinsky, *Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire’s End* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

²¹⁸ Dwyer and Jones III, “White Socio-spatial Epistemology,” 214.

²¹⁹ Peter Nyers, *Rethinking Refugees: Beyond States of Emergency* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 23.

²²⁰ M. Jacqui Alexander, “Remembering *This Bridge*, Remembering Ourselves: Yearning, Memory, and Desire,” in *This Bridge We Call Home*, eds. Gloria Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating (New York and London: Routledge, 2002): 87-8.

²²¹ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 16.

²²² Gloria Anzaldúa, “Preface: (Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces,” in *This Bridge We Call Home*, eds. Gloria Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating (New York and London: Routledge, 2002): 1.

²²³ Stewart Motha, “‘Begging to Be Black’ Liminality and Critique in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 27, no. 7–8 (2010): 303. On the necessity of decolonial processes moving beyond nationalism, see also Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright, “Decolonizing Resistance, Challenging Colonial States,” *Social Justice* 35, no. 3 (2008): 120–138.

²²⁴ Smith, “Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy,” 81.

sweeping critiques of nationalism can actually serve to re-marginalize Native peoples' struggles for sovereignty:

If one understands oneself as fundamentally constituted through relationship with all of creation and other peoples, then nationhood is not defined as being against other peoples, but through radical relationality. Nationhood is by definition expansive rather than insular. Consequently, the desire to liberate Native peoples from nationalism can reinstate what Elizabeth Povinelli describes as a tradition-free and nation-free liberal subject free from past encumbrances. The liberal subject articulates itself, she suggests, as an autological subject completely self-determining over and against the “genealogical” subject (i.e. the indigenous subject) that is trapped within tradition determined by the past and the future (Povinelli 2006). Essentially, then, this call for “no nationalism” can rely on a primitivizing discourse that positions a simple, premodern indigenous subject locked in history as a foil against the complex cosmopolitan diasporic subject.²²⁵

Rather than dismissing the concept of nation altogether, Smith argues that it is right-wing heteropatriarchal models of the nation-state, in which “elites govern the rest through violence and domination” which must be challenged.²²⁶ Her work identifies alternative articulations of nationhood and sovereignty by indigenous women that are rooted in responsibility for the land and liberation for all peoples.²²⁷

In regards to the question of decolonizing the white colonizer, however, specifically the white U.S. citizen, strategies of national as well as diasporic subject-formation need to be engaged cautiously – we are already inclined to see ourselves as protectors of the land, benevolent and generous in our interactions with others, and entitled both to whatever we have acquired and to move freely around the world. As with whiteness, it is important that we claim the privileges bestowed on us as a result of our U.S. citizenship – as well as our complicity, thus, in the domination of others. Rather than seeking ever greater inclusion in the fruits of this empire-nation, the goal should be its abolition – rather than its reform, which serves to strengthen its legitimacy. There are important lessons to learn here from the prison abolition movement. Prison abolition activists recognize that, in the face of enormous brutalities, there is a need to deal with certain reforms in the here and now even while having the ultimate goal of creating enough alternatives to crowd out the prison industrial complex rather than strengthening it through investing more resources in the name of reform. Similarly, in regards to the U.S. nation-state, there may also be a need to make demands of the state, and to challenge and reform destructive policies – even while the ultimate analysis centers its illegitimacy and the ultimate goal remains its abolition. Perhaps the U.S. nation-state will ultimately be crowded out by enough alternatives, whether those take the form other nationhoods (that function under logics of “radical relationality” rather than dominance) and/or alternatives to nations. In the meantime, however, it might be useful for white U.S. citizens to cultivate a relationship to home as a foreign concept, to home as something that cannot be ethically achieved under current circumstances.

²²⁵ Ibid, 81-2.

²²⁶ Andrea Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right: The Gendered Politics of Unlikely Alliances* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 271.

²²⁷ Smith, *Native Americans and the Christian Right*; Smith, “Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy.”

This cultivation is not necessarily straight-forward, and it must be practiced not in the abstract but in one's concrete circumstances. For example, Emmanuel Levinas argued that ethical relations involve being held hostage to an Other, moving away from the imperative of self-preservation and towards an imperative responsibility for the other, the neighbor.²²⁸ He asserted that

One has to respond to one's right to be, not by referring to some abstract and anonymous law, or judicial entity, but because of one's fear for the Other. My being-in-the-world...my being at home, have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing?...A fear for all the violence and murder my existing might generate, in spite of its conscious and intentional innocence...It is the fear of occupying someone else's place with the Da of my Dasein; it is the inability to occupy a place, a profound utopia.²²⁹

And yet Levinas, known as a philosopher of love due to such radical writings, identified politically as a Zionist and supported the Israeli nation-state building project. In 1982, right after the Sabra and Shatila massacre, he was asked in an interview whether for the Israeli the 'other' is not above all the Palestinian. He replied:

My definition of the other is completely different. The other is the neighbour, who is not necessarily kin, but who can be. And in that sense, if you're for the other, you're for the neighbour. But if your neighbour attacks another neighbour or treats him unjustly, what can you do? Then alterity takes on another character, in alterity we can find an enemy, or at least then we are faced with the problem of knowing who is right and who is wrong, who is just and who is unjust. There are people who are wrong.²³⁰

This response appears to take for granted that it is the Palestinian who would necessarily be attacking the Israeli, that it is not just as possible that the Israeli might be attacking the Israeli or that the Israeli might be attacking the Palestinian or that the Palestinian might be attacking the Palestinian or that someone who identifies as neither Palestinian nor Israeli might be the attacker or the attacked. Rather, in the context of the question and his response, his assertion that "there are people who are wrong" relegates Palestinians a priori to a status, an identity, of wrong – and hence not recognizable as other, as neighbor, as kin. The abstract universal ethics falls apart in the concrete political situation in which an enemy is required to justify one's own claiming of a particular place. As such, we can see how cultivating a relationship to home as a foreign concept depends upon the ability to recognize others as "others," the inability of which is core to racism and colonialism.²³¹

While I believe that cultivating a relationship to home as a foreign concept is an essential component of decolonizing the white colonizer, this is not necessarily the case for decolonizing the colonized,

²²⁸ Emmanuel Lévinas and Seán Hand, *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, MA, USA: B. Blackwell, 1989). See especially "Ethics as First Philosophy."

²²⁹ Ibid, 82. In German, "Da" means "there" and "Dasein" means "being" or "existing." Literally, however, "Dasein" is a composite word that can be translated as "there-being," as in being in a particular place.

²³⁰ Ibid, 294. From 28 September 1982 interview with Shlomo Malka, published as "Ethics and Politics."

²³¹ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*; Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

where, depending on the particular circumstances, the process may in fact be about laying claim to particular places. Home as a foreign concept does not, moreover, mean that mobility (as contrasted to settling) is inherently decolonial. Eyal Weizman, for example, documents the ways in which Israeli urban planning, architecture, and occupation policies depend on temporariness, mobility, and continually shifting geographies.²³² In fact, just as we can examine the ways in which our laying claim to a place is connected to others' displacement, we can examine the ways in which various forms of mobility are connected to others' immobility.

THE DISPLACEMENT IN MY DWELLING, THE IMMOBILITY IN MY MOBILITY

In 2007, I participated in a U.S. delegation to Palestine as part of my dissertation research.²³³ During the two-week trip, we traveled by bus and met with numerous residents, activists and organizations in Palestine and Israel. As a result of our U.S. passports, we were able to move fairly freely, although we were not exempt from multiple hours of detours due to road blocks, Israeli soldiers with automatic weapons coming on board the bus to check our papers, and lines at checkpoints. I was particularly struck by the existence of an entire apartheid road system created by Israel, in which “bypass roads” connect Israeli settlements to each other while bypassing Palestinian towns. Palestinians (whose cars are marked with different colored license plates than those of Israelis) are alternately forbidden to use these roads or only allowed to use them in certain circumstances.²³⁴ The mobility of Israeli bodies in the form of settlement expansion also contributes to Palestinian immobility as they are subjected to an ever-increasing network of walls and checkpoints, not to mention the possibility of being killed or imprisoned for ‘trespassing,’ having their homes demolished, and being relegated to an ever-decreasing amount of land on which they are ‘free’ to move.²³⁵

While the extremely militarized presence of the Israeli Occupation Forces²³⁶ was intimidating and violently devastating, one of the disturbing experiences I had while visiting was much more banal: visiting and speaking with two U.S.-Israeli residents of a large Israeli settlement in the West Bank. (40% of the residents of this settlement emigrated from the United States and retain dual citizenship.) When we arrived at the border of the settlement, we were stopped by a private security guard and waited for our host (who emigrated from Chicago) to come and lead us inside. The settlement resembled a suburb in southern California, complete with palm trees. Our host led us to the synagogue and showed us where the bathrooms were located, which he emphasized were clean. A few minutes later, a young woman (who emigrated from New York City) joined us and also made a point of mentioning the clean bathrooms which we were welcomed to use. I was reminded of the tropes of cleanliness and dirtiness which are often employed in colonial encounters.²³⁷ They provided us with a history of the town, reinscribing the Israeli narrative of “a land without a people

²³² Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007).

²³³ As explained in the Introduction, in an earlier version of my dissertation I had intended to focus on how various understandings of the Israel-Palestine conflict are produced in the United States.

²³⁴ http://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/200708_ground_to_a_halt

²³⁵ On the practice of home demolitions, see <http://www.icahd.org/node/478>. On the restriction of movement, see http://www.btselem.org/topic/freedom_of_movement. Also see Weizman, *Hollow Land*.

²³⁶ Officially, this body is known as the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). However, activists refer to the IDF as the IOF (Israeli Occupation Forces) to challenge the narrative of “defense” and to emphasize the colonial occupation.

²³⁷ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

for a people without a land” and echoing U.S. mythologies of Terra Nullius and Manifest Destiny. In their words, “when the first families arrived, there was nothing here. It was rocks, just rocks.” They described the settlement as surrounded by idyllic Palestinian vineyards which are still tended by Palestinian farmers, but emphasized that “the homes were built up on the hilltops which were unsuitable for agriculture. We’re not in any way jeopardizing the quality of life of nearby Palestinian residents.” Moreover, they explained, “when [the settlement] began, we had such wonderful relations with all the local villagers. In fact, all the building provided them with employment, which they welcomed. And we also helped them establish their preschool program. When we got electricity, they got electricity. We improved their living conditions. They were very grateful.” Ah, the white wo/man’s burden.

When asked why they now live with bars on the windows and surrounded by security guards, and why the region as a whole is littered with checkpoints, roadblocks, and the separation wall, they stated that all those measures were a response to terrorism. However, they insisted that they are politically moderate. In our host’s words,

I’m against house demolitions. I’m against any behavior at checkpoints that in any way insults, demeans or certainly jeopardizes the wellbeing of anybody who walks into a checkpoint. But I’m not against checkpoints. I’m against the security barrier where it unnecessarily appears to make the lives of Palestinians more difficult, separating their water from their fields or them from their businesses or families. But I’m not against the security barrier. All of this is a response to terrorism by Palestinians. For many years, every day over 100,000 non-citizens of this state were allowed to pass back and forth between Gaza and Israel. It’s like the US saying to Mexico, okay, you’re going to allow Mexican citizens who are not US citizens, to come in and just work in Mexico [Freudian slip!] and go back every day and take the money they earn every day in Texas and go back to Mexico. I don’t think the United States would ever do that. We did that for decades for the Palestinians. But when the terror got hiked up to the point where it became completely unbearable, it stopped.

The young woman added, “The problem today is the Arab leadership, which is promoting terrorism. And all you have to do is watch their television. Watch the cartoons on TV, the messages that they are relaying to their children.” That night, I reflected on this encounter and another encounter we had that same day, with a woman who founded a kindergarten for traumatized Palestinian children. In a field notes memo, I wrote:

Today, I met two U.S.-Israeli settlers who spoke of peace and hate, of victimization and violence. They recounted a time when “Jews and Arabs”²³⁸ lived happily together. Apparently all was well until the Palestinian Authority was formed and started shaking things up, reminding me of white people in the U.S. talking about how well they got along with Black people until those civil rights and black power agitators came into town. For me, this encounter was almost more challenging than the soldiers and extremist settlers roaming the streets and terrorizing Palestinians with their

²³⁸ The phrase “Jews and Arabs” should not be taken for granted. There are many people who are simultaneously Jewish and Arab, although the term “Arab Jew” is frequently avoided by referring to such individuals within the somewhat larger category of Mizrahi. While Jewish people have been the victims of white supremacy in Europe, white supremacy is reenacted in Israel, which was built with a racialized hierarchy that positions Ashkenazi Jews on top. See Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Ella Shohat, “Rupture and Return: Zionist Discourse and the Study of Arab Jews,” *Social Text* 21, no. 2 (2003): 49–74; Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Israeli Cinema East/West and the Politics of Representation* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

automatic weapons. These settlers do not belong to this extremist camp. They are friendly well-intentioned people who are “against housing demolitions, demeaning behavior at checkpoints, and the wall following a route that unnecessarily makes lives of Palestinians more difficult,” although they insist that these measures are all responses to terrorism.

Today, I also met another woman who spoke of peace and hate, of victimization and violence...she founded a kindergarten for traumatized children in the West Bank. She saw that the children were absolutely terrified of the soldiers they encounter on a daily basis, so in addition to art therapy and play time, she began going with them to checkpoints, helping them get used to the idea that they will not automatically get beaten or killed if they come within range of a soldier. This process helps the children to overcome their fear and thus enables them to walk on their own from home to school, for example, which often requires passing through multiple checkpoints. She sees this as fighting a battle against the education in violence that these kids get every day: “There are soldiers on the roof near the kindergarten. They often point their guns at the children who are coming and say, ‘children go home.’ When we ask them why they are scaring the kids, they say, ‘We have orders, there is to be no school today.’ Many people say, ‘Palestinians teach their kids to be violent and to hate us.’ This is not true. The soldiers are teaching them violence.”

This, however, is something that the settlers I met today refuse to understand. It is much easier to sleep comfortably if you make yourself believe that the prison you are committing others to for your entitlement to a particular piece of land needs to exist because those people are all potential terrorists. It is much easier not to think about the terror of ghettoizing people, of shoving guns in children's faces, of demolishing people's homes and displacing them from their land, of humiliating people at checkpoints, of starving people by making their local economies nearly impossible to sustain, of redirecting their water to fill your swimming pools and shooting holes into people's water-tanks or putting dead chickens in them to poison the bit of water that is left; in sum: of all the ways life is made as miserable as possible for Palestinians in the hopes that they will leave. It is much easier not to think about the production of violence. The comfortable lives these settlers lead depend every day on the occupation, brutalization and humiliation of others. They remain in complete denial of this relationship, however, as their role in the production of this violence is quite banal. They are simply trying to go about their lives. Many of us in the United States also play a role in the production of this violence. Our role is also quite banal. We participate simply by paying taxes. And the U.S. government passes billions of these tax dollars on to Israel every year.

What I failed to analyze in my initial reflection memo was the banality of my own participation in the production of violence not only vis-à-vis the Israeli occupation of Palestine and U.S. military occupations in other countries, but also in the ongoing U.S. occupation of Turtle Island. What about my own banal settlement and mobility do I need to learn to recognize as colonial in my immediate, not just disparate, surroundings? Through a 2012 exhibit called “The Slave at the Louvre,” Vergès points to the importance of learning to see slavery not only in the figure of the slave, but also in cowrie shells, coffee cups, and sugar bowls, i.e. in modes of household consumption made possible by the slave trade.²³⁹ Where can I see the displacement in my dwelling and the immobility in my mobility in the most intimate moments of my own life?

It begins with sheer presence. On my mother's side, there is a rumor that our family's presence on Turtle Island dates back to the Mayflower. On my father's side, a Lithuanian grandfather and Italian grandmother arrived just two generations ago. As far as I know, neither of these sides asked permission of indigenous inhabitants to share space here. A Christian European (later “white”) supremacist logic placed authority elsewhere, initially legitimating the displacement, exploitation and genocide of indigenous inhabitants; later legitimating ongoing displacements, continual exploitation of land and labor, and the dehumanization of all people designated non-white. Over the years, that

²³⁹ Vergès, “The Slave at the Louvre.”

white supremacist authority (despite its recent somewhat more multicultural face) has become entrenched in the U.S. constitution and this nation-state's laws, institutions, and narrations of history – naturalizing an absurdity widely taken for granted today: that the U.S. is a body which should rightfully establish and maintain borders, and determine who is allowed to reside here and on what terms. Perhaps the lack of objection to the San Francisco Mission District mural's depiction of the U.S. as illegitimate is a result of just how “successful” that entrenchment has been – perhaps indigenous insurgence is not widely perceived as a viable threat to the status quo. As decolonization efforts continue, however, it will hopefully begin to be perceived not only as a threat, but as a promise to celebrate and support.

Beyond the issue of sheer presence, however, there is also the question of the nature of that presence. As a white U.S. citizen, I have grown used to relatively unhampered movement. When traveling across national borders, it is much easier for U.S. citizens to obtain visas for travel. In fact, in many instances a U.S. passport is exempt from visa requirements even when citizens of other nations must apply for them. Moreover, white people in the U.S. do not have to contend with the racial profiling that impacts the movement of people of color in numerous contexts, ranging from being followed while shopping, to being pulled over for “driving while black,” to being dispersed for gathering outside in a group, to being far more likely to be stopped and frisked by police, to being detained and/or deported for not having “proper papers.”

Physical mobility is also impacted by social mobility, by access to socio-economic resources. These become life and death issues. The tradition of colonial white supremacy in the U.S. continues to result in an unequal racialized distribution of death, with lower levels of health and length of life for people of color and indigenous people as compared to whites. As such, Gilmore's definition of racism is “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.”²⁴⁰ This all crystallized for me in a more personal way through my mother's illness and death. I continue my analysis of white U.S.-ness and im/mobility through a reflection on that process.

DEATH AND IMMOBILITY

The title panel of the San Francisco Mission District mural declares that “La Lucha” is against the “barriers around the world that separate our families.” The significance of the absence of these barriers in relation to my own immediate family became incredibly apparent to me in 2008, when my Mom was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. She was living in North Carolina; I was living 2,500 miles away, in California. This distance was so much further, yet so much easier and faster for me to cross than were the shorter distances many Palestinians I met the year before told me about in stories of borders, checkpoints and roadblocks inhibiting their attempts to be with loved ones. Once with my Mom, there were many emergency trips to hospitals – while scared, we were not stopped and prohibited from accessing medical care by soldiers who decided not to let us continue on the road – something Palestinians cannot take for granted. But I need not reference places as far away as Palestine to make these comparisons. (Although the practices taking place there are also partially enabled by economic and political support from the U.S.) Here, too, there are many people who, because their bodies have been criminalized, are inhibited by prison bars and immigration laws from traveling to be with their family members.

²⁴⁰ Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 28.

In addition to not being physically barred from being with my loved ones, the resources my family had enabled me (as well as my Mom and Dad, for that matter) to not work (at a paying job) for the better part of two years. This meant that the 18 months I spent with my Mom before she died could be completely devoted to her. These months were difficult but the most important way I feel I have ever spent my time. The ability to be there, to give/receive that gift of time and presence is something I am immensely grateful for, even as I am angered and saddened by the ways in which that choice, that gift, is made incredibly difficult and even impossible for others to give/receive. Because sometimes presence, being there, is all there is to do. To be there during the surgeries and the treatments and the doctors' visits and the middle of the night trips to the emergency room; through the anger and the depression and the celebration and the questions and the hope and the mundane; through the daily grind, and at the moment of death. Being there was not only the biggest gift I could give and receive, it has also been my main source of comfort/solace since then. But that comfort/solace is not a comfortable one. Because I am acutely aware of the many ways in which this "choice" was wrapped up in patterns of colonial white supremacy that actively prevent others from being able to do the same.

This begins with the issues of mobility and resources already discussed above. Furthermore, the state of health care in this country means that those without insurance, and even many of those with it, cannot afford the treatments that prolonged my Mom's life. Without the expensive surgery she received, she would probably have lived for about 2-3 months, rather than 18. Additionally, those same colonial white supremacist structures that make "being there" difficult or impossible for so many, are simultaneously creating illness, including creating cancer through environmental racism (where toxins are pumped into the poorest areas, often populated by people of color), through wars (where toxins are used in weapons as well as released through the destruction) and through unsafe toxic work environments. For example, Haunani-Kay Trask documents how nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands has led to widespread rates of cancer, with one of the highest rates of children born with severe deformities, and a life-expectancy that has dropped from one of the highest in the world to 40 years.²⁴¹

However, when it came to my Mom's quality of (the last months of life preceding) death, all my politics – at least as embodied practices – flew out the window. She wanted to spend thousands of dollars going on a luxury cruise and invited me to join. I said yes. I nodded emphatically every time my Dad insisted to the doctors that "cost is not an issue," that it doesn't matter what the insurance company says about experimental treatments, that he'll make it work. My Mom wanted to be cremated and have her ashes turned into a diamond.²⁴² I laughed with her at the coolness of that idea and did not ask questions about the cost or the energy it takes to do that, and what those resources could be used for instead. So now I have a home-grown diamond, my Mom's transformed ashes, that I had placed in a bracelet she gave me. And yet, even as I reflect on these choices with

²⁴¹ Haunani-Kay Trask, "The Color of Violence," in *Color of Violence*, ed. Incite! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge: South End Press, 2006), 81-7.

²⁴² Zeus Leonardo pointed out to me that the fetishization of (and trade in) diamonds has its own colonial history. It did not occur to me to make this critique vis-à-vis my Mom, as she has never had any interest in or possessed a diamond – her fascination here had more to do with options for what could be done with one's ashes. She also left behind some unglazed pots she had made (she was a potter and a weaver) so that we could mix up a glaze with her ashes and give each of her family members and close friends an ash-glazed pot. That said, it is true that there was no analysis here about the violent history connected to the development of diamonds as a consumer object to begin with.

almost three years of distance, I still ask, “How could I *not* have consented to all this?” It feels impossible. This is my mother.

*“Those activities or Coatlilicue states which disrupt the smooth flow (complacency) of life are exactly what propel the soul to do its work: make soul, increase consciousness of itself. Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences—if we can make meaning out of them—can lead us toward becoming more of who we are.”*²⁴³

This experience has emphasized all the more to me how essential it is that excessive resources do not accumulate in some hands at the expense of others. And it reveals another kind of mobility that needs to be dealt with in regards to decolonizing the white colonizer: social mobility. Social mobility is also, though not exclusively, tied to issues of land and geographic mobility. Land- and homeownership are key sources of wealth and, in fact, it is this capitalist relationship to land that is what is contested by the alternative indigenous articulations of nationhood Andrea Smith describes. Furthermore, given the ways in which education is tied to social mobility in the U.S. (an issue which is discussed in Chapter Four), families with the means to do so will relocate with the express purpose of enabling their children to attend “high quality schools.”²⁴⁴ Families who do not have the means to relocate, but attempt to provide their children with similar access via providing a false address, are criminalized.²⁴⁵

The racial wealth gap in the United States is larger than it has ever been since the Census Bureau started measuring it in 1985.²⁴⁶ Furthermore, when we shift from documenting this only at the “household” or “family” level and start looking at single men and women, the data is even more telling. A 2010 report by the Insight Center for Community Economic Development analyzed the wealth gap in terms of both race and gender, drawing on data from 2007.²⁴⁷ They found that when it comes to wealth, gender matters – if you are a woman of color. For white women, gender plays a far less significant role. The following table taken from that study compares the median wealth (not income) of single White, Black, and Hispanic men and women:

Single White Men: \$43,800	Single White Women: \$41,500
Single Black Men: \$7,900	Single Black Women: \$100
Single Hispanic Men: \$9,730	Single Hispanic Women: \$120

Wealth is the value of all assets, including things like stock holdings, retirement accounts and home equity, minus debts. Wealth is a key aspect of stability when faced with periods of instability in employment and income – or when faced with unexpected costs such as medical emergencies. Two

²⁴³ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 46.

²⁴⁴ For just a few dozen testimonies of families who have done so, see: http://thestir.cafemom.com/big_kid/129145/its_not_crazy_to_buy#commentBox

²⁴⁵ Two prominent recent examples are the cases of Tanya McDowell and Kelley Williams-Bolar. See: <http://www.npr.org/2011/01/26/133246495/Parents-Cross-Lines-To-Get-Kids-Into-Good-Schools> and: <http://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/article/Mom-accused-of-stealing-education-pleads-guilty-3349999.php>

²⁴⁶ Kai Wright, “The Racial Wealth Gap’s Larger Than Ever,” *Colorlines*. July 26, 2011: http://colorlines.com/archives/2011/07/wealth_gap_explosion.html.

²⁴⁷ Insight Center for Community Economic Development, 2010. Accessed here: <http://www.insightcced.org/uploads/CRWG/LiftingAsWeClimb-WomenWealth-Report-InsightCenter-Spring2010.pdf>

out of three bankruptcies in the United States are due to medical bills,²⁴⁸ as are 50% of foreclosures.²⁴⁹

The “American Dream” is tied to visions of continual upward mobility and of parents passing accumulated assets on to their children so they can have an even “better life” than their parents did. This capitalist logic depends on an ever-increasing accumulation of resources, a vision of mobility that is about accumulation. Resources are acquired by asserting ownership over labor and land – ownership which is then sanctified as private property and deemed un(re)movable by others. In a context of vast disparities of resources, as well as unsustainable exploitation of the planet, decolonizing the white colonizer needs to include a shift from pursuits of upward mobility to a commitment to downward mobility.

For example, one possible p/reparations practice indicated in Chapter One was a “from-inheritance-to-reparations” campaign inspired by the fact that the persistence of a racial wealth gap is partially rooted in inheritance practices. Expanding our notion of “kin” from immediate offspring to move towards a more expansive “propter nos,”²⁵⁰ inherited assets (money, stocks, land, housing, etc.) might be passed on to people and organizations doing racial justice work. This could also be one small step towards “breaking down the barriers that separate our families” in the broader sense. Such moves are not uncomplicated and, in the larger scheme of things, are not of tremendous consequence regarding overall patterns of colonial white supremacy. However, in challenging internalized notions of entitlement, they might be pedagogically useful for decolonizing the white colonizer while also providing some material support for liberatory movements and experimenting with possible models for broader-based transformation.

When my mother died I inherited about \$90,000 worth of stocks.²⁵¹ It was incredibly tempting to use this money to pay off the \$58,000 of student loan debt I have accumulated while in graduate school. Committed to the practice of p/reparations, I toyed with the idea of using this inheritance to pay off all my student debt right away to avoid paying the government more money in the form of interest. I would then pass the funds on as part of p/reparations in the form of the monthly installments that I would have been paying to the government, including the interest. I decided against this approach for two reasons. One, it means deferring the p/reparations payments as well as paying them in smaller increments, which results in less flexibility for the recipients than a larger sum up front. Two, I think it is pedagogically important to undermine the sense of security and choice that comes with wealth. Part of that security is psychological, knowing my parents would be more aligned with using the inheritance to pay off my student loans. Part of that security is material, achieved by not being in debt.

²⁴⁸ David U. Himmelstein et al., “Medical Bankruptcy in the United States, 2007: Results of a National Study,” *The American Journal of Medicine* 122, no. 8 (2009): 741–746.

²⁴⁹ Christopher Robertson, Richard Egelhof, and Michael Hoke, “Get Sick, Get Out: The Medical Causes of Home Mortgage Foreclosures.” *Health Matrix: Journal of Law-Medicine* 18, no. 65 (2008): 65-105.

²⁵⁰ Wynter, “1492.”

²⁵¹ Thanks to Dean Spade for modeling the importance of financial transparency as we are trying to develop alternative ways of economic being. His reflection on the Enough website called “the dirty details of my new salary” (and the discussion it provoked) inspired me to also attempt to be more explicit about these connections between political/ethical commitments and personal daily choices. Accessed here: <http://www.enoughenough.org/2009/04/the-dirty-details-of-my-new-salary>

I decided to turn over the inheritance I received to organizations led by people of color who have global decolonial feminist, queer social justice analyses. I use the phrases “turn over” and “passed on” rather than “gave,” in an attempt to distinguish this process from philanthropy. As discussed in Chapter One, such acts of redistribution by the white colonizer should be conceived as insufficient returning, rather than as charity, donations, or giving. Such acts of redistribution should also be devoid of any attempts to set the agenda regarding the use of the resources. Of course, the selection of where to transfer the funds aligns one with certain agendas versus others. My willingness to be explicit about my alignments is rooted in believing that it is important to avoid assuming a passive, neutral or opting-out stance which, under the guise of reserving judgment, can actually end up reasserting colonial white supremacy precisely by assuming that all work by people of color is equal, whether equally dismissed or equally valorized. Such moves not only remove the white actor from accountability and critique but also replace the issue of being attentive to positionalities and “the colonial difference” with blatant essentialism.

Approximately half of the inheritance was passed on to the Boarding School Healing Project, “a coalition of several organizations around the country, seeking to document Native boarding school abuses so that Native communities can begin healing from boarding school abuses and demand justice.”²⁵² That was an autonomous decision I made based on being inspired by what I’d learned about their work, as well as about the history of boarding schools and the framework of reparations itself, from Andrea Smith, Rosemary Gibbons, and the resources on the Boarding School Healing Project’s website.²⁵³ And yet, while I felt/feel deeply indebted to them and their work, the manner in which this decision was made did not feel right to me. With the remaining half of the inheritance, I tried to figure out how to more fully live out the idea that this money isn’t mine to give. At an Oakland gathering with a racially diverse group of people focused on reparations, racial justice, and decolonization, I put the remaining money on the table for us to collectively decide how to use. We decided to pass 2/3 of it to Nafsi Ya Jamii, in a time-sensitive action to help purchase land to expand this urban farm, retreat, and renewal center in Oakland. Nafsi Ya Jamii (the phrase is Swahili for “The Soul Community”), founded by Patricia St. Onge and Wilson Riles, serves grassroots organizations, nonprofits, communities and individuals impacted by social injustice (with a special focus on elders and those “fresh out” of the criminal justice system) to “come together to reimagine themselves and the systems which create the injustices.”²⁵⁴ Nafsi Ya Jamii “combines grassroots economic development, rediscovering and highlighting the wisdom and experience of historically marginalized communities, and the integration of health and wellbeing for body, mind, heart, soul and community.”²⁵⁵ Some of the ways these goals are manifested are through sustainable urban gardening, arts and fitness classes, political education and involvement, ceremonies, life coaching, and providing space for retreats.

Inheritances are just the tip of the iceberg, however. There are also issues of our daily lifestyles, and the addictions we develop to perceived needs. (In my own life this currently looms largest in the decision I have made to live alone.) Also, given that the ultimate goal is total decolonization, our personal financial choices are not of great consequence and we should see them not as taking the place of, but going hand in hand with, the work of education, movement building, policy change, and collective healing. However, I believe such personal practices are pedagogically useful as a form

²⁵² <http://boardingschoolhealingproject.org/>

²⁵³ For more information, please see www.boardingschoolhealingproject.org.

²⁵⁴ Nafsi Ya Jamii informational brochure.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

of “rehearsing for revolution,” as Augusto Boal might put it²⁵⁶ or, alternately, as a form of p/reparations, in the sense of “preparing” for a time when ethical relationships will be possible by contributing to the “political work [that] needs to be done to make ethical life possible.”²⁵⁷

For the purposes of decolonizing the white colonizer, such work might be most usefully pursued with a sense not of security, but of insecurity. That is, with an awareness that while death is guaranteed, its nature is not. Nor is a particular place in the world – that is contingent upon the development of ethical relationships with other people and with the land.

HOME, REVISITED

To the extent that Brah is right in arguing that people have a “homing desire” that must be accounted for or that, in Simone Weil’s words, “to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul,”²⁵⁸ arguing that white U.S. citizens need to develop a relationship to home as a foreign concept may not provide enough of a spiritual foundation to sustain a long-term commitment to the demanding processes of decolonization. Given that it is not possible, however, in my opinion, for white people to claim a land-based home within our current context, perhaps we might develop understandings and senses of home which do not depend on staking claim to particular places. I have personally found Buddhist teachings helpful here. As I end this chapter, I would like to share this teaching by Thich Nhat Hanh:

In the Vietnamese language the word for uterus is “the palace of the child.”...You were physically attached to your mother through the umbilical cord...As an adult, you may fight very hard to convince yourself that you and your mother are two different people. But it's not really so. You are a continuation of both your parents. When I meditate, I can still see the cord connecting me to my mother. When I look deeply, I see there are umbilical cords linking me to phenomena as well. The sun rises every morning. And thanks to the sun, we have heat and light. Without these things, we can't survive. So an umbilical cord links you to the sun. Another umbilical cord links you to the clouds in the sky. If the clouds were not there, there would be no rain and no water to drink...If you continue meditating like this, you can see that you are linked to everything and everyone in the cosmos. Your life depends on everything else that exists—on other living beings, but also on plants, minerals, air, water, and earth... You and your mother are not exactly the same person, but you aren't two different people either. This is the truth of interdependence. No one can be one's self alone. We have to inter-be to be... Even if you have the feeling that you don't belong to any land, to any country, to any geographical spot, to any cultural heritage, or to any particular ethnic group, you have a true home...In your daily life, your body and mind often go in two different directions. You are in a state of distraction; mind in one place, body in another. Your body is putting on a coat but your mind is preoccupied, caught in the past or the future. But between your mind and your body there is something: your breath. And as soon as you go home to

²⁵⁶ Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*.

²⁵⁷ Lewis Gordon, “Fanon in Recent African Political Thought,” *The Frantz Fanon Blog*, 2008, <http://thinkingafricarhodesuniversity.blogspot.com/2011/12/fanon-in-recent-african-political.html>.

²⁵⁸ Simone Weil, *The need for roots: prelude to a declaration of duties towards mankind* (London: Routledge, 2001), 43.

your breath and you breathe with awareness, your body and mind come together, very quickly. While breathing in, you don't think of anything; you just focus your attention on your in-breath. You focus, you invest one hundred percent of yourself in your in-breath. You become your in-breath. There is a concentration on your in-breath that will make body and mind come together in just one moment. And suddenly you find yourself fully present, fully alive. There is no more longing to return to the womb, to your perfect paradise. You are already there, already home.²⁵⁹

Such meditation seems so simple and yet I also find it to be such a challenging practice. But when I persist, I experience moments of true joy in which I know I am not separated from my mother, although I can no longer share moments of embodied co-presence with her. When I persist, I know that individual actions (like people) are never individual, that they are coterminous with structural transformations, and are the requirements of love and compassion. When I persist, the pain I feel from all the literal and figurative borders, barriers and separations is held with gratitude for all the gifts of life that also persist, in so many forms, ranging from the painting of alternative visions to the dependability of the sun. When I persist, my restlessly yearning spirit also experiences peace and, in those rare moments when I manage to be particularly patient and persistent in the practice, even feels at home.

²⁵⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, "Returning Home," 2006. Accessed here:
http://www.shambhalasun.com/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2877&Itemid=0&pop=1&page=0.

CHAPTER THREE: MICHAEL JACKSON ON THE LINE: THE POLITICS OF PERFORMING HYBRIDITY

In the wake of Michael Jackson's death on June 25, 2009, non-stop coverage of his death, and commentary on his life, revealed myriad racialized, gendered and sexualized anxieties and discursive frames functioning within the United States. James Baldwin's 1985 words remain salient:

The Michael Jackson cacophony is fascinating in that it is not about Jackson at all...He will not swiftly be forgiven for having turned so many tables, for he damn sure grabbed the brass ring, and the man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo has nothing on Michael. All that noise is about America, as the dishonest custodian of black life and wealth; and blacks, especially males, in America; and the burning, buried American guilt; and sex and sexual roles and sexual panic...Freaks are called freaks and are treated as they are treated—in the main, abominably—because they are human beings who cause to echo, deep within us, our most profound terrors and desires...But we are all androgynous, not only because we are all born of a woman impregnated by the seed of a man but because each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other—male in female, female in male, white in black and black in white. We are a part of each other.²⁶⁰

I began returning to and researching Jackson's work and interviews, as well as the public commentary and academic analyses of his creations and his life. Researching Jackson's work, for me, included deep listening to his music and learning some of his choreography by carefully studying his dancing. "Free your mind, and your ass will follow!"²⁶¹ George Clinton famously declared. The reverse also holds true: free your ass, and your mind will follow.²⁶² Putting together a dance is not completely dissimilar to assembling a paper; you take phrases of others who have inspired you, add some of your own, assemble them into something new. But learning through and communicating through the body, through dance and music, is different than words alone. It is another language. María Lugones describes learning one another's languages – without the presumption of transparency – as a decolonial technology required for coalitional resistance to domination. I return to this point below. Here, I just want to stress that languages are not all of the tongue. It was through the music that I first approached Michael Jackson and, in the wake of his death, music and dance were the first methodologies through which I attempted to draw closer, listen, be moved. On October 1, 2009, I participated in a day-long symposium at UC Berkeley's Center for Race and Gender on the theme, "Michael Jackson: Critical Reflection on a Life and a Phenomenon." My presentation began with a dance compiled from various "Michael moves" from over the years, and set to a medley of his songs.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ James Baldwin, *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (Library of America, 1998), 828.

²⁶¹ George Clinton, "Free Your Mind and Your Ass Will Follow," *Free Your Mind...And Your Ass Will Follow*. Westbound, 1970.

²⁶² Althusser discusses embodiment as a key element of ideology. He paraphrases Pascal's writing on religious belief, saying, "Kneel, move your lips in prayer and you will believe." Althusser, Louis. *Essays on Ideology*. (London: Verso Books, 1984).

²⁶³ The original conference presentation can be viewed here: <http://crg.berkeley.edu/content/michael-michael-line>

While Chapter One offered a discussion of reconstructionism and abolitionism as anti-racist strategies pursued by white people, this chapter discusses the possibilities and pitfalls of performing hybridity in relation to the project of decolonizing the white colonizer, after taking a detailed look at what Michael Jackson's hybrid performances can teach us.

Artists, James Baldwin argues, are “the only people who know the truth about us”²⁶⁴ and are compelled to share it. Their/our struggle for integrity in that process, he argues, “must be considered as a kind of metaphor for the struggle, which is universal and daily, of all human beings on the face of this globe to get to become human beings.”²⁶⁵ The artist is not always victorious in this struggle, in a given moment or in all aspects of his/her life. Certainly Michael Jackson was a man of contradictions, perhaps most notably in the fact that he sung over and over again about the need to eradicate poverty yet lived a lavish life of luxury. Baldwin, reflecting on his own life as an artist – referring specifically to his work as a writer – comments that, should you be so lucky that people cease trying to dissuade you from pursuing an artist's life and begin recognizing your work as something of value, “you must decide all over again whether you want to be famous or whether you want to write. And the two things, in spite of all the evidence, have nothing whatever in common.”²⁶⁶ Jackson, it seems, attempted to reject that proposition, or at least to negotiate it, pursuing both great artistic expression and enormous fame. At times the pursuit of fame may have come at the cost of integrity. At the same time, that fame also led to the proliferation of deeply radical critiques of dominant society.

The United States (and “Western” societies more generally) has a long history of material and representational racism, specifically white supremacy. The material and the representational go hand-in-hand, leading Michel Foucault to focus on “power/knowledge” – access to power and material means enables the institutionalization of particular forms of knowledge, which themselves contribute to particular materialities (structures, institutions, subject-positions) and reinforce/recreate particular forms of knowledge. It is thus through power that what Foucault calls “regimes of truth” are created; power enables certain forms of knowledge to make themselves true. These propositions are based on a constructivist theory of language, although Foucault deemphasized “language” in favor of a focus on “discourse” in order to emphasize historical specificity and power relations rather than focusing on representational systems in a vacuum. Constructivism emphasizes that meaning is not fixed, but is (re)created between interlocutors. As such, there is no final “true” meaning, although Foucault's interventions point to the fact that the ability to institutionalize particular meanings is dependent on power. Moreover, the institutionalization of certain meanings over others has material consequences.

One of Foucault's most famous studies regarding these material consequences is Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison.²⁶⁷ Here he discusses the creation of particular subjects labeled “criminals” as well as the institutionalization of particular disciplinary procedures which travel across institutions (including to schools, as is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4). In the United States, the discourse “criminal” has been highly racialized, which has material consequences for bodies of color, especially in our current era marked by an enormous expansion of the prison-industrial

²⁶⁴ James Baldwin, *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*. Edited by Randall Kenan. (New York; Toronto: Vintage, 2011): 51.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 54.

²⁶⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

complex – which Michelle Alexander argues functions as “the new Jim Crow”²⁶⁸ and which many racial justice activists and scholars see as a key site of intervention in the form of prison abolition work. One of the technologies of discipline discussed by Foucault in relation to the prison is the Panopticon, which results in an unequal gaze. As bell hooks has pointed out, “there is power in looking”²⁶⁹ – enslaved black people were frequently punished, even murdered, for looking at white people, but developed what hooks calls “an oppositional gaze,” declaring, “Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality.”²⁷⁰

The oppositional gaze is one of the technologies Michael Jackson makes use of in his work, as I discuss below. Moreover, Jackson became so famous that his gazes and his many languages (music, lyrics, dance, imagery) could be found in households across the country. He did not enter onto neutral terrain, however, but into a context in which the subject-position “black male” had been created and had come to signify a range of meanings. Stuart Hall argues that,

people who are in any way significantly different from the majority – ‘them’ rather than ‘us’ – are frequently exposed to the *binary* form of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes – good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling-because-different/compelling-because-strange-and-exotic. And they are often required to be *both things at the same time!*²⁷¹

However, drawing on the legacy of constructionists, Hall emphasizes that even these entrenched binary modes of thinking can be contested and transformed. One of the ways he points to this happening is through the hybrid -- that which fails to fit neatly into any categories. However, the assertion of hybridity is itself not an uncontested process. As Hall explains, “symbolic boundaries are central to all culture. Marking ‘difference’ leads us, symbolically, to close ranks, shore up culture and to stigmatize and expel anything which is defined as impure, abnormal.”²⁷² One strategy employed by such “racialized regime[s] of representation” discussed by Hall is “naturalization.” This is the attempt to “fix ‘difference’...to halt the inevitable ‘slide’ of meaning, to secure discursive or ideological ‘closure.’”²⁷³ In “Ghosts,” one of the works by Michael Jackson which I discuss below, Jackson holds up a mirror revealing and critiquing these efforts to stigmatize and expel. Simultaneously, both in “Ghosts” and through his other work, he presents us with enormously varied representations of himself, undermining any efforts to “fix” him or black males in general – a category with which he repeatedly aligns himself even while refusing to be reduced to it. “Fixing” attempts certainly continued, however, in the form of such binary discourses as Hall discusses above, as well as through relegating him to a realm beyond the human, as I discuss below.

Power, as we have seen, is not only enacted through physical exploitation and domination, but also through representational practices. There has been a long power struggle over the meaning of Michael Jackson’s life and work. One could interpret this as a simplistic obsession with celebrity. However, I believe there is something larger at stake here, that the extent of what Baldwin calls the

²⁶⁸ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*.

²⁶⁹ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 115.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 116.

²⁷¹ Hall, *Representation*, 229.

²⁷² *Ibid*, 237.

²⁷³ *Ibid*, 245.

“Michael Jackson cacophony” is indeed about dominant U.S. anxieties regarding the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality, and the ways in which Jackson troubles them.

Audre Lorde argues that “poetry is not a luxury.” Rather, she explains,

it is a vital necessity of our existence...within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action...Poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before...And who asks the question: Am I altering your aura, your ideas, your dreams, or am I merely moving you to temporary and reactive action? And even though the latter is no mean task, it is one that must be seen within the context of a need for true alteration of the very foundations of our lives...we must constantly encourage each other to attempt the heretical actions that our dreams imply...For within living structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive...If what we need to dream, to move our spirits most deeply and directly toward and through promise, is discounted as a luxury, then we give up the core – the fountain – of our power.²⁷⁴

Part of the power of the artist is to make us feel, to make us dream, to expand our realm of the possible, and to give us the courage to act. It is no accident that artists are frequently among the first exiled under authoritarian regimes. In more “democratic” places, where exile is not considered an option, there are strategies of containment and of attempting to fix the meaning of the artists’ work in ways that are less threatening to the status quo. As Michael Jackson sings on the last track of the last album he released: *you should be watching me, you should feel threatened; while you sleep, while you creep, you should be threatened...you think you’re by yourself, but it’s my touch you felt; I’m not a ghost from hell, but I’ve got a spell on you; your worst nightmare, it’s me, I’m everywhere, in one blink I’ll disappear, and then I’ll come back to haunt you...I’m the one watching you, that’s why you got to be threatened by me.*²⁷⁵

Because meaning is neither fixed nor transparent, however, but socially created through interactions, interpretive work is always involved. Theorizing can be understood as a process of making the interpretive work we do explicit, and as part of the power struggle over representation and meaning-making. To the extent that decolonizing the colonizer entails discursive as well as material transformation (the two, following Foucault, existing in a recursive relationship, inseparable from one another), the meaning we make out of what we perceive (see, hear, feel, experience) *matters*. Sometimes an important strategy may be to focus the gaze elsewhere, to learn about new (to us) concepts and phenomena through what Enrique Dussel calls inter-subjective dialogue and what Lynice Pinkard calls cross-fertilization. In the process, we may come to realize that some things need to be abolished, as I have argued (in Chapters One and Two) needs to happen with whiteness and U.S.-ness. Sometimes an important strategy may be to focus the gaze differently, to learn to see the same concepts and phenomena in new (to us) ways. For example, Christianity and the Bible have been key elements of colonization and oppression, but also – in the form of various liberation theologies – key elements in decolonization and liberation movements. In this chapter, I attempt to

²⁷⁴ Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Crossing Press, 1984), 37–9.

²⁷⁵ Michael Jackson, “Threatened,” *Invincible*. Epic, 2001.

look differently, at and with Michael Jackson, to explore the politics of performing hybridity in relation to the project of decolonizing the colonizer.

I argue in this chapter that Michael Jackson's work does not promote a simplistic colorblind message of multiculturalism, but offers deep critiques of white supremacy and a vision of color-conscious interculturalism²⁷⁶ -- however, because his art is not dogmatic, how his work is interpreted also depends on what the listener/viewer brings to the encounter. For the first "short film"²⁷⁷ he conceptualized, for the Jacksons' 1980 single, "Can You Feel It?," he wrote a spoken intro in which the narrator describes the creation of the world and explains that, "Soon men and women of every color and shape would be here, too. And they would find it all too easy sometimes not to see the colors and to ignore the beauty in each other." Peace and harmony, here, is achieved by *seeing*, not ignoring, "the colors." The song itself, co-written by Michael Jackson and his brother Jackie Jackson, reflects the analyses of world systems theorists, emphasizing the ways in which poverty and wealth are interconnected.²⁷⁸ They sing, *every breath you take is someone's death in another place; every healthy smile is hunger and strife to another child* -- while also emphasizing that there is a different truth that must be spread, that *we're all the same, yes, the blood inside of me is inside of you and promising salvation is near this time*. To bring about the utopia they describe, however, requires that we *feel it...see what's going down, open up your mind*.²⁷⁹ The song demands both intellectual and emotional engagement, demands a response, repeating the question over and over again, *Can you feel it?* The continual movement between emphasizing sameness, multiplicity, harmony, dissonance and oppressive power dynamics is a recurrent theme in Jackson's work, as is the insistence that life is not a spectator sport, that we must be active participants -- including in our roles as listeners. Below, I discuss these themes, and how they coalesce around specific critiques of white supremacy, in analyses of two of Jackson's short films, "Ghosts" and "Black or White."

I also argue in this chapter that Jackson does not embody postmodern social constructionism (Lance Olson described him as the "possessor of the PomoBod"²⁸⁰) but might rather be understood as a decolonial trickster. As such, I believe his work offers many lessons regarding the decolonial potential of hybridity when recognized and employed in ways which are attentive to relationships of power. As discussed below, hybridity is not inherently decolonial and white people in particular must beware of engaging in acts of cultural appropriation and/or seeking to escape whiteness when turning to this strategy. However, hybridity can be an essential recognition and skill to develop as part of what Lugones calls "complex communication" -- a "creative preparation" in which we

²⁷⁶ Reverend Lynice Pinkard discusses the difference between multiculturalism and interculturalism: "Multiculturalism places cultures side by side" and "plays into the moral void of cultural relativism." Interculturalism involves "the alchemization of cultures into something entirely new" and letting go of those parts of ourselves which do not "serve the flourishing of all life." Moreover, she argues, "whiteness is not a culture," it is cannibalistic and nihilistic and, as such, "white customs are "cultural" only in the way that necrophilia is "sexual." See Pinkard, "Beyond Multiculturalism: The New Life Before Us."

²⁷⁷ Jackson did not allow people to use the phrase "music videos" to describe that aspect of his work, but insisted on the phrase "short films" to emphasize the depth of what he was creating. Indeed, his short films were far more extensive, both in length and in production values, than anything else that was being shown on MTV or VH1 at the time. He frequently hired famous Hollywood directors to work on them, including John Landis, Martin Scorsese, John Singleton, Stan Winston, and Spike Lee.

²⁷⁸ See, for example, Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

²⁷⁹ The Jacksons, "Can You Feel It," *Triumph*. Epic, 1980.

²⁸⁰ Lance Olsen, "The Michael Jacksonization of American Fiction," *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 5, no. 4 (1992): 171-179.

practice “reading reality as multiple” and engaging as “intercultural interlocutors,” responding to one another and sharing of ourselves (without assimilation or assuming transparency) in order to “learn each other’s meaning” and “to understand the peculiarities of each other’s resistant ways of living.”²⁸¹ This striving for mutual understanding via “complex communication” is a necessary component for building the coalitions needed for broad-scale liberatory transformation.

Communication, as emphasized by both Lugones and Baldwin, is never uni-directional. It is impacted by the frames of reference and perceptions of all parties involved. Lugones emphasizes that communication must entail “an openness to the interlocutors as real...not a figment of my imagination nor completely foreign.”²⁸² We must take each other seriously and believe one another without ever believing that we have fully understood. And we must respond. Baldwin emphasizes that the response to the artist’s mirror – and here he is specifically speaking about the white response to the truth-telling by black artists – cannot be, “what should I do for you?” Rather, he emphasizes,

There is nothing you can do for Negroes. It must be done for you. One is not attempting to save twenty-two million people. One is attempting to save an entire country, and that means an entire civilization, and the price for that is high. The price for that is to understand oneself.²⁸³

Baldwin argues that really understanding oneself is painful. This, he states, is especially true for those “most inarticulate people...totally unlettered in the language of the heart, totally distrustful of whatever cannot be touched, panic-stricken at the first hint of pain. A people determined to believe that they can make suffering obsolete. Who don’t understand yet a very physiological fact: that the pain which signals a toothache is a pain which saves your life.”²⁸⁴ Recognizing oneself as oppressor, as dominator, as colonizer – regardless of and in spite of one’s desires and even efforts to the contrary – is indeed painful. But this pain is precisely what enables us to begin moving (however slightly and imperfectly) away from the death-clutches of domination and towards greater aliveness. This pain is part of recognizing and understanding oneself which, in turn, is necessary for entering into complex communication and coalition with others committed to decolonization.

Michael Jackson communicated an enormous amount but did not dictate how he should be interpreted. I am not positing that the stories about his work that I tell here are closer to Jackson’s own version(s) of reality than any other story that is told about him or his creations. Rather, in telling stories (which is what all interpretive work does, including academic genres) we are responding to those creations by offering one of our own. In the process, we become responsible (response-able) for articulating what we see and reveal our frameworks of understanding. As such, as Baldwin pointed out, our stories arguably reveal at least as much, if not more, about ourselves than about anything or anyone else. Michael Jackson himself reminds us of the ways in which his persona functions in a mirror-role. In his song, *Is It Scary?*, he sings, *I’m gonna be exactly what you wanna see...So let the performance start!*²⁸⁵ I return to that song (and the film in which it is featured) in the section

²⁸¹ Maria Lugones, “On Complex Communication,” *Hyppatia* 21, no. 3 (2006): 75–85.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁸³ Baldwin, *The Cross of Redemption*, 57.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁸⁵ Michael Jackson, “Is It Scary,” *Blood on the Dance Floor*. Epic, 1997.

below titled “(Wo)Man in the Mirror.” But for now I’d like to turn to the story I want to tell about Michael Jackson.

ON THE LINE/IN THE BORDERLANDS

The story never stops beginning or ending...Its (in)finity subverts every notion of completeness and its frame remains a non-totalizable one...The story circulates like a gift; an empty gift which anybody can lay claim to by filling it to taste, yet can never truly possess. – Trinh T. Minh-ha

The story I want to tell about Michael Jackson is not the (unfortunately) common story of essentialized binaries, stories about the black boy who grew into a white woman, musings about whether he was gay or straight, a sexual predator or an asexual eunuch, an innocent child or a conniving adult, a savior or a villain. Nor do I want to tell a story of an otherworldly presence, stories that have been told in negative terms about a freak or in positive terms about an angel. Such stories are ultimately dehumanizing, as is, I would argue, the story about Michael Jackson as a postmodern social constructionist who transcends all categories. This latter story often disembodies this incredibly embodied performer and, ironically, frequently does so by completely reducing this human being to his skin, hair, and bone structure. In the process, what is often intended as a progressive intervention can come to feel dangerously close to those exercises in physiognomy and phrenology that underwrote the creation of the racist ideologies these theorists are aiming to critique. For example, in an article titled, “Cutting Race Otherwise: Imagining Michael Jackson,” Kristopher Cannon states, “I will address Jackson’s body as racial image, which has been (but possibly must always be) Black and has been (was becoming, became, will henceforth be) White.”²⁸⁶ He goes on to analyze Jackson’s shifting “chromatic” image to argue that

Jackson’s inability to visually “pass”—as an image of Black- or Whiteness—moves outside of the realm of assimilation and toward the possibility to radically construct a visual body/identity that need not be subject to chromatic distinctions at all.²⁸⁷

The implied goal of race abolition, i.e. racialized markers coming to signify nothing, is laudable. However, if the goal of the article is to illuminate possibilities for liberatory social change, there are at least two major problems that arise from Cannon’s choice to focus solely on Jackson’s interventions vis-à-vis his body, beyond the already mentioned dangers of a person – especially a person socially positioned as white within the current historical context (Cannon) -- hyper-analyzing the physiognomy of a person socially positioned as black (Jackson) and making an argument about the latter’s post- or non-humanness (even if the point is to trouble those categories, including by revealing various ways in which Jackson troubled them).

The first problem is that a focus on racism is replaced with a sole focus on race. While pointing out the socially constructed (rather than inherent) nature of “race” and racial categories reveals the lie upon which the ideological foundations of racism have been built, there is a false assumption that this revelation alone has the power to transform racism, a structure of institutionalized relations of domination. Jackson demonstrated a keen awareness of the distinction between the falsity of race/racial categories and the reality of racism/white supremacy in his work, and I discuss some of

²⁸⁶ Kristopher L. Cannon, “Cutting Race Otherwise: Imagining Michael Jackson,” *Post Identity* 30, no. 2 (2010): 29.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 34.

examples of this below. By focusing analytic attention solely on Jackson's body, Cannon ignores the critical power of Jackson's many creative interventions which speak precisely to these issues.

Second, and relatedly, the absence of an analysis of power (specifically, of white supremacy, as the primary focus of the article is on race) de-radicalizes the theoretical frameworks Cannon draws on. For example, he draws heavily on Donna Haraway's cyborg theory to argue that, "with the assistance of plastic surgery," Jackson's "machinated fleshed-construction(s)...commands our attentive attraction, to imagine how his visible presence is never wholly human."²⁸⁸ Cannon also describes Jackson's body as "an imag(in)ing of cyborg bodiedness that deconstructs the visual signifiers for race, gender and sexuality by occupying the space of the hyphen in post-human"²⁸⁹ and argues that "the cyborg offers a conceptual framework to illuminate distinctions between the human body and Jackson's imag(in)ed body—on the brink of becoming non-human."²⁹⁰ In Haraway's work, the hybrid being called a "cyborg" is not "post-human" or "on the brink of becoming non-human" or "never wholly human." To the contrary – the cyborg is, in Sandoval's words, "a revolutionary form of human being."²⁹¹ Haraway describes a cyborg world as "lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints."²⁹² This is an expansive and humble humanness; a humanness that recognizes itself as simultaneously part of and formed by all other animate and so-called inanimate beings, and which does not seek to position itself as superior vis-à-vis any other forms of existence. Nor, however, does it seek to become disembodied or to deny its particularity as human. Moreover, the entire purpose of imagining cyborg identities is to contribute to the political project of decolonization. As Sandoval explains, such efforts

insist on new kinds of human and social exchange that have the power to forge a dissident transnational coalitional consciousness, or what Haraway calls an "earthwide network of connections"²⁹³

This is a project to which, I argue, Michael Jackson contributed -- and continues to contribute, depending on the stories we tell about him. Emphasizing the interconnectedness of the material and the representational, Anzaldúa asked us to dedicate ourselves to "transforming perceptions of reality as a means for transforming the conditions of life."²⁹⁴ The story I want to tell about Michael Jackson, and the perception of reality that I would like to thus promote, is the story of a decolonial trickster.

Sandoval identifies the "trickster" as a key figure for decolonization, in particular for decolonizing the imagination. The trickster is defined by a "commitment to the process of metamorphosis itself."²⁹⁵ This is someone who "practices subjectivity as masquerade, the oppositional agent who accesses differing identity, ideological, aesthetic, and political positions."²⁹⁶ Metamorphosis is a key

²⁸⁸ Ibid, 33.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, 29.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, 32.

²⁹¹ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 167.

²⁹² Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 154.

²⁹³ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 175.

²⁹⁴ Anzaldúa, "Now Let Us Shift...the Path of Conocimiento...Inner Work, Public Acts," 540.

²⁹⁵ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 62.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

aspect in Jackson's work: in his short films, he has morphed into a black panther, a werewolf, a zombie, a robot, a crow, dust, various ghouls, a cherub, a giant, sand, a skeleton, a fat white man, a rabbit, and a cartoon – to name a few examples. Of course, the media has also always been obsessed with the metamorphoses of his physical appearance off-stage (in particular in regards to racialized and gendered markers), as well as with the narrative of a person who morphs back and forth between presumed discreet “public” and “private” personas. Though many have tried to pin him down, Jackson (and his work) continually elides being confined to a particular box, discourse, or genre – although he may choose to take on one or another at various moments. Jackson thus manifests a “differential consciousness,” which Sandoval identifies as a key technology for oppositional actors. Rather than remaining dogmatically committed to a singular analysis and/or strategy of resistance, the “differential” approach morphs according to particular contexts:

The differential mode of oppositional social movement and consciousness can be understood as a *symptom* of transnational capitalism in its neocolonizing postmodern form (insofar as...this mode of resistance is arising out of pressures peculiar to this newest form of globalization), as well as a *remedy* for neocolonizing postmodernism both in spite and because of its similarities in structure to power's postmodern configurations...the differential resides in the place where meaning escapes any final anchor point, slipping away to surprise or snuggle inside power's mobile contours...the differential is subjunctive; it is that which joins together the possible with what is...This form of political subjectivity resides in a state of contingency, of possibility, readying for any event...[it] is conditional: subject to the terms of dominant power, yet capable of challenging and changing those very same terms.²⁹⁷

In relation to racial identity, Jackson eschews a singular oppositional tactic, playing alternately with *both* social constructivism and essentialism. Jackson's music draws from gospel, classical, R&B, funk, rock, hip-hop, disco, soul, and electronica. Tamara Roberts analyzes the sound of numerous Jackson tracks and argues that his music entails a “tension between realizing and transcending race through sound,”²⁹⁸ blending genres of music which the music industry has historically segregated (in spite of their cross-racial roots) while also employing hyperracial markers. Michael Awkward advances a similar argument about Jackson as what Roberts calls a “Hyper/Transracial Artist” in regards to Jackson's physical appearance. Awkward argues that, for Jackson, “the human body has come to represent an extremely malleable surface and...others' efforts to read his altered state as a manifestation of an absence of racial pride are themselves operating in terms of limited notions of blackness.”²⁹⁹ Pointing out that Jackson has never denied (and has frequently asserted) his blackness, nor attempted to “pass” as white, Awkward describes Jackson's play with racial markers as “transraciality.” He explains that in transraciality, “the ultimate outcome of the assumption of the other's traits of physical difference is neither abandonment of origin nor wholehearted adoption of either group's ideology, but is the creation of another category, another state of racial being.”³⁰⁰ However, as Awkward also notes, Jackson's particular brand of transraciality does not situate him

²⁹⁷ Ibid, 179-80

²⁹⁸ Tamara Roberts, “Michael Jackson's Kingdom: Music, Race, and the Sound of the Mainstream,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 23, no. 1 (2011): 20.

²⁹⁹ Michael Awkward, *Negotiating Difference: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Positionality*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 184.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 182.

permanently in “another category, another state of racial being.” Rather, Jackson also employs what Spivak has called “strategic essentialism”³⁰¹ – but has only ever claimed blackness when doing so.

We can begin to see here the ways in which the decolonial trickster is distinct from the postmodern social constructionist. The former emphasizes an egalitarian ethics (as opposed to the latter’s moral relativism) and includes space for moving within as well as outside of essentialisms, depending on the circumstances. Michael Jackson declared that he was “not going to live my life being a color,” and also frequently referred to himself as a black man, reminding me of Aimé Césaire’s declaration: “I’m not going to confine myself to some narrow particularism. But I don’t intend either to become lost in a disembodied universalism.”³⁰² Jackson learned from and incorporated a range of cultural traditions, while simultaneously positioning himself within a particular African-American tradition and claiming a universalism as a member of the human race. His transraciality, in this sense, is not the “neither/nor” narrative of a “third space” or a new racial category. Neither, however, is it a “both/and” narrative of integrating blackness and whiteness. It is a “both/and” narrative of integrating blackness and humanness. Whiteness – as an identity or ideology, if not as a phenotype or “chromatic” element – is categorically denied. I return to these points below. For now, I would like to linger a while longer on the story of Michael Jackson as a decolonial trickster.

At the core of colonial thought lie hierarchical binaries. But it is not only in disturbing these that Michael Jackson is a decolonial figure, but also in his other central methodology: love. This is the theme that comes through most often in his music, dance, words, and humanitarianism, whether expressed fiercely, sentimentally, angrily, sexually, defiantly, or yearningly. He has argued that it is impossible to solve problems without love, and saw giving love, “through song and through dance and through music,” as his purpose in life.³⁰³ “Love,” Sandoval asserts, “understood as a technology for social transformation,” constitutes “a singular apparatus necessary for forging twenty-first century modes of decolonization.”³⁰⁴ This decolonial love is also the driving force in Anzaldúa’s work. And her insistence on “the freedom to carve and chisel my own face,”³⁰⁵ along with her project of creating a new tribalism based on a mestiza culture, strikes me as having a lot in common with Jackson’s work. Drawing on their writings, interviews, songs, and poems (without adding any of my own words), I imagined a conversation between the two of them in which they riff off of each other’s contributions. I performed this conversation at the Center for Race and Gender’s 2009 symposium on Michael Jackson. What does it mean for a white woman to engage in such cross-racial vocalizations?

Anna Deavere Smith is an actor who has become famous for her one-woman shows in which – based on a meticulous study of individuals’ vocal stylings – she embodies dozens of people she has interviewed on a topic, across lines of race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and other forms of difference. At a 2008 presentation she gave at UC Berkeley, she explained the reason for her particular performance style:

We are what we say...in our language, we create ourselves and the world. It is in *how* we say things. My work is based on putting myself in others’ words. If you say a

³⁰¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

³⁰² Aimé Césaire, *Letter to Maurice Thorez* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1957).

³⁰³ “Michael Jackson Talks to Oprah,” *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, February 10, 1993.

³⁰⁴ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 2.

³⁰⁵ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 44.

word often enough, it becomes you...I didn't like the feeling that I'm only supposed to know what's me and mine...I know I can never be anybody but me. But I'm trying to keep myself at bay and trying to reach towards the other. My media is that reach: walking a bridge towards one another, having relationships.³⁰⁶

In an interview, Smith (an African-American woman) commented on her social positioning in relation to her chosen performance genre and mused, "it's likely that a white person would take more heat for doing [performing] blacks."³⁰⁷ There is good reason for that. Performances do not exist in a vacuum, exempt from power dynamics. As E. Patrick Johnson points out,

history demonstrates that cultural usurpation has been a common practice of white Americans and their relation to art forms not their own. In many instances, whites exoticize and/or fetishize blackness, what bell hooks calls "eating the other." Thus, when white-identified subjects perform "black" signifiers—normative or otherwise—the effect is always already entangled in the discourse of otherness; the historical weight of white skin privilege necessarily engenders a tense relationship with its Others.³⁰⁸

And yet, Johnson goes on to argue that,

all human commingling necessarily entails the syncretism whereby cultures assimilate and adopt aspects of each other...Given that, is all cross-cultural appropriation an instance of colonization and subjugation?...some sites of cross-cultural appropriation provide fertile ground on which to formulate new epistemologies of self and Other.³⁰⁹

Johnson identifies performance as one of these sites of "fertile ground," so long as there is an avoidance of "fetishistic voyeurism" and an awareness is maintained of the fact that blackness – while embodied in myriad ways – has also "historically been the site of violence and trauma."³¹⁰ Here, again, there is an emphasis on the importance of focusing not just on race, but also on racism: "Although useful in deconstructing essentialist notions of selfhood, performance must also provide a space for meaningful resistance of oppressive systems."³¹¹ Radical performance, in this sense, requires the performer's openness to being transformed by the encounter with the Other. Johnson argues that "insofar as the performer is transformed...in/through performance, she has the potential to effect social change,"³¹² emphasizing again that these efforts are not just about play, but about a larger political and spiritual project of liberatory transformation, not just of the self, but also of the structures which (re)produce selves and Others. It was thus important that my performance at

³⁰⁶ Anna Deavere Smith, "We Are What We Say." 2008 Presentation at University of California Berkeley Townsend Center. The full presentation can be viewed here: <http://townsendcenter.berkeley.edu/media/anna-deavere-smith-actress-playwright>.

³⁰⁷ Rachel Steinberg, "Understanding the American Character," *The Berkeley Rep Magazine* 7: 19.

³⁰⁸ E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 4.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 244.

the symposium linked an exploration of hybridity and trans-performances with an analysis of reparations as an essential component of white people's participation in transforming dominating structures. Regardless, Johnson also emphasizes that "performance is not magic: there are "pitfalls" to performance that may result in tragic misreadings by colonizing the Other, exoticizing or fetishizing the Other, trivializing the Other, or by not engaging the Other at all."³¹³

Performers navigate these pitfalls in different ways, and differently in different moments. For myself, when deciding to vocalize the voices of two people of color in the imagined conversation between Gloria Anzaldúa and Michael Jackson, I decided not to emulate Smith's performance technique. Partially, this was due to not having the vocal training/mimetic skills she possesses in order to deliver nuanced representations that sound respectful rather than stereotyped or caricatured. Moreover, there is a particular danger of even nuanced cross-racial representations of people of color's voices by white people being experienced as disrespectful, given the history of racist minstrel performances in this country in which whites "mimic" (in derogatory fashion) what they consider black speech.³¹⁴ As such, while I believe there could be a wide range of valid opinions on whether or not it is offensive for a white person to vocalize people of color in the manner of Smith's meticulously detailed performances, the fact that my doing so could cause psychic injury has not been a risk I (at least thus far) have been willing to take.

I am, however, willing to risk the fact that my embodying a conversation between two people of color in my own voice might still be felt as offensive by some. This willingness is due to two beliefs. First, I believe that it is important, as Spivak asserts, to "risk the decision that you can hear the other."³¹⁵ For me, attempting to hear someone involves internalizing that person's words, being able to speak them back as a demonstration of having heard properly (even if full understanding can never be assumed), and being moved by them. The point is not, as Pinkard has argued, "to *be* you, to become your clone, but to be cross-fertilized by you, transformed by you."³¹⁶ Live performance enables the expression of emotions evoked by these words, including a demonstration of the urgency, grief, hope and longing that I feel in my own body. And, as Smith describes, it enables a certain kind of entering into relationship. In this case, the relationships I reach towards with Jackson and Anzaldúa initially background my own voice (i.e. words/analysis) even while they "command my body to perform."³¹⁷ This is an attempt at *active* listening, a listening that is participation rather than a passive consumption of their work. Placing their words side-by-side is also about creating relationship. It is not an intellectual exercise that says, "Look! These two people who are generally encountered in very separate worlds have a lot in common!" Rather, it is an invocation of a relationship between two formidable beings who never met each other (as far as I know) while alive but whose work, amplified and synergized, lives on through those who evoke it, and may have the power to help us "heal [ourselves and] the world."

³¹³ Ibid, 243.

³¹⁴ This is not only an issue on the stage. For a discussion of issues regarding such everyday mimicry see, for example, Jane H. Hill, "Language, Race, and White Public Space," *American Anthropologist* 100, no. 3 (1998): 680–689; H. Samy Alim, "Hearing What's Not Said and Missing What Is: Black Language in White Public Space," in *Intercultural Discourse and Communication: The Essential Readings*, eds. Scott Kiesling and Christina Bratt Paulston (Malden: Blackwell, 2005): 180–197.

³¹⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak," *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988): 271–313.

³¹⁶ Personal conversation, April 4, 2013.

³¹⁷ Thank you to Patricia Baquedano-López for this observation/analysis/articulation. (Personal conversation.)

Second, one of the recurring themes in this dissertation is that white people, at this historical moment, can neither escape nor take pride in whiteness, that we must reject it without removing ourselves from it. I believe the viscosity of live performance lends itself to this tension. Even as the white performer voices critiques of whiteness, even as she speaks and aligns herself with the words of decolonial theorists of color, her embodied whiteness remains on display, not as a fixed essence, but as something inescapable, implicating me, and a continual reminder to the audience – and to myself as I see myself through the eyes of those in the audience – of my complicity with this structure of domination.

While a written transcription is not the same as a live performance, I share the transcript of this part of my presentation at the UC Berkeley Michael Jackson Symposium here because I believe Anzaldúa and Jackson have a great deal to teach us about possibilities for decolonial movement, and want to proliferate their words in as many venues as possible. I encourage you to read the following out loud, embodying the words. I also encourage you to seek out the original sources (listed in the citations) of their writing, interviews, and lyrics quoted here, in order to delve deeper by engaging with the full texts as well as with the imagery, music, and dance.

GA: **Conocimiento is reached via creative acts...[and] a hunger to understand and love yourself [and the world].³¹⁸ But it can be difficult as your multiple cultures try to singularly claim you [and] you don't know whether to assimilate, separate or isolate³¹⁹ ...you are kicking a hole out of the old boundaries, trying to slip under or over, dragging the old skin along, stumbling over it.³²⁰**

MJ: *Too high to get over, too low to get under, you're stuck in the middle, and the pain is thunder.³²¹*

GA: **Sometimes the pain of living in the border, combined with grief at the injustices of the world, leads to despair, self-loathing, hopelessness,³²² and addiction to escape emotional pain.³²³**

MJ: *I'm tired of injustice. I'm tired of you tellin' the story your way. Your lies are disgusting, you think it's okay.³²⁴ Did you ever stop to notice all the blood we've shed before, the crying Earth, these weeping shores?³²⁵ How many dead children must we see before we learn to live as brothers and create one family?³²⁶ Tragedy on top of tragedy, you know it's killing me. So many people in agony.³²⁷ Did God say they could decide who will live and who will die?³²⁸ They don't really care about us.³²⁹ To be damned to know hoping is dead and you're*

³¹⁸ Anzaldúa, "Now Let Us Shift...the Path of Conocimiento...Inner Work, Public Acts," 542–3.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 548.

³²⁰ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 71.

³²¹ Michael Jackson, "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'," *Thriller*. Epic, 1982.

³²² Anzaldúa, "Now Let Us Shift...the Path of Conocimiento...Inner Work, Public Acts," 545.

³²³ Ibid., 550.

³²⁴ Michael Jackson and Janet Jackson, "Scream," *HIStory: Past, Present and Future, Book I*. Epic, 1995.

³²⁵ Michael Jackson, "Earth Song," *HIStory: Past, Present and Future, Book I*. Epic, 1995.

³²⁶ Michael Jackson, "History," *HIStory: Past, Present and Future, Book I*. Epic, 1995.

³²⁷ Michael Jackson, "Shout," B-side on *Cry*. Epic, 2001.

³²⁸ Michael Jackson, "We've Had Enough," *The Ultimate Collection*. Epic, 2004.

³²⁹ Michael Jackson, "They Don't Care About Us," *HIStory: Past, Present and Future, Book I*. Epic, 1995.

*doomed, then to scream out and nobody's there.*³³⁰ *Kicked in the face, you hate your race, you make me sick, so undesirable. Don't cry, no need to dismay, close your eyes and drift away, Demerol, Demerol.*³³¹

GA: **To rise from depression's slow suicide and re-arouse yourself as agent, you must move.**³³²

MJ: *When the world is on your shoulder, gotta straighten up your act and boogie down.*³³³

GA: **You gather strength from those who have come before you.**³³⁴

MJ: *African people have given us gifts of courage and endurance that we couldn't hope to repay. Slavery was a terrible thing, but when black people in America finally got out from under that crushing system, they were stronger. They knew what it was to have your spirit crippled by people who are controlling your life. They were never going to let that happen again. I admire that kind of strength. People who have it take a stand and put their blood and soul into what they believe.*³³⁵ *[To Sammy Davis, Jr.:] you were there, before we came. You took the hurt, you took the shame. They built the walls to block your way. You beat them down. You won the day. It wasn't right, it wasn't fair. You taught them all. You made them care. Yes, you were there, and thanks to you, there's now a door we all walk through. And we are here, for all to see --to be the best that we can be. Yes, I am here cause you were there.*³³⁶

GA: **But to dwell in the border beyond culturally-imposed limits you also have to leave parts of yourself behind...including lover, parent, friend, who...try to keep you from changing...In the final reckoning it comes down to a matter of faith.**³³⁷

MJ: *Keep the faith. Don't let nobody turn you 'round. You gotta know when it's good to go, to get your dreams up off of the ground. I know that keepin' the faith means never givin' up on love, but the power that love has to make it right, makes it, makes it right.*³³⁸ *Gotta put your heart on the line, if you wanna make it right. You gotta reach out and try. Gotta put it all on the line.*³³⁹

GA: **You're sure of one thing: the consciousness that's created our social ills (dualistic and misogynist) cannot solve them. Reframing the old story points to another option besides assimilation and separation—a new tribalism.**³⁴⁰

³³⁰ Michael Jackson, "Little Susie," *HIStory: Past, Present and Future, Book I*. Epic, 1995.

³³¹ Michael Jackson, "Morphine," *Blood on the Dance Floor*. Epic, 1997.

³³² Anzaldúa, "Now Let Us Shift...the Path of Conocimiento...Inner Work, Public Acts," 552.

³³³ Michael Jackson, "Off the Wall," *Off the Wall*. Epic, 1979.

³³⁴ Anzaldúa, "Now Let Us Shift...the Path of Conocimiento...Inner Work, Public Acts," 557.

³³⁵ Michael Jackson, *Moonwalk*. (New York: Harmony Books, 2009/1988), 278–9.

³³⁶ Michael Jackson, "You Were There." Written and performed for Sammy Davis Jr.'s 60th birthday celebration November 13, 1989.

³³⁷ Anzaldúa, "Now Let Us Shift...the Path of Conocimiento...Inner Work, Public Acts," 557.

³³⁸ Michael Jackson, "Keep the Faith," *Dangerous*. Epic, 1991.

³³⁹ Michael Jackson, "On the Line," *The Ultimate Collection*. Epic, 2004.

³⁴⁰ Anzaldúa, "Now Let Us Shift...the Path of Conocimiento...Inner Work, Public Acts," 560.

- MJ: *We're takin' over! We have the truth. This is our planet. You're one of us. We're sendin' out a major love, and this is our message to you. The planets are linin' up, we're bringin' brighter days, they're all in line waitin' for you. We're needin' you, so know the truth: You're just another part of me. Heebee.*³⁴¹
- GA: **You scan your inner landscape, books, movies, philosophies, mythologies, and the modern sciences for bits of lore...You scrutinize and question dominant and ethnic ideologies...And, putting all the pieces together, you reenvision the map of the known world, creating a new description of reality and scripting a new story.**³⁴²
- MJ: *I wanted to change the world, so I got up one morning and looked in the mirror. That one in the mirror felt very angry and desperate. Everything looked like a disaster. "Do something!" he said. It was not hard to find good people who wanted to solve the earth's problems. As I listened to their solutions, I thought, "There is so much good will here, so much concern." But everybody didn't do their part. Some did, but were they stopping the tide? That one in the mirror whispered, "Maybe it's hopeless." Then a sly look came into his eyes, and he shrugged. "But you and I will survive. At least we are doing all right." There was something very wrong here. A faint suspicion came to me. What if that one in the mirror isn't me? He feels separate. He sees problems "out there" to be solved. But I don't feel that way -- those problems aren't "out there," not really. I feel them inside me. The next time I looked in the mirror, that one looking back had started to fade. It was only an image after all. It showed me a solitary person enclosed in a neat package of skin and bones. "Did I once think you were me?" I began to wonder. I am not so separate and afraid. The pain of life touches me, but the joy of life, the love, is so much stronger. That one in the mirror winced and squirmed. He hadn't thought so much about love. Seeing "problems" was much easier, because love means complete self-honesty. Ouch! "Oh, friend," I whispered to him, "Do you think anything can solve problems without love?" That one in the mirror wasn't sure. "Is love more real than pain?" he asked. "I can't promise that it is. But it might be. Let's discover," I said. One thing I know: I never feel alone when I am earth's child. I do not have to cling to my personal survival as long as I realize, day by day, that all of life, pain and joy, is in me. That one in the mirror has his doubts sometimes. So I am tender with him. Every morning I touch the mirror and whisper, "Oh, friend, I hear a dance. Will you be my partner? Come."³⁴³*
- GA: **You take your story out into the world, testing it. When you or the world fail to live up to your ideals, your edifice collapses like a house of cards, casting you into conflict with self and others in a war between realities³⁴⁴ ...the contradictions explode in your face³⁴⁵ ...white people pay lip service to diversity issues, [but] most don't shift from positions of power...each camp adopts an "us-versus-them" model that assumes a winner and loser³⁴⁶ ...Though tempted to retreat behind racial lines and hide behind simplistic walls of identity, las nepantleras know their work lies in positioning themselves—exposed and raw—in the crack between these worlds, and in revealing current categories as unworkable...Besides fighting, fleeing, freezing, or submitting las nepantleras usan otra media...they reframe the conflict and shift the point of view³⁴⁷ ...In gatherings where people feel powerless la nepantlera offers**

³⁴¹ Michael Jackson, "Another Part of Me," *Bad*. Epic, 1987.

³⁴² Anzaldúa, "Now Let Us Shift...the Path of Conocimiento...Inner Work, Public Acts," 545.

³⁴³ Michael Jackson, *Dancing The Dream* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 143–5.

³⁴⁴ Anzaldúa, "Now Let Us Shift...the Path of Conocimiento...Inner Work, Public Acts," 545.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 567.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 565.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 567.

rituals to say good-bye to old ways of relating; prayers to thank life for making us face loss, anger, guilt, fear, and separation; rezos to acknowledge our individual wounds; and commitments to not give up on others just because they hurt us.³⁴⁸

MJ: *Don't walk away. See, I just can't find the right things to say. I tried but all my pain gets in the way. Should I get down on my knees and pray? How can I stop losing you, how can I begin to stay? Can't we find some love to take this away? Cause the pain gets stronger every day. All my dreams been broken, I don't know where we're going, with everything we said and all we done. Don't let go, I don't wanna walk away.*³⁴⁹

GA: **You acknowledge an unmapped common ground: the humanity of the other. We are the other, the other is us...This alchemy of connection provides the knowledge, strength and energy to persist.**³⁵⁰

MJ: *We is not a choice anymore, not if you and I want to grow with one another. We unites us, increases our strength; it picks up our burden when you and I are ready to let it fall. The truth is that you and I would have given up long ago, but We won't let us. It is too wise.*³⁵¹

Jackson and Anzaldúa chose over and over again to make that unsettling place of the border their home, putting everything on the line and risking ostracization to challenge the colonial deathliness of rigid identities and hierarchical binaries. Driven by an intense desire to create a more egalitarian world in which fully reciprocal relationships are possible, they used their bodies and their work to disrupt current common-sense categories, and to reach out with love and an offering of alternative realities.

But what does it mean for me as a white person to tell this particular Michael Jackson story, to speak his (and Anzaldúa's) words, to echo his body's movements? I ask this question because I am aware and leery of how tempting it can be for white people who feel trapped in our skins to appropriate hybridity – as a set of strategies developed by people of color to undermine white supremacist notions of purity and hierarchical value-laden divisions – in ways that ultimately act as an escape valve via the unethical act of removing ourselves from whiteness. Such appropriations engage in the play of hybridity or trans-performances while neglecting the work of transforming the larger colonial structures of white supremacy. Thus, in the following segments (“(Wo)Man in the Mirror” and “If You're Thinking of Being My Brother...”), I take a closer look at some of Jackson's “transracial” performances to discuss the decidedly non-colorblind character thereof. I then conclude with some thoughts regarding how hybridity, strategically and differentially employed, might also be a decolonial technology to which white people can turn.

(WO)MAN IN THE MIRROR

I'm gonna be exactly what you wanna see. It's you who's taunting me because you're wanting me to be the stranger in your life. Am I amusing you or just confusing you? Am I the beast you visualized? And if you wanna see eccentric oddities, I'll be grotesque before your eyes. Let them all materialize! Is that scary for you, baby? Am I scary for you,

³⁴⁸ Ibid, 568.

³⁴⁹ Michael Jackson, “Don't Walk Away,” *Invincible*. Epic, 2001.

³⁵⁰ Anzaldúa, “Now Let Us Shift...the Path of Conocimiento...Inner Work, Public Acts,” 570–1.

³⁵¹ Jackson, *Dancing The Dream*, 103.

boy? Did you come to me to see your fantasies performed before your very eyes?...So let the performance start!...I'm just not what you seek in me. The heart reveals the proof like a mirror reveals the truth; see, the evil one is you! Is that scary for you, baby? Wanna talk about it? I don't wanna talk about it. Is it scary for you? I'm tired of being abused. You know, you're scaring me, too. I see the evil is you! Is it scary for you, baby?

– Michael Jackson

Michael Jackson's song, "Is It Scary?," is featured in the 1997 short film, "Michael Jackson's Ghosts," co-written by Jackson and Stephen King, and directed by Stan Winston.³⁵² In this 39-minute film, Jackson plays "The Maestro," who lives in a mansion on a plot of land labeled "Someplace Else," on the outskirts of what the town's sign announces is "Normal Valley: A Nice Safe Place to Raise the Kids; Population: Nice Regular People." In an interview about the making of the film, Jackson explains that the maestro is a character based on himself: "Here's a guy, which is myself, that I'm playing, who—he doesn't really like to hurt anyone or offend anyone but they find him to be strange and eccentric and weird. The older people do. The grown-ups. Because they're kind of bigoted."³⁵³

As the film opens, the mayor of Normal Valley is leading the townspeople to the gate of the maestro's mansion, to run him out of town because, in the mayor's words, "He's a weirdo. There's no place in this town for weirdos." Some of the people in the mob are carrying flaming torches, reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan and other white "vigilantes" terrorizing black people in their homes. In the film, the mob is not exclusively white – perhaps a critique of assimilation, perhaps an emphasis that white supremacy is not simply a matter of skin color. The mayor, symbol of institutional power, is a white man. In an interview, Jackson describes the mayor as "grotesque, ridiculous...and I say it that way because those kind of people are just so stubborn and just don't see the beauty of the inside of a person...he's a fat, 50-year-old—I guess, middle American." Jackson hesitates briefly in the middle of his list of descriptors, and does not end up using the word "white" to describe the mayor. I don't know his personal reasons for this, however, I do know he was committed to being popular. He frequently spoke of the importance of a new album needing to sell more copies than previous ones, of needing to constantly break records, of being the best not only by his own standards but as measured by the adoration of others. One of the amazing feats of Michael Jackson is that he achieved such enormous popularity without conforming to "the normal." However, remaining popular does tend to come with certain constraints. John Fiske has argued that, "Popular texts may be progressive in that they can encourage the production of meanings that work to change or destabilize the social order, but they can never be radical in the sense that they can never oppose head on or overthrow that order."³⁵⁴ Furthermore, as Conquergood points out,

Dominant epistemologies...are not attuned to meanings that are masked, camouflaged, indirect, embedded, or hidden in context...meanings that are expressed forcefully through intonation, silence, body tension, arched eyebrows, blank stares, and other protective arts of disguise and secrecy...Subordinate people do not have the privilege of explicitness, the luxury of transparency, the presumptive

³⁵² Stan Winston, *Ghosts*. 1997.

³⁵³ VH1's "Michael Jackson: The Making of Ghosts." Accessible here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EFkqn2TwIw>

³⁵⁴ Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 134.

norm of clear and direct communication, free and open debate on a level playing field that the privileged classes take for granted.³⁵⁵

Michael Jackson was certainly not “subordinate.” However, fame and fortune alone, as many have pointed out, does not remove black people from the ravages of white supremacy. Moreover, in order to maintain the level of popularity and influence Jackson desired, explicit head-on radical critique of the social order was not an option. Also, one of the ways in which art is frequently distinguished from propaganda has to do with an avoidance of dogmatism and the creation of enough space for multiple interpretations – this also enables the work of art to continue to circulate and proliferate through interpretive processes. Certainly, “intonation, silence, body tension, arched eyebrows, blank stares, and other protective arts of disguise and secrecy” are hallmarks of Jackson’s performance in “Ghosts,” as well as in many of his other short films and public appearances. In fact, it is impossible to convey in writing the many layers of meaning in “Ghosts.” In addition to the subtle facial expressions, body language and tone Conquergood describes, Jackson’s film also communicates through the cinematography, the choreography of the numerous dance sequences, and the music (as expressed through the instrumental compositions as well as his own voice). As such, before continuing to read, I highly urge readers to first watch the short film, which can be accessed online here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pW9JYCK0GxI>

As the townsfolk arrive at the gate to the maestro’s mansion, the children in the group – two white boys (brothers) and one black boy – protest that he hasn’t done anything wrong and that they should all leave. The older white boy hits his younger brother on the head, telling him that it is his fault that this is happening because, “you just couldn’t keep your mouth shut.” The boys’ mother then hits the older boy on the head and reassures her younger son that, “you did the right thing.” We are witnessing the passing on, the training, of violence. The younger child had innocently shared the fun adventures he had been having during his visits with the maestro. The older child had already learned that adults are intolerant of anyone different from themselves. However, while he had thus learned to strategically stay under the radar, he had also already internalized his mother’s disciplinary practices in the face of transgression of his authority. A few minutes later in the film, this sequence of physical abuse is repeated in the presence of the maestro, with an added layer: the older boy hits his younger brother on the head, the mother does the same to the older child while telling him not to hit his brother, and then the mother is hit on the head by an invisible ghost. Is this one of the maestro’s ghosts enacting revenge on the physically abusive parent? Perhaps Michael Jackson’s own abuse at his father’s hands – and his father’s abuse at white society’s hands – is being evoked. Or is the ghost of the mother’s parent(s) being evoked, reminding her of her own childhood trauma, and revealing the inheritance of violent practices? Perhaps both; the two scenarios are not unrelated. In any case, it is notable that all of the direct violence in the film is embodied by white people. While all of the townsfolk are supporting the mayor’s actions by joining in the mob, the only direct violence depicted is the verbal violence of the white mayor and the physical violence of the white mother. While complicity is attributed to everyone in the group, the *source* of violence is visually represented by whiteness. The moment in which the invisible ghost hits the mother is the first of many mirror moments in the film. This moment draws attention to the mother’s inheritance of and perpetuation of violence – even while she is hypocritically telling her son not to hit others. A mirror is being held up to her and to the film’s audience, revealing an example of how people project various evils onto others, without seeing our own inheritance and perpetuation thereof. Here

³⁵⁵ Dwight Conquergood, “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research,” *TDR/The Drama Review* 46, no. 2 (2002): 146.

this is symbolized by the mother's hypocrisy; in regards to racism and white supremacy, we can point to countless attempts to mark it as something that belongs to other times and other people.

The mayor proceeds to insult and threaten the maestro: "Back to the circus, you freak. And do yourself a favor, okay? Don't force us to get rough with you. Because we will, if we have to." The townspeople voice some objections to this threat, although weakly, and without actually intervening. This kind of weak display of resistance, which seems to be based more in fear than principle, is repeated at various moments during the film and, as such, the maestro does not rely on, nor call on, the townspeople to join forces with him. Instead, he calls on his "family" for support – a multicultural ensemble of ghosts. The family is not introduced quite yet, however. First, in response to being threatened, the maestro challenges the mayor to a game: "The first person who gets scared has to leave." The mayor refuses to engage, but the maestro proceeds, undeterred. His first attempts to scare the mayor consist of what, to me, read as a mimicry of minstrelsy (see Figures 1 and 2), and as the second moment in the film when a metaphorical mirror is being held up to white ("middle") America. In this second mirror moment, the maestro locks eyes with the mayor and, cracking himself up while doing so, crosses his eyes, purses his lips, and buffoons in a manner that mimics old minstrel acts, asking the mayor, "Do you think this is scary?" The mayor is upset and shouts, "That's ridiculous! That's not funny!" The maestro kicks it up a notch, sticking with the same minstrel mimicry, but no longer laughing about it. In a more steely tone, he asks again, "That scare you?"



(Figure 1)



(Figure 2)

bell hooks has pointed out that,

When most black people in the United States first had the opportunity to look at film and television, they did so fully aware that mass media was a system of knowledge and power reproducing and maintaining white supremacy... Black looks, as they were constituted in the context of social movements for racial uplift, were interrogating gazes. We laughed at television shows like *Our Gang* and *Amos 'n' Andy*

[more recent examples of minstrelsy], at these white representations of blackness, but we also looked at them critically.³⁵⁶

The maestro, here, keeping the mayor locked in his gaze, demonstrates both the laughable absurdity of white minstrel representations of blackness, and the seriousness of the violence enacted by these representations.

Minstrelsy began in the mid-1800s. White performers would put on “blackface” and purported to portray black people and culture. The performances featured highly derogatory stereotypes in the form of stock characters such as Jim Crow, Zip Coon, Tambo, Bones, and Mammy. The shows mocked and exoticized black people, and frequently portrayed slaves as cheerful, inarticulate and ignorant infants, happy to oblige their masters with a song and dance. Eric Lott argues that, in minstrel shows,

“Black” figures were there *to be looked at*, shaped to the demands of desire; they were screens on which audience fantasy could rest, securing white spectators’ position as superior, controlling, not to say owning, figures.³⁵⁷

In his book, *Love and Theft*, Lott also points out the ways in which minstrel shows, and discourses surrounding them, not only inscribed racial boundaries, but revealed transgressions – and anxieties surrounding those transgressions, in particular in relation to miscegenation (“love”) and exploitation (“theft”) of black labor (including cultural labor).³⁵⁸ Eventually minstrel shows began to feature black performers, as well, frequently often also in blackface. This was one of the only venues in which black performers could find work, and promoters emphasized the “authenticity” of black minstrels. Black minstrels occupied a complex position – on the one hand, they were paid to promote viciously racist stereotypes; on the other hand, they worked to undermine these stereotypes when possible, by adding nuance and humanity to the performances, occasionally even inserting subtle critiques of white society. Frederick Douglass, in an 1849 review of a performance by the black minstrel troupe Gavitt’s Original Ethiopian Serenaders, gave a contemporary voice to such tensions. While he expressed a general distaste for minstrelsy and blackface performances, he added, “It is something gained when the colored man in any form can appear before a white audience...But they must cease to exaggerate the exaggerations of our enemies; and represent the colored man rather as he is, than as Ethiopian Minstrels usually represent him to be.”³⁵⁹

In “Ghosts,” Michael Jackson does not put on blackface or a minstrel show. He mimics the genre – although even this mimicry is only worth a minute of his time in this 39-minute film. The point seems to be to hold a mirror up to the white mayor of what the mayor imagines him to be. The confrontational context makes clear that the maestro is quite self-conscious of his actions, and that

³⁵⁶ hooks, *Black Looks*, 117.

³⁵⁷ Eric Lott, “Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy,” *Representations* no. 39 (1992): 28.

³⁵⁸ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, Race and American Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). See also Timothy J. Lensmire and Nathan Snaza, “What Teacher Education Can Learn from Blackface Minstrelsy,” *Educational Researcher* 39, no. 5 (2010): 413–422; David R Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London; New York: Verso, 1991); Thandeka, *Learning to Be White: Money, Race, and God in America* (New York: Continuum, 1999).

³⁵⁹ Frederick Douglass, “Gavitt’s Original Ethiopian Serenaders,” June 29, 1849. Originally published in *The North Star*. Accessed here: <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/minstrel/miar03at.html>.

what is being revealed through this mimicry is actually the mayor's own ignorance and bigotry. It appears the spirit of W.E.B. Du Bois is being evoked here, who wrote,

I see these [white] souls undressed and from the back and side. I see the working of their entrails. I know their thoughts and they know that I know. This knowledge makes them now embarrassed, now furious!³⁶⁰

When the mayor refuses to feel implicated in the critique, however, and thus refuses that such depictions could in any way be scary (either due to the real violence they enacted or because of the violence of the white soul they revealed), the maestro takes it up another notch. He distorts and exaggerates all of his facial features to a point beyond what is humanly possible, with special effects making his eyes pop out and his mouth and tongue grow enormous as he pulls on them. He shakes his head, which returns his face to its initial physique, and glares at the mayor. Then he reaches up to his face again, and tears it off completely, revealing the skull underneath, and dangles the limp face/hair that he has removed in front of the mayor. (See Figure 3) The mayor is finally terrified, turns around and runs away. The maestro's skull laughs. It appears as though really facing the truth of another human—when all of the projections and distortions the mayor puts on him to justify his violent actions towards him are removed—is too much to bear.



(Figure 3)

The maestro, however, will not allow the mayor (or the other townspeople, who had attempted to run out with the mayor) to leave. He uses his magic to slam the doors closed, and also slams his fists against his skull, causing it to shatter and his initial physique to reappear. He taunts the mayor and the townsfolk: “Are we going somewhere? Hello! It’s too late. You’re my guests...Meet the family!” Through electric blue plasma shooting from his hands, he calls forth a multiethnic ensemble of ghosts. The manner of their appearance allows us to see them as distinct personas yet also part of the maestro, indicating that he is a multi-gendered and multi-ethnic hybrid being.

The first dance sequence begins with the instrumental introduction to the song “2 Bad”³⁶¹ and the maestro’s voice shouting non-verbal rallying cries. The group of dancers/ghosts, led by the maestro, advances towards the mayor, and the music stops as the maestro locks him in his gaze in a prolonged moment of silence. He then begins banging out a rhythm with his foot and the music starts up again. The first sequence of dance moves is explosive, including imagery of lynching and

³⁶⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater* (1920; reprint, New York: Schocken, 1969), 29.

³⁶¹ Michael Jackson, “2 Bad,” *HIStory: Past, Present and Future, Book I*. Epic, 1995.

being placed in stocks (see Figures 4 and 5). This is not the cheerful song and dance routine of minstrel shows; the maestro is not smiling but screaming; he is holding his audience captive and leading his dancers in movements that continually advance threateningly on the mayor and the townsfolk, as if to say, “you WILL look, listen, learn, and be held accountable.”



(Figure 4)



(Figure 5)

As the lyrics begin, the maestro directs them at the mayor, calling him “dead and stuffy in the face,” and telling him that he is “doin wrong,” “cryin’ wolf” and “throwing rocks to hide your hands.” He continues with this song which simultaneously launches an accusation, expresses resilience in the face of violence and oppression, and mocks the oppressors’ frustration with not getting the upper hand: *You ain’t done enough for me/ You are disgusting me/ You’re aiming just for me/ You just want your cut from me/ Well, too bad, too bad/ Look who’s standing, if you please/ Though you tried to bring me to my knees/ What do you want from me?/ Tired of you haunting me/ You got blood lust for me/ But too bad, too bad/ I’m right back where I wanna be/ I’m standin’ though you’re kickin’ me/ Too bad, too bad about it/ Why don’t you scream and shout it/ Too bad, too bad!*³⁶²

Leigh Raiford discusses a history of African American activists and artists employing lynching imagery as part of antiracist projects, resignifying photographs and drawings that white Americans had circulated to promote beliefs about African Americans as criminal, barbaric, and lascivious. By reframing these images, Raiford argues, antiracist activists and artists turned the gaze back on white society:

By returning the gaze of their executioners and those gathered to watch them die...the accused intervenes in their racial making and begins to undo the racial making of their executioners.³⁶³

In addition to the reframing of images created by whites, Raiford also discusses the ways in which African Americans used photography “to reconstruct their image, in part, against the humiliation of minstrel icons and against the vulnerability of lynched black bodies...Photography has been used to express a freedom to define and represent oneself as one chooses and a freedom from the ideological and material consequences of dehumanizing depictions...photography has also enabled a confrontation with, a staging of, alternative futures.”³⁶⁴ I would argue that Michael Jackson is part of

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Raiford, “Lynching, Visuality, and the Un/Making of Blackness,” 25.

³⁶⁴ Ibid, 28-9.

this legacy, using, here, the visual mediums of video and dance, to both return the gaze (hold up a mirror) to whites, and assert alternative visions.

Throughout this and the subsequent song and dance sequences, the camera frequently pans the faces of the townsfolk and, in doing so, holds up another mirror – this time to us, the audience of the film. We see the townsfolk positioned as an audience, consuming a spectacle, just as we who are watching the film are doing. They are alternately afraid and delighted by the entertainment being provided. This particular mirror is held up to the townsfolk more directly in the final scene of the film, when the maestro asks them, “Did we have a good time here?” The question is posed in a confrontational tone, almost as an accusation. The townsfolk respond with hesitation and silence, leading the maestro to aggressively shout, “Hello!?!?” When they begin to nod their heads and affirm him, however, he seems pleased and relaxes, indicating the complex emotional world of a professional performer who simultaneously desires praise as a result of having presented spectacular entertainment yet also is attempting to communicate an important critique that implicates the very audience whose approval is also courted.

The “2 Bad” sequence ends with the maestro again locking eyes with the mayor. The music escalates, accompanied by lightning strikes, and then briefly cuts out before returning as a soft melody. At this point, the figures on the ceiling begin to float back down to the floor like angels, inspiring awe in the faces of all the townsfolk except for the mayor. The maestro gives the mayor a look that seems to say, “Can’t you see the beauty?” The mayor, however, just scowls and shakes his head. In response, the maestro reaches down to his ankles and tears off all of his skin, leaving just a skeleton in socks and shoes. At this point, the song “Is It Scary?,” quoted at the beginning of this segment, begins. The dancers form a cypher around the skeletal maestro, clapping and cheering him on, indicating that there are more active ways of being an audience (versus the passive spectatorship of the townsfolk). Partway through the song, the music fades out and the skeleton approaches the mayor, grabbing his tie and pulling him onto the dance floor. He then directs his family members to take turns approaching the mayor and trying to scare him. They are all disappointed with their lack of success. Then, however, the ghosts begin to direct their menacing gazes directly into the camera, looking at us watching the film, implicating us as well.

As the ghosts’ frustration grows, they start loudly stomping and pounding on the floor. The townsfolk are truly terrified – until the music comes back in, the ghosts resume dancing, and the townsfolk begin enjoying themselves again. It is clear that their emotions, as well as their sense of security, is dependent on the choices the maestro and his family make to play or to fight. As is the case in many Michael Jackson short films, however, “play,” especially in the form of dance, is often the means of fighting. Dance is how he demonstrates his fierceness, and it is the terrain which he insists upon engaging in, and upon which he wins, any disputes with adversaries. Dance is also a means of reconciliation in Michael Jackson’s worlds, most obviously in the short film for “Beat It,” where he sings “don’t wanna see no blood, don’t be a macho man,” and breaks up a fight between rival gangs by getting them to dance together with him. He invites (dares, even) people to use the nonviolent means of dance as a means of creating an alternative world. In the case of “Ghosts,” however, where the mayor refuses to participate, the invitation is transformed into a forced possession. As the “Is It Scary?” dance ends, the family of ghosts surrounds the mayor, prohibiting any escape route. At this point, the maestro transforms from the skeleton into the “super-ghoul,” a giant with grotesque features who stands directly in front of the mayor and asks, again, “Are you scared yet?” Without waiting for a response, he sticks his finger into the mayor’s mouth, prying it open, and, transforming himself into blue plasma, slithers down the mayor’s throat.

The music to the song “Ghosts” begins, the maestro rumbles around inside the mayor’s stomach, and begins to force him to dance. The mayor resists, but this resistance ultimately proves to be futile. He proceeds to get down, shaking his butt, grabbing his crotch, strutting around, spinning and even doing the moonwalk to the lyrics: *There's a ghost down in the hall, there's a ghoul upon the bed, there's something in the walls, there's blood upon the stairs. And it's floating through the room, and there's nothing I can see, and I know its restless tune because now it's hauntin' me. I don't understand it!...And who gave you the right to scare my family? And who gave you the right to hurt my baby? She needs me. And who gave you the right to shake my family tree? You put a knife in my back, shot an arrow in me. Tell me, are you the ghost of jealousy?*³⁶⁵ As the mayor lets loose, so do the townsfolk. While they had enjoyed the dance sequences by the maestro and his family, they do not themselves begin to join in the dancing until the mayor begins to dance, a metaphor for the fact that white supremacy is a system and that although many of the townsfolk seemed enamored by the maestro and his family, and objected to the mayor’s threats, their fundamental ideologies/behaviors are wrapped up in and shaped by the institutional power his figure represents.

The fact that the mayor is possessed by the maestro (and resisting this possession) provides a clue to the shift in music/voice in the song as the lyrics move from 1st to 2nd person. In the first verse, the mayor begins to recognize the existence of ghosts, and the fact that they are restless as they have been the victims of violence, as evidenced by the blood upon the stairs. He can’t see them (perhaps a willful blindness or perhaps an inability to see) but he is haunted by their restless tune, even though he proclaims to not understand it. The voice of the song then shifts to a series of accusatory questions, asked from the point of view of the maestro, as a response to the mayor’s ignorance. In my interpretation, he is speaking here to the mayor as a representative of white supremacy, calling out the violence that has been done to Africans and African Americans, scaring and destroying families, and asking if the ongoing violence is motivated by jealousy of black success and “standin’ though you’re kickin’ me” (to reference the prior song, “2 Bad”).

After a few minutes, the mayor, unable to handle the truths he is being forced to face, gathers all his energy to stand still and scream, “STOP!” The music comes to a halt, and he begins to regain his composure. However, the spirit is still inside him and the rumbling in his stomach resumes. This time, however, he is not forced to break out in dance – he has already rejected that opportunity to move into greater humanity. Instead, the rumbling results in the maestro’s hand and arm emerging from the mayor’s stomach, holding a mirror which is extended towards his face. (See Figure 6)



(Figure 6)

³⁶⁵ Michael Jackson, “Ghosts,” *Blood on the Dance Floor*. Epic, 1997.

As the mayor gazes at his reflection in the mirror, his face transforms, becoming more grotesque, and he asks his reflection – and/or his reflection asks him – “Who’s scary now? Who’s the freak now?” (See Figures 7 and 8) The mayor drops the mirror and vomits the maestro back out of him.



(Figure 7)



(Figure 8)

The maestro reappears in his initial physique, and slowly circles the mayor before taking a bow. The mayor does not, however (nor do the townsfolk, for that matter), applaud or in any other manner express any gratitude for the gift he has just received. George Yancy discusses mirrors as effective metaphors, and asserts that white people need to see the mirrors that people of color hold up to us as gifts, as “an invitation *to see more*, to see things differently”³⁶⁶ Such gifts, he argues, are “heavy laden with great responsibility...[and] ought to engender a sense of gratitude, a sense of humility, and an opportunity to give thanks.”³⁶⁷ The gift the maestro offers the mayor is rejected, however. He cannot bear to look at the truth that the mirror reveals “from the perspective of lived experience of those bodies of color that encounter white people on a daily basis as a problem or perhaps even as a site of terror”³⁶⁸ – let alone accept this truth as such and become accountable to it.

The maestro looks from the mayor to the townsfolk and asks, “So, you still want me to go?” The camera zooms in on the boys shaking their heads, “no,” while the mayor screams, “Yes! Yes!” The maestro shrugs and replies, “Fine, I’ll go.” He very briefly glances at the rest of the townsfolk as if to see if anyone is going to intervene. They, however, remain paralyzed in place. The maestro then drops to the floor, slamming his body and then his face into it. He lifts his head to look directly at the townsfolk as his face begins to crumble into dust, then drops it and disintegrates. (See Figure 9). Only a shadow remains, for a second, then that disappears, too. This moment acts as a powerful critique of liberal racism. It is not only the mayor, with his racist attitude and intentions who is to blame for the maestro’s demise, but also the seemingly well-intentioned townsfolk, who throughout the film verbally express distaste for the mayor’s attitude and violence, yet (in spite of their numeric majority) do nothing to intervene.

³⁶⁶ Yancy, *Look, a White!*, 10.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 6.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 10.



(Figure 9)

The mayor mutters, “good riddance,” and begins to lead the townsfolk to the door, to leave. They are reluctant, and he has to repeat “let’s go!” three times until they follow him. Witnessing these events has made them briefly question his authority, and they only reluctantly accede to it. They do, however, accede, and begin to follow him. As the mayor approaches the door, he mutters, “I showed that freak.” Suddenly, both of the double doors swing open, knocking him off his feet, and the whole doorway is filled with the face of the maestro (in his super-ghoul manifestation) saying, “Hello!” (See Figure 10) The mayor, terrified, turns around and runs frantically in the opposite direction until he jumps through a glass window at the other side of the room, preferring suicide to facing (i.e. being accountable to) his demons. Perhaps he will discover that death is not necessarily an escape, that his spirit will remain restless until he – as well as all the living – have surrendered to the fact that we are not separate, that we are all a part of each other (in Jackson’s words from another song, “you’re just another part of me”) and need to live accordingly.



(Figure 10)

As the credits role, the audience is exposed to one more surprise mirror moment. It turns out that Michael Jackson not only played the maestro (including the maestro’s various manifestations as skeleton and super-ghoul), but also – with the help of a fat suit and mask – played the mayor. In an interview about the making of the film, right after commenting that the mayor is a fat grotesque ridiculous middle American who stubbornly refuses to see the beauty of the inside of a person, Jackson adds, “Looking in the mirror [as the mayor] takes on a psychological strangeness...when you look at this grotesque creature, you start to really believe that you’re taking on the heart, you start to become the part. This is pretty ugly. Diabolical, I would say.”³⁶⁹ Jackson’s musings (and his

³⁶⁹ VH1’s “Michael Jackson: The Making of Ghosts.”

choice to play both the maestro and the mayor) indicate that the problems are not just “out there.” This is a recurrent theme which he also writes about in his short story, “That One in the Mirror,” quoted above in the exchange with Gloria Anzaldúa, and which is the refrain in one of his most famous ballads: *I’m starting with the man in the mirror, I’m asking him to change his ways, and no message could have been any clearer: if you wanna make the world a better place, take a look at yourself and make a change.*³⁷⁰ By taking on the persona of the mayor, Jackson indicates that nobody, including himself, is automatically immune from internalizing and participating in white supremacy – this is something that must be actively fought against, something the townfolk fail to do. However, the maestro prevails in casting the mayor out, remaining standing, and even, despite the townfolks’ failure to act in solidarity with him, appears not to give up on them but willing to remain in relationship with them. Whether this is a gift they recognize and respond to remains to be seen.

Unlike Michael Jackson, however, Stan Winston, the white director of the film, discursively distances himself from the mayor in discussing the making of the film. He states that the mayor is, “mister right-wing. He’s mister establishment. He’s mister ‘if you’re not like me, you’re not worth anything.’ And he’s the guy that, really, I’m sorry, none of us like.”³⁷¹ This issue of reducing a systemic critique of white supremacy into something that only extremists are responsible for is also central to the controversy that erupted after the release of Jackson’s short film for the song “Black or White,” a film to which I now turn, in which the politics of performing hybridity are featured even more prominently than in “Ghosts.”

IF YOU’RE THINKING OF BEING MY BROTHER...

With the exception of “They Don’t Care About Us” – the only song for which Michael Jackson created not one, but two short films, both directed by Spike Lee, one set in a prison³⁷² and the other set in a Brazilian favela³⁷³ – it is interestingly in the “Black or White” short film,³⁷⁴ frequently dismissed as a simplistic message of multiculturalism, where I think one can find some of Jackson’s most explicit critiques of white supremacy. Part of the reason the film has been dismissed is the fact that the last section, often called “the panther dance,” was censored after one showing. However, even the earlier sections offer important critiques.

The film begins in the living room of a white middle-class family: the father is watching baseball on TV, the mother is reading a newspaper featuring a story about UFO abductions. Upstairs, their rebellious son (played by a young Macaulay Culkin) is rocking out to the guitar riff from Michael Jackson’s song “Black or White.” His father comes in and screams at him for playing “this garbage” too loud and sends Macaulay’s framed Michael Jackson poster crashing to the ground when he slams his son’s door shut. In response, Macaulay brings huge speakers and an electric guitar into the living room, mimics some of Jackson’s gestures and wardrobe, and strikes a chord so loudly that it sends his father’s armchair – along with his father – straight through the roof of the house and soaring

³⁷⁰ Michael Jackson, “Man in the Mirror,” *Bad*. Epic, 1987.

³⁷¹ VH1’s “Michael Jackson: The Making of Ghosts.”

³⁷² Accessible here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97nAvTVeR6o>

³⁷³ Accessible here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cgl81eL0Teg>

³⁷⁴ The full version of the video, including the panther dance, can be viewed here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqRrbEvI_w. As discussed below, the version without graffiti is not available online, but only as part of the 2010 DVD box set, *Michael Jackson’s Vision*.

across the planet. Mom comments, “I’m afraid your father is going to be very upset when he gets back.” He never does get back, however. The last we see of him is him and his chair landing in Africa, near some lions that a group of hunters is approaching, and in front of Michael Jackson dancing with a group of male African dancers. He does not get up and join in, however, but remains a passive spectator in his armchair.

As in “Ghosts,” the adult white male is given multiple opportunities to enter into relationship via music and dance – in “Black or White,” the father rejects these invitations, first by labeling the music as “garbage” and insisting that it be turned off, then by remaining in his armchair while others dance around him. And, as in “Ghosts,” the adult white male is literally ejected from the building and we do not learn of his ultimate fate. The adult white male, in both of these short films, is both visually abolished and abolished from the narrative. This abolition is a joint process – something done to him, and something he does to himself through his unwillingness to engage. In “Black or White,” the narrative the white man is rejecting is that of equality. Jackson sings, *They print my message in the Saturday Sun. I had to tell them I ain’t second to none, and I told about equality and it’s true – either you’re wrong or you’re right. But if you’re thinking about being my baby, it don’t matter if you’re black or white.*³⁷⁵ The film accompanying the song emphasizes that “racial” identities are false and cultural identities are diverse and hybrid – while the lyrics insist that morality (in this case, equality) is not so complex: either you’re wrong or you’re right. And if you want to be part of Michael Jackson’s family (as either his “baby” or as his “brother,” depending on the verse), “it don’t matter if you’re black or white.” It does, however, matter what you believe. As in “Ghosts,” Jackson also takes liberal racists to task in “Black or White,” when he sings, *Don’t tell me you agree with me, when I saw you kicking dirt in my eye.*³⁷⁶ Words are lies, better left unspoken, if they are not matched by actions. It is notable that Michael Jackson never simply says, “It don’t matter if you’re black or white.” This sentence is always prefaced by an “if.” “IF you’re thinking of being my baby” or “IF you’re thinking of being my brother,” THEN “it don’t matter if you’re black or white.” These “if”’s reveal that race only ceases to matter if people are perceiving and treating each other as family, are engaging in deep intimate committed relationships with one another.

“Black or White” begins in “Africa.” Eric Lott points out that this

locates the source of white rock and white suburban youth rebellion in cultures of the African diaspora, the ultimate referent of Culkin’s power chord...it is this music that Jackson has in turn self-consciously appropriated (he wants you to *hear* that he’s appropriated the appropriation) in the chordal backbone of “Black or White.”³⁷⁷

This appropriation of the appropriation is another recurrent element in Jackson’s work, as we saw in the mimicry of minstrelsy in “Ghosts.” The “Africa” in “Black or White,” however, as Elizabeth Chin points out, is actually “some Southern California chaparral” and the dancers’ movements “are emphatically West African, and their costumes (such as they are) look more East African than not.”³⁷⁸ Chin argues that the opening dance sequences – in which Jackson dances first with the group of African men, then with a group of Thai women, then with a group of Native Americans,

³⁷⁵ Michael Jackson, “Black or White,” *Dangerous*. Epic, 1991.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Eric Lott, “The Aesthetic Ante: Pleasure, Pop Culture, and the Middle Passage,” *Callaloo* 17, no. 2 (1994): 551.

³⁷⁸ Elizabeth Chin, “Michael Jackson’s Panther Dance: Double Consciousness and the Uncanny Business of Performing While Black,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 23, no. 1 (2011): 66.

then with a woman from India, and then with a group of Russian men, all in “traditional” costumes – are a parody of Natural History Museum dioramas, racist stereotyped displays created for consumption by citizens of colonial powers. Another appropriation of appropriation. Through this parody, Chin sees Jackson offering “a very direct challenge to the kind of uncritical multiculturalism often disparagingly referred to as the “food and festivals” approach.”³⁷⁹ In addition to this parody, I believe there are other layers of meaning. The music and the dancing begins in “Africa,” and the “African” dancers are the only ones who travel with Jackson from one scene to another, which reads to me as an assertion of Africa as the birthplace of all of humanity, an argument (widely accepted in scientific communities) called the “Out of Africa Model.”³⁸⁰ Also, as Jackson travels from place to place and group to group, we see him eager to learn new movement vocabulary from various traditions, and from women as well as men, while also incorporating these movements into his distinct style – demonstrating that it is possible to learn from one another across lines of difference and that even while we allow our bodies to learn something new, we maintain our particular, yet living and changing, subjectivity. Lott articulates this sequence as “bear[ing] witness to Jackson’s understanding of the historical weight of culture as well as its inessential—one might say antiessentialist—character...underscore[ing] the cultural hybridity in which “Black or White” revels.”³⁸¹

The last dancing sequence features Michael Jackson with a group of male Russian dancers in the snow, and the camera pulls back to reveal them as dancing inside of a snow globe. We then see a white hand grab the snow globe and the camera pulls back even further to reveal two babies, one white and one black, sitting on top of the world. The white baby has grasped the (snow) globe and is not letting the black baby have a turn playing with it. This brief scene is striking for a Michael Jackson film in that he generally (both in his work and in interviews) portrays children as innocent and as the hope for the future. However, here he seems to be pointing to the ravages of greed, and emphasizing that these ravages are not colorblind but racialized. We move directly from the baby moment into a screen filled with flames and smoke which Michael breaks through as he sings the bridge of the song (see Figure 11): *I am tired of this devil. I am tired of this stuff. I am tired of this business. So when the going gets rough, I ain’t scared of your brother, I ain’t scared of no sheets, I ain’t scared of nobody, girl, when the going gets mean.*³⁸² The flames shift to reveal images of the Ku Klux Klan burning a cross and of soldiers and a military tank firing ammunition. (The linking of domestic violence and imperial military violence is another recurring theme in Michael Jackson’s work.)

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Donald Johanson and Kate Wong, *Lucy’s Legacy: The Quest for Human Origins*. (New York: Harmony Books, 2010).

³⁸¹ Lott, “The Aesthetic Ante,” 551.

³⁸² Jackson, “Black or White.”



(Figure 11)

The bridge is followed immediately by a rap interlude performed by L.T.B. In the short film, however, we do not see the black rapper. Rather, his words are lip synched by Macaulay Culkin, who is no longer in his suburban home, but on the front stoop of an urban apartment building, along with Michael Jackson and six other kids (two black boys, two black girls, one white girl, and one other white boy). Macaulay is joined by Jackson and one of the black boys on the final line of the rap, “I’m not gonna spend my life being a color.” Here, the message seems to be that if you are actively engaged in the right song, i.e. committed to equality, then it doesn’t matter what you look like. A black man’s voice can come out of a white boy’s body – or out of three very different bodies at once. Relatedly, in one of the verses in the song Jackson responds to challenges about the legitimacy of his relationship with a white woman by saying that he and she, “we’re one and the same.” Gender and race don’t matter – if we make it so.

Right after this cross-racial lip-synching moment we hear the verse in which Jackson takes liberal racists to task, insisting, *Don’t tell me you agree with me, when I saw you kickin’ dirt in my eye.*³⁸³ As he sings this line, he is standing next to the flame on top of the Statue of Liberty, a highly symbolic move for this particular critique as the statue is precisely associated with narratives of the United States as a place for the tired, the poor, the wretched, the homeless and all those who seek freedom.³⁸⁴ (See Figure 12)



(Figure 12)

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ As written on the inscription of the statue.

The next section of the short film is the most famous, utilizing what was at the time cutting edge “morphing” technology. We see a series of at least 13 people of many backgrounds (not all “black” or “white”) in close-up head shots dancing and lip-synching to Michael Jackson’s song. The actors seamlessly morph into and out of one another, revealing how hard it is to draw clear lines between where one “race” ends and another begins, thus drawing attention to the social construction of racial categories (as a an issue that is distinct from the reality of humanity’s diverse traditions, which were paid homage to in the dancing sequence). As Lott points out, this sequence is not an erasure of difference; rather,

boundaries between self and other are permeable even as the particularity of faces and races is stunningly present. It is identity politics with a (universalist) human face...indeed the black-white binary is wholly exceeded by the beautiful heterogeneity on display here.³⁸⁵

As the music ends, we hear the director of the film yell, “cut,” and the camera pulls back, revealing the set where this effect is being filmed. The director approaches the last actor in the morphing sequence, saying, “That was perfect.” Following the controversy that erupted when the short film was first aired, subsequent airings of the film ended here, censoring the deepest critique, which is found in the final section of the film. It is in this final section in which, in Lott’s words, Jackson’s “anger counters and at the same time earns the democratic faith embodied in the rest of “Black or White.””³⁸⁶

As the camera continues to zoom out, we see just how elaborate the necessary technology has been to bring this utopic vision of (relative) racial harmony, cultural exchange, hybridity, and transracialism to life. We then see a black panther on the edge of the set. There are no words or music for the four and a half minutes that follow – the soundtrack is made up of the panther’s growls, Jackson’s screams, and the ambient sounds of footsteps, wind, glass breaking, etc. The panther growls at the tech boxes, perhaps growling at the artifice. It walks through the set, towards the exit, pausing again to growl at a statue of George Washington, perhaps growling at the artifice of U.S. founding ideologies. As the panther exits the studio, it morphs into Michael Jackson in front of what Lott argues looks like prison bars. Jackson begins to walk down a dark alley, until he is “caught” by a spotlight and freezes in place. The moment is reminiscent of police surveillance, menacingly monitoring the movement of bodies of color. Michael slowly raises his head and looks directly into the camera, making eye contact with the audience, implicating us: what do you do when you see a black man being stopped and frisked? (See Figure 13) He then executes a brief fierce rapid-fire dance sequence,³⁸⁷ as though to release his rage and center himself after this dehumanization, and continues walking. The street lights reveal an impoverished neighborhood with abandoned buildings and broken windows. Jackson pauses in the middle of the street, standing firm as a strong wind blows leaves and trash past him, then raises his head to once again look directly at the audience: what do you do when you see poverty? (Again, see Figure 13)

³⁸⁵ Lott, “The Aesthetic Ante,” 553.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Lott interprets this sequence as Jackson reaching for a gun but being “taken down in a hail of bullets.” Lott, “The Aesthetic Ante,” 553.



(Figure 13)

Suddenly, with a look of disgust, Jackson whips his head to the side and begins a long dance sequence, punctuated by screams and roars, alternately (and simultaneously) expressing rage, humanity-affirming creativity in the form of dance, and gestures of self-love (that were generally glossed in the media as immoral masturbation). He kicks and breaks a bottle, perhaps indicating fury at substance abuse and the existence of far more liquor stores than grocery stores in most poor neighborhoods. He smashes the windows of a car, with his body and with a crowbar, then dances on the roof of the car before tearing out the steering wheel and sending it flying through a store window. He jumps back down from the car and grabs a trash can, which he also hurls through a store window, evoking a similar scene in Spike Lee's movie *Do the Right Thing*. Unlike the riot scene in Lee's movie, however, the store window Jackson breaks no longer houses someone's business – a sign indicates that the building has already been declared condemned.

In spite of my not-so-slight obsession with Michael Jackson, it was not until reading Elizabeth Chin's 2011 article that I learned that in the original version of the short film, there was no graffiti on the windows Michael smashes. While televisions cut the "panther dance" entirely, even online it is impossible to track down a version of this sequence which does not include graffiti of racist epithets (a swastika and the phrases "Hitler lives," "nigger go home," "no more wetbacks," and "KKK rules") which were subsequently added after the controversy over the film erupted. (The only place where I have been able to find the unaltered original version is in the 2010 DVD Box Set, "Michael Jackson's Vision.") Chin offers a poignant analysis of the addition of the racist graffiti, arguing that Jackson's critique of structural racism is undermined – and his artistic creation vandalized – in order to make the violence intelligible to (white) viewers:

Replacing the reality of structural racism with digitally rendered racist graffiti neatly contains the problem as one of overt racism practiced by those who identify as racists, eliminating the need to look further or more carefully to understand why the King of Pop has popped his cork...Although I am not expert on racist graffiti, a scan of available images on Google is striking because it is assertions of whiteness that are most discursively important—statements like "White Power" or "Whites Rule." In *Black or White*, the digital alterations do include the racist epithet "Nigger" but do not include the word "white." Thus, an acknowledgement of racial whiteness as a problem remains strikingly and starkly absent; racism is evident only in the racial epithet...To protect [white] audience members from any anxiety that Jackson's anger might be directed at them, it became necessary to write "Nigger" on his film, to inscribe it with "KKK," and the swastika. In the interest of making Jackson's anger

intelligible to audiences who apparently lacked the ability to understand Black rage, it became necessary to deface Jackson's artistic product with racist graffiti.³⁸⁸

Jackson then runs down the street until he reaches the Royal Arms Hotel, where he spins, falls to his knees, screams and tears his shirt open, baring himself, making his love, rage, pain, and yearning all visible and audible. (See Figures 14 – 17)



(Figure 14)



(Figure 15)



(Figure 16)



(Figure 17)

He then brings the Royal Arms Hotel sign shining neon above him crashing to the ground, perhaps an anti-imperialist gesture and perhaps also an auto-critique of his own complicity with empire, if one recalls that the royal arms are featured on the gates to Neverland, his home. As in “Ghosts,” Jackson does not place himself completely outside of his critiques. The pain of this moment of self-examination causes him to wince (see Figure 18) before morphing back into the black panther, symbol of black power. This time it is the panther that looks directly at the audience before turning and continuing down the street. (See Figure 19) While in “Ghosts,” Jackson danced with his “family,” and this final sequence of “Black or White” is a solo, the symbolism of the black panther reminds us that Jackson is not alone. There is a larger movement (of black power) being evoked, and which exists regardless of the presence of Jackson's individual human body.

³⁸⁸ Chin, “Michael Jackson's Panther Dance,” 71.



(Figure 18)



(Figure 19)

At this point, the camera pulls back yet again, and the music starts back up. We are now inside the home of another paradigmatic white suburban family: The Simpsons. The film we have just seen is being watched on TV by Bart, who is wearing a Michael Jackson t-shirt and dancing to the music while hopping up and down on the couch, similar to the way in which Macaulay Culkin was hopping up and down on his bed to Jackson's music at the opening of the film. In the closing, again, the father-figure (here Homer) comes in, telling his son to "turn off that noise." Bart rebelliously replies, "Chill out, homeboy," mimicking urban black vernacular speech, another echo of Macaulay's transracial moves. However, Bart's mimicry is not as "successful," as he remains at a distance, watching the spectacle on television. Then, just as Macaulay's father shattered Jackson's image when slamming the door, Bart's father erases the image of the panther and silences Jackson's music by clicking the remote and turning the sound and image on the TV to static. The cycle continues, but this time we do not see whether the younger white male will reject his father in favor of a broader human family.

The message we are left with at the end of "Black or White," while not completely hopeless, is certainly ambiguous. There are no guarantees, but Jackson has offered us a challenge and an invitation to join his "family" in healing the world, to evoke another of his songs. He has presented us with a world of possibilities, and an invocation of utopia, reminding me of Gilroy's reflections on black music. Black music, Gilroy argues, should be examined both for its formal attributes and its moral character, posing the world as it is against the world as it should be, and thus providing courage to go on living in the present.³⁸⁹ The invocation of utopia involves a "politics of transfiguration...the emergence of new desires, social relations, and modes of association."³⁹⁰ Created under the nose of the oppressors, this politics of transfiguration must be invoked by opaque means. Furthermore, words will never be enough to communicate its unsayable claims to truth. Racial terror has been unspeakable but not inexpressible.³⁹¹

FROM "BEGGING TO BE BLACK" TO (DE)FACING WHITENESS

'Begging' opens a relation of gifting...[In Antjie Krog's 'Begging to be Black,'] it is not an identity that is being sought. Rather it is an attempt to share an onto-epistemology of becoming...there is a process of un-homing and re-homing...finding a new sense of being in a place that never was home...a liminal space. – Stewart Motha

³⁸⁹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 36.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

People who have been subjected to practices and relations of domination have developed many strategies and theories with the goal of decolonizing the world and its inhabitants, and creating more ethical and equitable conditions of life. Some of these contributions – for example, liminality,³⁹² hybridity,³⁹³ transraciality,³⁹⁴ mestizaje,³⁹⁵ nepantlismo,³⁹⁶ interconnectedness,³⁹⁷ and ubuntu³⁹⁸ -- provide deep critiques of, and alternatives to, the deathliness of colonial notions of purity and separation. They name and develop a basic scientific and spiritual truth that white supremacist colonialism has obscured: everyone and everything across time and space is inextricably connected. In Jackson's words, "You're just another part of me."³⁹⁹ And I'm just another part of you. Everything and everyone is in us, and we are in everything and everyone, past, present, and future. This is true whether or not we perceive it to be the case. However, our mis-perceptions of this truth result in the *particular nature* of our interconnectedness becoming relations based not on mutual caretaking but on domination and exploitation. As the Jacksons explain in the song, "Can You Feel It?": *every breath you take is someone's death in another place; every healthy smile is hunger and strife to another child.*⁴⁰⁰ They emphasize the truth that *we're all the same, yes, the blood inside of me is inside of you* while pointing out that we are not currently living in ways that testify to our understanding of that truth. The material lives of some are flourishing at the expense of the material lives of others, even though we *should be lovin' each other wholeheartedly.*⁴⁰¹ But what does it mean to love when we are entangled in relations of domination?

bell hooks argues that "love and domination cannot coexist."⁴⁰² As she explains:

love is a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust... To be transformed by the practice of love is to be born again, to experience spiritual renewal... When we commit to love in our daily life, habits are shattered. We are necessarily working to end domination. Because we no longer are playing by the safe rules of the status quo, rules that if we obey guarantee us a specific outcome, love moves us to a new ground of being. This movement is what most people fear... Just as cultivating a garden requires turning over the ground, pulling weeds, planting, and watering, doing the work of love is all about taking action.⁴⁰³

³⁹² Motha, "‘Begging to Be Black’ Liminality and Critique in Post-Apartheid South Africa"; Lugones, "On Complex Communication."

³⁹³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. (London; New York: Routledge, 1994); Ha, "Crossing the Border?"; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Roberts, "Michael Jackson's Kingdom."

³⁹⁴ Awkward, *Negotiating Difference*.

³⁹⁵ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

³⁹⁷ In particular as taught in engaged Buddhism.

³⁹⁸ South African philosophy. See, for example, Michael Onyebuchi Eze, *Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

³⁹⁹ Jackson, "Another Part of Me."

⁴⁰⁰ The Jacksons, "Can You Feel It."

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² bell hooks, "Toward a Worldwide Culture of Love," June 3, 2010. Accessed here:

<http://www.pbs.org/thebuddha/blog/2010/jun/3/toward-worldwide-culture-love-bell-hooks/>.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

The processes of transforming how we think about selves and others is inextricably connected with the work of transforming the conditions which give rise to the false concepts (of race, gender, nationality, sexuality, etc.) which divide us. Psychological/spiritual and material work must go hand-in-hand. In the meantime, because “love and domination cannot coexist,” and because (as explained in Chapter One) participation in domination is not simply a matter of individual choice, it is impossible for people to engage in completely loving relationships under circumstances structured by logics of domination. I deeply appreciate Antjie Krog’s work about living as a white South African, and agree with Stewart Motha’s analysis that the project described in her book Begging to Be Black is not about “seeking an identity” so much as “an attempt to share an onto-epistemology of becoming.”

Part of what I appreciate about Krog’s work is that she is neither pretending to be black nor attempting to salvage whiteness. She argues that, “in a country where we have come from different civilizations, then lived apart in unequal and distorted relationships that formed generations of us, our imagination is simply not capable of imagining a reality as – or with – the other...[as a white person,] to imagine black at this stage is to insult black.”⁴⁰⁴ Krog recognizes just how deeply we have become separated from one another, but hers is not a hopeless project. She goes on to insist on “listening, engaging, observing, translating, until one can hopefully begin to sense a thinning of skin, negotiate possible small openings at places where imaginings can begin to begin.”⁴⁰⁵ But right now a full imagining, an ability “to speak black,”⁴⁰⁶ is impossible – and she insists that “the terror and loneliness of that inability is what I don’t want to give up on.”⁴⁰⁷ What is so important about Krog’s work is the combination of elements she holds in tension:

- the conviction that we are interconnected;
- the recognition that the currently oppressive nature of that interconnectedness inhibits ethical/loving relationships and understanding one another;
- understanding that the “terror and loneliness” of this recognition can (and must) fuel action rather than paralysis; and
- believing that it is possible to learn from and move closer to one another – but that this movement needs to be a movement away from whiteness (“a thinning of [white] skin”) and towards blackness.

While whiteness and blackness are both socially constructed categories, they are not equal. In particular, they are not morally equivalent. As such, Krog finds herself “begging to be black.”

What I like about the formulation “begging to be black” is its naming of specificity. To move towards something more generic risks, as Krog points out, not giving “*credit* that something remarkable originated in *blackness* or a black world view.”⁴⁰⁸ However, blackness is not the only “other” vis-à-vis which whiteness has created relations of domination. As such, Motha broadens her formulation a bit to talk about “becoming minor.”⁴⁰⁹ However, it seems to me that while moving away from a sense of being major is essential, becoming minor is not necessarily the goal. The entire notion of major/minor needs to be supplanted. White people need to learn from the specific liberatory understandings that particular people of color and indigenous peoples have developed

⁴⁰⁴ Antjie Krog, *Begging to Be Black* (Cape Town: Random House Struik, 2009), 268.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, 267.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, 206.

⁴⁰⁹ Motha, “‘Begging to Be Black’ Liminality and Critique in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” 298.

while simultaneously – and as a result of this learning -- (de)fac^{ing} whiteness. (De)fac^{ing} implies a double movement: facing whiteness, in all of its horror, without resorting to white flight; and defacing whiteness, both in the sense of destroying it and in the sense of de-fac^{ing} it, i.e. undoing the notion that whiteness is human, that it has a face, in the Levinasian sense. Perhaps the “begging” – which I believe is important to maintain for the ways in which it evokes a sense of desperation and reveals white people’s need for a gift which depends upon the generosity of people of color – might be conceived of as begging for love, which necessarily entails begging (and working in other ways) for the conditions that make love possible.

While whiteness is antithetical to humanness, people who are currently racialized as white are also human. This entails a certain existential crisis: until whiteness has been abolished, we can neither escape nor take pride in it, but must reject it without removing ourselves from it. As such, for those of us who embody the falseness and oppressiveness of whiteness in this historical moment, the question arises about how to “be” in the world as we work to “become” something else. In Chapter One, I discussed the strategies of reconstructionism and abolitionism, and argued that a more fruitful approach would be to assist white people in simultaneously claiming both whiteness (as inherently oppressive, and thus inhuman) and hybridity (as a reminder of the constructed nature of all categories and the irreducibility of any individual to any one of them, and thus the inherent humanity of all people). Here, I expand on this suggestion, with the reminder that decolonial identity-work must go hand-in-hand with decolonial material transformation (which, for white people, as I propose in Chapter One, should take place within a framework of p/reparations).

WHITENESS AND HYBRIDITY

As mentioned above, Michael Jackson claimed both a particular African-American tradition and a universalism as a member of the human race. His transraciality, in this sense, is not only the “neither/nor” narrative of a “third space” or a new racial category. Neither, however, is it a “both/and” narrative of integrating blackness and whiteness. It is a “both/and” narrative of integrating particular blackness, particular things learned from other cultures, and universal humanness. Whiteness – as an identity and ideology, if not as a phenotype -- is categorically denied. In the examples discussed above, we can see Jackson’s play with hybridity, transraciality, and racialized particularity as challenging common-sense notions of racial categories AND affirming a particular African American tradition AND affirming a universal humanness, yet denying and destroying whiteness. I am intentionally using the terms “whiteness” and “white supremacy” interchangeably. Historically, the construction of whiteness as a racial category took place in relation to the construction of blackness as a racial category, resulting in a hierarchical binary. As such, the resignification of blackness through discourses of “black is beautiful,” the valorization of various black cultures, and the promotion of heterogeneous representations of black people as black people (including Michael Jackson in his diverse appearances throughout his life) is a move that asserts agency and denies the authority of white representations of coded-as-black bodies. Whiteness can only be resignified as a supremacist project, i.e. as inherently dominating, exploitative, and dehumanizing – not as something in which to take pride. As such, the proper resignification of whiteness announces the need for its abolition, for its (de)fac^{ing}.

White people must simultaneously recognize the falseness of whiteness, the fact that we are white, and our inherent hybridity. For white people to focus solely on hybridity would run the risk of either disappearing into a colorblind “humanness” or engaging in cultural appropriation. Hybridity would

then function as yet another power-blind escape valve for white people and whiteness which ultimately reinforces white supremacist structures while critiquing essentialism and declaring “boundaries are social constructions -- we’re all a mix of things!”

Similar to the case of white reconstructionists taking inspiration from "Black is Beautiful" campaigns, when turning to hybridity or border theory as a means of dealing with whiteness, it is important to recognize that liberatory strategies employed by people of color can not necessarily be emulated wholesale by white people. On the one hand, the recognition of hybridity offers an important critique of both reconstructionism and abolitionism by pointing out that although these approaches may acknowledge the constructedness and/or falseness of, for example, "whiteness" and "blackness," they still promote these as distinct categories, thus reifying false notions of purity that enable hierarchical systems to begin with. However, while it is true that borders themselves are not natural or inherent, but constructed, not all crossings are equal -- how any one of these constructed borders can be approached or inhabited depends on where one is coming from. This is true both for geographical borders (think about the different ways in which the U.S./Mexico border can and cannot be crossed, depending on who is doing the crossing, as discussed in Chapter Two) and for identity borders. It is important to simultaneously recognize and understand the truth of our inherent hybridity AND the ways in which racial categories and their legacies still matter. So the universal and timeless truth of hybridity is simultaneously a not-yet-achieved vision for the future.

Relatedly, it is essential to understand the precise nature of the hybridities imagined. Kien Hghi Ha points out that hybridity is not inherently decolonial. In his article, “Crossing the Border? Hybridity as Late-Capitalistic Logic of Cultural Translation and National Modernisation,” he discusses how this initially politically charged concept developed by marginalized peoples has become a key element in the production of new desires and commodities under late capitalism. Agreeing with Irmela Schneider that, “the hybrid is not the opposite of hierarchy and hegemony, but of binary and dichotomy,” he points out that a recent trend in corporate advertising actually seeks to capitalize on difference and that the constant need for the next new thing to sell has led to an industry of (re)mixing:

formerly unwanted cultural and human resources of marginalized migrant communities are now desired as hot and vivid ingredients. The blending of gendered and racialized bodies, images and sounds from different national, ethnic and local contexts to create a consumable product is nowadays a common marketing strategy.⁴¹⁰

However, in spite of this new “valorization of difference”⁴¹¹ in relationship to cultural productions, political and economic issues regarding “institutional access, group interests, profits for whom, decision-making processes, political rights, etc.”⁴¹² are left unaddressed. Existing power relationships are not contested. In assessing various hybridity projects, we cannot, for example, equate the morphing sequence in Jackson’s “Black or White” short film or Anzaldúa’s “mestiza consciousness” project with that of Time Magazine’s “New Face of America.” The New Face of America is a computer-generated image of a woman created by mixing together the features of people from various racial-ethnic backgrounds. The text next to her face asks us to, “Take a good look at this

⁴¹⁰ Ha, “Crossing the Border?”.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Ibid.

woman. She was created by a computer from a mix of several races. What you see is a remarkable preview of The New Face of America.”⁴¹³ (See Figure 20)



(Figure 20)

While Jackson also made use of computer technology in the “morphing” sequence in the “Black or White” short film, there we see a series of distinct faces that maintain their particularity even as they seamlessly melt from one into the next. The effect in that sequence is to reveal that there are no clear boundaries, no clear lines delimiting one “race” from another. As such, the social construction of races is revealed, thus emphasizing the lie underwriting *racism* or white supremacy. In the Time Magazine image, however, racism is conceptualized as simple prejudice inhibiting miscegenation. The message is that differences in appearance are the root of the problem. The proposed solution is interracial heterosexual procreation of melting pot babies.

There is no analysis of power in The New Face of America project. There is an imagination of equal parts of all that exists peacefully swirling together and being mixed up until their distinctiveness vanishes into one another, creating something new – and homogenous. By contrast, Anzaldúa’s *mestizaje* project is rooted in historical specificity, attentive to power dynamics, and insistent on a reckoning with various systems of domination as they are specifically and differentially manifested in all of one’s cultures. Here, there is also a mixing, but the swirling parts appear in varying amounts in various bodies and are not simply melting into one another but are often also grating up against each other, engaged in numerous battles and negotiations to define the nature of what she calls the “new tribalism.” As she explains,

⁴¹³ *Time Magazine*, November 18, 1993.

Honoring people's otherness, las nepantleras [the border-dwellers] advocate a "nos/otras" position—an alliance between "us" and "others." In nos/otras, the "us" is divided in two, the slash in the middle representing the bridge – the best mutuality we can hope for at the moment. Las nepantleras envision a time when the bridge will no longer be needed—we'll have shifted to a seamless nosotras. This move requires...that we act on our interconnectivity...it includes diverse others and does not depend on traditional categories or sameness...Conocimiento of our interconnectivity encourages white women to examine and deconstruct racism and "whiteness."⁴¹⁴

Anzaldúa emphasizes that understanding our interconnectedness must lead white people to action. I am arguing here that when we turn to the wisdom of decolonial tricksters like her and Michael Jackson to help us create new narratives and strategies that can challenge and transform the colonial categories that structure our identities and relationships, we [white people] cannot engage in wholesale appropriation of their techniques. We can learn about interconnectedness from them, learn to recognize that the other, in her pain and joy, is also me; what happens to him, happens to me. This learning must take place not only intellectually but also emotionally and through the body. However, we cannot presume to fully understand – we cannot take on Chicana-ness or blackness. To attempt to do so would actually risk bolstering, rather than contesting, white supremacy. As Ha explains:

by playfully accessing and appropriating Non-White contexts, White identities turn into a more colorful, self-satisfying, and valuable self-image. To imagine the dominant Self as Other allows one to deny historical inscriptions and structural differences in the construction of cultural identities. The problem of amnesia occurs and lays the ground for a relaxed cultural consumption without the burdens of the colonial past...[this] allows the dominant White self to extend his/her range of self-definition by consuming and appropriating fashionable and permitted forms of Otherness.⁴¹⁵

White people must negotiate the tension that while everything and everyone is in us, our bodies and our selves remain, at this current historical moment, white. That need not result in paralysis, so long as another important lesson from Jackson and Anzaldúa is internalized: that we are not contained by our skins, nor reducible to any identity categories, including whiteness, that we are – as is everyone – infinite. As such, there is much space for movement. If we desire the direction of that movement to be decolonial, to entail a drawing closer towards one another, a movement in and towards love, a movement that can render that bridge, that slash, between nos/otras unnecessary, we need to do the work of transforming the structures that continue to re-create white supremacy. As discussed in Chapter One, I believe p/reparations is a powerful framework through which to pursue that work.

Does this mean, then, that it is unethical for me, as a white woman, to perform a dance built around Michael Jackson's movements and music, as I did at the 2009 symposium where I presented pieces of this chapter? I don't know. From where I currently stand, I think it depends upon the context and, crucially, upon not divorcing the multiple contexts from the music and the dancing. As blogger

⁴¹⁴ Anzaldúa, "Now Let Us Shift...the Path of Conocimiento...Inner Work, Public Acts," 570.

⁴¹⁵ Ha, "Crossing the Border?"

VC wrote in a post titled, “On White People and The Blues,” in which she recounted feeling disturbed by the blues music playing in the background at a hipster Brooklyn brunch spot,

much musical development occurred within an environment of cross-racial, -cultural, often transatlantic influences. Borrowing has happened, sometimes even mutually. Still, there is such a thing as black music: music that is derived from or inspired by black people and culture...My issue/criticism/complaint is that this music is often not understood within its cultural, historical, and emotional context...it is important to consider the stories, histories, pain, and oppression that such music has been inevitably steeped in, and to seek to really understand what it means, and where it comes from – culturally, historically, emotionally – as opposed to appropriating whichever part of its aesthetic seems useful. Everything is not simply for your listening pleasure.⁴¹⁶

In the context of a symposium on Michael Jackson’s work, it was unthinkable to me to try to communicate what I have learned from him through words alone. “Quoting” dance moves (or, for singers/musicians, music) is not so different from quoting textual creations. (Although here, too, questions of cultural appropriation may arise.) Credit must be given, context must be provided, and commitment must be demonstrated to the processes of decolonization being pursued by those whose work we claim as inspirations. And I would add that while it is crucial, for example, that my engagement with Jackson’s work be “not simply for...pleasure,” pleasure is also a part of it. To me, part of the power of the blues – and of the various black music traditions Jackson draws from – is the display of the resiliency of the human spirit in the face of unspeakable horrors. As Jackson sings in “Unbreakable,” *You can’t stop me even though you think that if you block me, you’ve done your thing. And when you bury me underneath all your pain, I’m steady laughing – ha! – while surfacing...No matter what you do, I’m still gonna be here. Through all your lies and silly games, ima still remain the same. I’m unbreakable.*⁴¹⁷ There is a forceful *aliveness* in the music that challenges the deathliness of white supremacist colonialism and this, too, is something that white people seeking decolonization need to learn – affective soulful engagement, rather than disaffected indifferent distance (which, in the academy, has often been institutionalized as so-called objectivity and professionalism). The depth of the horrors of white supremacist colonialism and, thus, the power of the aliveness expressed in the blues (and in other cultural productions by people of color), will never be fully understood by white people. However, those cultural productions may offer the most effective means of drawing closer, when combined with an unflinching look in the mirror. As Frederick Douglass wrote in 1855, regarding the songs that enslaved people would sing:

I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress truly spiritual-minded men and women with the soul-crushing and death-dealing character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes...If any one wishes to be impressed with a sense of the soul-killing power of slavery, let him go to Colonel Lloyd’s plantation...place himself in the deep pine woods, and there let him, in silence, thoughtfully analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of

⁴¹⁶ VC, “On White People and The Blues,” September 2, 2010, <http://www.postbourgie.com/2010/09/02/on-white-people-and-the-blues/>.

⁴¹⁷ Michael Jackson, “Unbreakable,” *Invincible*. Epic, 2001.

his soul, and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because “there is no flesh in his obdurate heart.”⁴¹⁸

Dwight Conquergood offers an analysis of this passage, emphasizing that the hermeneutics Douglass describes is riskier than that of the armchair intellectual, requiring “experience, relocation, copresence, humility, and vulnerability: listening to and being touched by the protest performances of enslaved people...Proximity, not objectivity, becomes an epistemological point of departure and return.”⁴¹⁹ Pointing out the essential inclusion of Douglass’ instruction to listen “in silence,” Conquergood adds, “Douglass encouraged a participatory understanding of these performances, but one that muffled white privilege.”⁴²⁰ Prolonged and recurring silences, i.e. engaged deep listening, is essential practice for white people, as also discussed in Chapter One. However, silence, too, is contextual. Silence – in words and actions – can function as complicity. We also need to practice speaking up and acting out, breaking the rules of dominant culture, “living off the wall” and “put[ting] it all on the line,” to evoke more lessons learned from Michael Jackson.

In the meantime, perhaps the notion of “hybridity” itself, even in its decolonial usages, may be misleading. Discussing the figure of the sphinx, Antjie Krog argues that this being is not a hybrid. Rather,

She is what she is. Not split, not guarding dichotomies, but presenting beingness as multiple intactnesses, not with the singular self, but with a bodily akin-ness to the vulnerability of being in and beyond this world.⁴²¹

This assessment, it seems to me, also speaks to part of the beauty of what Jackson and Anzaldúa offer the world. Visions that are not only visions but liberatory realities which they cocreate and which coexist (albeit uncomfortably) with oppressive realities. A simultaneous rootedness in geographical and historical specificity and transcendence thereof. Where the transcendence is not so much an escape as it is a recognition of a reality much larger than, yet part of, our embodied selves. I am reminded of Arundhati Roy’s expansion of the World Social Forum’s slogan, “Another World Is Possible”:

Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.⁴²²

Listen to the breathing in Michael Jackson’s music. Listen to the breathing in Gloria Anzaldúa’s poetry. Listen, respond, move, listen. Listen, respond, move, listen. Repeat, repeat, repeat,...

⁴¹⁸ Frederick Douglass, *The Complete Autobiographies of Frederick Douglass* (Radford: Wilder Publications, 2008), 110–1.

⁴¹⁹ Conquergood, “Performance Studies,” 149.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Krog, *Begging to Be Black*, 275.

⁴²² Arundhati Roy, “Confronting Empire,” January 27, 2003, <http://www.ratical.org/ratville/CAH/AR012703.html>.

CHAPTER FOUR: **WHAT'S SCHOOL GOT TO DO WITH IT?**

There's an old proverb that says it's better to teach someone to fish than to give them a fish. But what if they sell the river? Or what if the river is poisoned? And what good is it to know how to fish if the owner of the river doesn't let us fish? In other words, education is inextricably connected to all other aspects of life.

– Eduardo Galeano

In the United States, fixing and/or creating schools is so frequently held up as a panacea to much of the world's ills that Grubb and Lazerson named their 2004 book The Education Gospel.⁴²³ Schools, as such, are often deemed in need of improvement, though the nature of that "improvement" is highly contested. In his heavily cited article, "Public Goods, Private Goods: The American Struggle over Educational Goals,"⁴²⁴ David Labaree argues that while the "problems" of schools are often defined as pedagogical (in the sense of poor teachers and curriculum), organizational (too much bureaucracy or too decentralized), social (poverty, racism, unequal privilege), and/or cultural (culture of poverty, poor family values, gap between school and home cultures), the "root problem" is actually political. That is, people disagree about the ultimate purpose of schooling. He outlines three primary purposes which are often in conflict: democratic equality (schools should be focused on preparing citizens capable of political engagement), social efficiency (schools should be focused on creating the workers the market needs), and social mobility (schools should be focused on enabling students to successfully compete as they strive to attain the "American Dream"). Labaree provides a history of the development of each of these goals in the United States, and analyzes the ways in which they are aligned and in contradiction with each other, and the implications thereof. He ultimately sees all three goals as serving important functions, but is concerned about the dominance the social mobility goal has acquired in U.S. schooling, resulting in "rampant credentialism"⁴²⁵ and privatization.

As Trinh Minh-ha has argued, "What we "look for" is un/fortunately what we shall find."⁴²⁶ In other words, we end up with answers to the questions we ask, which includes the ways in which we ask them, our methodologies, and our understandings of the concepts we employ. At first glance, the goal of "democratic equality" discussed by Labaree might seem aligned with the project of "decolonizing the white colonizer." However, the fact that Labaree equates "democratic equality" with "citizen-creation," and assumes a) that the United States is, in fact, a democracy, and b) that democracy and capitalism can coexist, renders the goal of "democratic equality" – at least as described by Labaree – counterproductive to the goal of decolonization.

The history of the "citizen-creation" goal of U.S. schooling is a genocidal one, beginning with the explicit policy of schools' purpose being to "civilize" Native Americans, summed up in the pronouncement at the Carlisle Indian School commencement speech to "Let all that is Indian within

⁴²³ W. Norton Grubb and Marvin Lazerson, *The Education Gospel: The Economic Power of Schooling* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁴²⁴ David F. Labaree, "Public Goods, Private Goods: The American Struggle over Educational Goals," *American Educational Research Journal* 34, no. 1 (1997): 39–81.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid*, 70.

⁴²⁶ Trinh, *Woman, Native, Other*, 141.

you die.”⁴²⁷ Today, the assimilationist project of schools can still be observed “domestically” in resistance to ethnic studies courses and bilingual education, and is imposed internationally via forced educational interventions in conjunction with aid provision (for example, making loans dependent on “structural adjustments” which include the institutionalization of standardized tests and privatization), trade policies (NAFTA was the first trade agreement to include education as a “tradeable” good), and the (well-meaning) actions of contemporary missionaries and non-religious do-gooders (who want to “help” people in poor villages by bringing education, i.e. “western”-style or so-called “modern” schooling to them).

However, the imposition of Euro-American schooling has continued to have devastating consequences on multiple scales. To give just one example at the global scale, the World Trade Organization only grants protective patents as “intellectual property” to knowledges which conform to particular technological and scientific paradigms. All other ways of knowing can be freely appropriated, just as in earlier versions of colonialism land was usurped when it was not recognized as having been claimed within the western system of private ownership. Legalized by the agreements protecting intellectual property, the ancestral collective knowledge of peoples in all parts of the world is being expropriated and converted into private property, for whose use its own creators must pay. In this process, peasants are becoming less autonomous (threatening rural self-sufficiency), the genetic diversity of the planet is being reduced (through an engineering view of agriculture), and a diversity of ways of knowing is being eroded.⁴²⁸ At the individual and community scales, the hegemony of Euro-American education (and its stratifying system) can result not only in a poverty of ways of knowing, but in internalized inferiority. Manish Jain articulates this as a social justice issue:

One of the things I’ve seen that education has really created is the sense of inferiority at many levels. One, at the level of elders. I’ve visited many villages, wanting to learn from elders’ traditional practices, and the first response is always, ‘I don’t know anything. Go and talk to my son, he’s a 12th grade pass.’...That has been one of the most painful things I have heard over and over...you have an institution that is in place globally that is branding millions of innocent people as failures. Very brilliant, wonderful, talented kinds of people are always introducing themselves to me as, ‘I’m an eighth class fail’ or ‘I’m a tenth class fail,’ and that’s their introduction. What’s amazing is that people who are claiming to be concerned with social justice cannot see the huge kind of social hierarchy and inequity that is created through modern education...The other thing is a loss in the richness of imagination and cultural resources. Those who are branded as “failures” actually have a wide array of capacities to think in different ways. And that is all being suppressed and lost.⁴²⁹

To pursue the goal of “democratic equality” in a decolonial way, and to engage schools in this effort, requires that we question and transform, rather than accept, not only existing curricula, but also pedagogies and school structures, as well as the major structures schooling is informed by and serves, i.e. current political and economic structures. This includes the terms of citizenship within

⁴²⁷ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 274.

⁴²⁸ Edgardo Lander, “Eurocentrism, Modern Knowledges, and the ‘Natural’ Order of Global Capital,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 3, no. 2 (2002): 245–268.

⁴²⁹ Interview in Carol Black, *Schooling the World: The White Man’s Last Burden*, Documentary, 2010.

the United States and, by extension, the legitimacy of this nation-state writ large. It also requires that we transform an economic system (capitalism) which creates inequality by design. As Galeano points out in the epigraph, “education is inextricably connected to all other aspects of life.”⁴³⁰ Labaree’s discussion of debates around the purposes of schooling is missing a perspective: schools should foster the critical consciousnesses and capacities that would enable students (along with teachers, staff and broader communities) to contribute to decolonial processes, i.e. fundamentally reimagining and reconstructing social and cultural institutions, including current political and economic systems, in ways which lead to greater equity and sustainable life for all.

SCHOOLING FOR DECOLONIZATION = SCHOOLING FOR U.S.-ABOLITIONISM

White supremacy, colonialism, and economic exploitation are inextricably linked to U.S. democratic ideals rather than aberrations from it. The “freedom” guaranteed to some individuals in society has always been premised upon the radical unfreedom of others. Very specifically, the U.S. could not exist without the genocide of indigenous peoples. Otherwise visitors to this continent would be living under indigenous forms of governance rather than under U.S. empire.

– Andrea Smith, 2005

If it were not for the stripes on my back which were made when I was a slave, I would in my will leave my skin as a legacy to the government, desiring that it might be taken off and made into parchment, and then bind the constitution of glorious, happy and free America. Let the skin of an American slave bind the charter of American liberty!

– William Grimes, 1825

Some might argue that while the history of the United States is regrettable, based as it is on the genocide of indigenous peoples, the enslavement of African peoples, the racialized oppression of immigrants not recognized as “white” (some of which “became” white,⁴³¹ others of which remain “perpetual foreigners”⁴³²), and the militarily enforced exploitation of people and natural resources around the world, the nation’s history is ultimately one of progress and that these attitudes and atrocities are primarily located in the past. However, that is unfortunately not true. As discussed throughout this dissertation, significant changes have happened, however our context remains one of colonial white supremacy. This is manifested in the prison industrial complex, in the racial wealth gap, in racialized health and longevity disparities, in (international) economic policies, in the daily extrajudicial executions of black and brown people, and in the refusal of the country to recognize itself as a settler colonial nation-state.

It is also manifested at the micro-level. Four years ago, I was babysitting a 7-year old white boy who objected to my use of the term “African-American” because he was adamant that black people aren’t American. However, he argued, they could become “sort of American” by marrying white

⁴³⁰ This quote is taken from an interview he gave in the documentary *Granito de Arena*, a film chronicling global economic forces that have been dismantling public education in Mexico, and the ongoing organizing by teachers, students, and communities for democratic public education for liberation.

⁴³¹ Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁴³² Stacey J. Lee, Nga-Wing Anjela Wong, and Alvin N. Alvarez, “The Model Minority and the Perpetual Foreigner” in *Asian American Psychology: Current Perspectives*, ed. Alvin Alvarez (New York: Psychology Press, 2009): 69-84; Jennifer C. Ng, Sharon S. Lee, and Yoon K. Pak, “Contesting the Model Minority and Perpetual Foreigner Stereotypes: A Critical Review of Literature on Asian Americans in Education,” *Review of Research in Education* 31, no. 1 (2007): 95–130.

people. In fact, it turned out he had a whole continuum in his mind, with white people as most American, followed by Asians and Latinos, and black people as least American. Indigenous people(s) were absent from his picture. This boy lives in a relatively diverse Bay Area neighborhood. His parents are white liberals who, when I told them about what their son had said, explained that they had been having conversations with him about this issue but that “it is as if he can pick up the scary vibe of the conservative Republicans...As a family we embrace everyone – but [he] picks up on the undercurrents of our society.”⁴³³ We can see the strategy of good white/bad white separation here, with the boy’s parents distancing themselves from complicity and displacing the systemic issue of colonial white supremacy onto the scapegoat of “conservative Republicans.” However, the critique I would like to make vis-à-vis this particular moment is not of the parents’ response, but of mine.

The conversation I had with this boy in response to his comments was focused on challenging the notions he had of what it means to be American. However, since then I have come to question that instinct. Inspired by Sandoval’s articulation of “differential consciousness” and methodology of morphing between oppositional strategies rather than remaining rigidly loyal to one particular ideology, one could argue that the approach I took of re-defining “American” might be the most strategic choice in certain moments, perhaps also in this one. However, I question it as an overall strategy, and think it is essential to remain aware of what is being recreated when we employ it. When we recognize the ways in which “whiteness” and “Americanness” (i.e. U.S. citizenship) are co-constituted, an issue discussed in Chapter Two, perhaps it would be more fruitful (and honest) to respond to the comment that black people are less “American” than white people by saying something along the lines of, “Yes, that is often true, and that is a cause for celebration and hope. We need to seek wisdom and guidance from people who have not been (fully) seduced by whiteness or Americanness as we try to create alternatives to this genocidal U.S. nation-state.” The attempt, here, would not be to pull more people into the “American” pot, but to position U.S. citizenship as something that is not worthy of pride, but of dismantling. Just as scholars of whiteness have argued that the developing a “positive white identity” is not without problems,⁴³⁴ we might question U.S.-ness as an identity in which to take pride and instead work towards (re)creating different forms of political/social organization which will carry different names. As James Baldwin argued in his “Talk to Teachers”:

Precisely at the point when you begin to develop a conscience, you must find yourself at war with your society.⁴³⁵

Unfortunately, most public schooling in the United States, even when it takes place under the “social justice” label, encourages identification with and investment in this nation-state, rather than its abolition. As Dylan Rodríguez observes,

As teachers, we are institutionally hailed to the service of *genocide management*, in which our pedagogical labor is variously engaged in mitigating, valorizing, critiquing, redeeming, justifying, lamenting, and otherwise reproducing or tolerating the profound and systemic violence of the global-historical U.S. nation-building project.

⁴³³ Personal email, August 2, 2009

⁴³⁴ Leonardo, *Race, Whiteness, and Education*.

⁴³⁵ James Baldwin, *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (Library of America, 1998), 685.

As “radical” teachers, we are politically hailed to betray genocide management in order to embrace the urgent challenge of genocide abolition.⁴³⁶

The project of “genocide abolition,” is currently, Rodríguez argues, “primarily pedagogical, within and against the “system” in which it occurs.”⁴³⁷ He explains that,

While it is conceivable that in future moments, abolitionist praxis can focus more centrally on matters of (creating and not simply opposing) public policy, infrastructure building, and economic reorganization, the present moment clearly demands a convening of radical pedagogical energies that can build the collective human power, epistemic and knowledge apparatuses, and material sites of learning that are the precondition of authentic and liberatory social transformations.⁴³⁸

Schools, then, to answer the question posed in the title of this chapter, have *a lot* to do with it, especially as compulsory institutions in which young people spend a large percentage of their time. Louis Althusser identified schools as a primary “ideological state apparatus,” reproducing both the material means of production and the existing relations of production. He argued that ideologies exist in ideological apparatuses which govern material practices of individuals who conceive of themselves/ourselves as acting with free will. He saw it as a crucial task to develop a science of ideology, which entails breaking with ideology even as one speaks from within it. In the remainder of this chapter, I first discuss “equality of opportunity” as one schooling ideology which is often held up as a principle of social justice but which actually contributes to genocide management. I then analyze two different attempts at social justice schooling (one by a high school and one by a college course) – these examples have been chosen to reveal the importance of pedagogical, as opposed to just curricular, interventions. To reflect on the possibilities for integrating alternative pedagogical strategies into the classroom, I go on to analyze two different approaches to theater. Finally, I offer a set of skills which the white colonizer needs to learn for the project of decolonization.

AGAINST EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

One maxim frequently taken for granted in the world of education reform is that schools should offer students equality of opportunity. Under the equality of opportunity paradigm, a person’s place in the socio-economic hierarchy is not supposed to be predetermined by birth but earned based on an individual’s merits, talents, efforts, and performances. Of course, in a society in which present inequalities are rooted in past systems in which factors of birth influenced socio-economic status there is not a level playing field. Compensatory measures (such as affirmative action policies) acknowledge and attempt to ameliorate this issue, however the allocation of educational resources still heavily favors those of rich and white backgrounds. As Gloria Ladson-Billings outlines, on average, suburban schools with a 90% or higher white student population spend \$10,000 more per pupil per year than their urban counterparts in which the student body is 70-90% black and/or

⁴³⁶ Dylan Rodríguez, “The Disorientation of the Teaching Act: Abolition as Pedagogical Position,” *Radical Teacher* 88, no. 1 (2010): 17.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

Latino.⁴³⁹ Existing racial wealth gaps compound this problem, especially when state and federal funding for public education is cut and schools rely more on contributions from students' families. As Rogers et al document, "families of 15-17-year-olds with earnings above \$98,000 spent more than seven times as much on education-related expenses as families earning less than \$57,000."⁴⁴⁰ Moreover, the effects of poverty, such as hunger and housing insecurity, can make it more challenging for students to stay in school and graduate, let alone pursue higher education. Furthermore, many schools serving low-income students are overcrowded and are less likely to provide adequate college guidance or even offer students the classes required to attend a four-year college.⁴⁴¹

The goal of equality of opportunity, however, is far too limited for the purposes of decolonization. Moreover, in the absence of broad-based transformation of current political and economic structures, even this limited goal is unlikely to be achieved. Given the correlation of educational achievement with occupational opportunities and income, the stakes of school success are high. Thus, parents will typically find themselves continuing to attempt to ensure that *their* kids rise to the top, score in the highest percentiles on standardized tests, gain access to the best-ranked colleges and universities, and do not end up with low-wage and/or undesirable jobs. Amy Stuart Wells and Irene Serna document how awareness of these high stakes leads "elite parents" to resist schools' attempts to detrack in the name of social justice.⁴⁴² Resource-rich parents who are not able to resist detracking efforts will frequently withdraw their children from the public schooling system altogether.

The combination of neighborhood-based funding disparities, racialized inequality in families' economic and political resources, and ever-increasing backlash against affirmative action programs make it highly unlikely that educational equality of opportunity will be achieved. Meanwhile, discourses of educational equality of opportunity function as one of the primary ideological mechanisms supporting colonial white supremacy in our current age of "color-blind racism,"⁴⁴³ i.e. a power-blind form a racism that is perpetuated by refusing to recognize the continued significance of race in relation to inequality. A common trope of color-blind racism is the assertion that talking about race or taking race into account is the cause of racism, in particular of "reverse racism" targeting whites.

To the extent that people are falsely convinced that schools already do provide students with equal opportunities, racialized *outcomes* are held to be the result of an individual's merits, talents and efforts – and thus deserved. The backlash against affirmative action functions under this logic that equality of opportunity is not only sufficient as a goal, but that it has been achieved (hence the false conclusion that affirmative action now functions as discrimination against whites). The highlighting

⁴³⁹ These statistics were discussed in detail in her 2011 keynote address at Teachers College, which can be viewed here: <http://vimeo.com/25599183>

⁴⁴⁰ John Rogers, Melanie Bertrand, Rhoda Freelon, and Sophie Fanelli, "Free Fall: Educational Opportunities in 2011." UCLA IDEA, UC/ACCORD (2011). Full report available here: http://idea.gseis.ucla.edu/educational-opportunity-report/california-state-report/2011%20EOR_state_webversion.pdf

⁴⁴¹ Oakes et al. (2006). *Removing the Roadblocks*. UC All Campus Consortium on Research for Diversity and UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education and Access. <http://www.ucla-idea.org>

⁴⁴² Amy Stuart Wells and Irene Serna, "The Politics of Culture: Understanding Local Political Resistance to Detracking in Racially Mixed Schools," *Harvard Educational Review* 66, no. 1 (1996): 93–119.

⁴⁴³ Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in Contemporary America*.

of “successful” individuals of various racial and class backgrounds is held up as proof of this achievement, focusing on the *possibility* of “success” rather than the *probability*. As Jay MacLeod points out,

To be sure, social mobility does exist—just enough to maintain the myth of America as the land of opportunity. Whereas a completely closed society cannot maintain a semblance of openness, a society that allows some mobility, however meager, can always hold up the so-called self-made individual as “proof” that barriers to success are purely personal and that the poor are poor of their own accord.⁴⁴⁴

Moreover, hierarchy per se is not questioned by the equality of opportunity intervention. Rather, the hierarchical nature of our schooling system, and the entanglement of scholastic achievement with socio-economic prospects, naturalizes the hierarchical nature of our capitalist economic system and legitimizes individuals’ differential placement within it. Such stratification is justified in meritocratic terms (those who are smarter and work harder *deserve* better-paying jobs), in social efficiency terms (financial motivation and competition will encourage students to excel and will reveal the best candidates for various positions), and in human capital terms (we should compensate individuals for the additional time, effort and, often, money they have invested in their education in order to qualify—and be qualified—for “better” jobs).⁴⁴⁵ Of course, as Jane Collins has pointed out, the differential valuing of various skills and occupations “takes for granted that public discourses of skill are fair (and not skewed in favor of dominant groups).”⁴⁴⁶ Furthermore, even if all students received and excelled at an education that outfitted them with the qualifications for a so-called “high-skill” job which is well-compensated, the number of such jobs available is limited. Thus, a focus on the development of high skills and “college for all” as the means for ensuring that students are not stuck in poverty-zone minimum wage jobs is incredibly misleading. Schools cannot function as an anti-poverty program in the absence of transforming an economic system which creates poverty by design. This is not only a “domestic” issue, but also a global one. One of the discourses surrounding the importance of improving U.S. schools is that “our” students must remain “internationally competitive.” Rather than questioning a system which relegates masses of people to poverty, the focus becomes on making sure “we” do not end up at the bottom of the pyramid – what our “competitiveness” means for other people’s children (locally or globally) is apparently not of concern.

Stuart Tannock describes “education-based discrimination” as a form of discrimination in which “differentiation on the basis of education...is presented as that which occurs when discrimination

⁴⁴⁴ Jay MacLeod, *Ain't No Makin' It: Leveled Aspirations in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 240.

⁴⁴⁵ For a discussion of human capital, see David W. Livingstone, “Beyond Human Capital Theory: The Underemployment Problem,” *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology* 36, no. 2 (1999): 163–192; Gary S. Becker, *Human Capital: a Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education*, 3rd ed (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993); Randall Collins, *The Credential Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification* (Academic Press New York, 1979). For a discussion of meritocracy and desert, see John H. Goldthorpe, “Problems of Meritocracy” in *Can Education Be Equalized*, eds. Robert Erikson and Jan Jonsson (Boulder: Westview, 1996): 255–287; Sandra Harding, “Is the Equality of Opportunity Principle Democratic,” in *Philosophical Forum* X, 1979: 206–23; Phillip Brown, “The Opportunity Trap: Education and Employment in a Global Economy,” *European Educational Research Journal* 2, no. 1 (2003): 141–179.

⁴⁴⁶ Collins, *The Credential Society*, 936.

has been successfully eliminated.”⁴⁴⁷ This creates a challenging situation because rather than being stigmatized – just as discrimination based on race or gender is – education-based discrimination is considered natural and fair. And yet a simple question remains: why should an individual’s success in school (whether measured by standardized tests, numbers and letters or by more holistic performance reports and qualitative descriptions) have anything whatsoever to do with whether or not that individual is financially secure and has decent working conditions? Or whether that individual is able to participate in agenda-setting activities in the realms of politics, education, economics and other areas? The latter question points to the fact that the equality of opportunity principle not only justifies economic inequality, it also reinforces epistemological hierarchies. Sandra Harding explains that,

The equality of opportunity doctrine should be restated in the following way: “Each person should have equal opportunities to develop the capacities and talents already highly valued in his or her society.”⁴⁴⁸

The implication of Harding’s statement is that it is of no consequence, for example, to argue that while everyone might not excel at business, everyone has at least some talents in which they can prove themselves to be excellent. If you do not excel at something that is being tested in school or that is already deemed valuable by dominant society, you will not be compensated with credentials, positions of power or financial rewards. Thus, “freedom of choice remains merely a formal freedom without the availability of equal power to bring about the situations one *would* choose. ... [and] it is no more effective for equality to be valued in the abstract than...for freedom of choice to be only formally valued.”⁴⁴⁹ It is not very common for the principle of equality of opportunity to be applied to agenda-setting roles – those are typically reserved for people who have already proven themselves within the current system. For example, those who are in a position to shape and implement education policies have typically managed to succeed in the educational system they are now empowered to uphold and/or reform. Those who opted out of the education system (dropping out of high school, not continuing on to college or graduate school) may, in some instances, be invited to express opinions but are not generally found in positions of decision-making power vis-à-vis the system that failed them or that they found irrelevant to their needs. And, as discussed, in a system based on equality of opportunity, preexisting rules and expectations not only set the parameters for what qualifications are necessary for one’s opinions to be legitimized and consequential, they also determine what contributions and modes of productivity will be financially rewarded (and how lucratively). Contributions to society that do not require credentials at all – for example, parenting – are frequently not deemed worthy of any level of material compensation. Even though material compensation may not be the only or even the primary criteria regarding what activities an individual pursues, for anyone who is not independently wealthy it is an issue that maintains influence over how one is able to spend one’s time.

In an article discussing (the misuse of) theories of evolution and creationism, Stephen Jay Gould provides an internal critique of the hegemonic status that the Western scientific method has achieved.⁴⁵⁰ He states, “We live with poets and politicians, preachers and philosophers. All have

⁴⁴⁷ Stuart Tannock, “The Problem of Education-based Discrimination,” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 29, no. 5 (2008): 440–1.

⁴⁴⁸ Harding, “Is the Equality of Opportunity Principle Democratic.”

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 208/217.

⁴⁵⁰ See also Paul Feyerabend, *Science in a Free Society* (London: NLB, 1978).

their ways of knowing, and all are valid in their proper domains. The world is too complex and interesting for one way to have all the answers.”⁴⁵¹ The issue is not just one of missing out on the complexity and interestingness that the world has to offer, however. The issue is also one of domination. As explained in the Introduction, one aspect of coloniality is the geopolitical hierarchy of knowledge, i.e. the differential status afforded knowledge depending on where it is produced, who is producing it, and towards what ends. Edgardo Lander explains that,

Beyond the internal controversies within Western, techno-scientific communities lies the fact that in the thousands of conflicts occurring in the world today between the interests of transnational capital and those of rural or indigenous people concerning the use of the environment, there is generally also a conflict in the parties’ views of the cosmos, an antagonism between different knowledge systems and different ways of conceiving the relationships between culture and nature. Nevertheless—and this is a perfect expression of the continual functioning of colonial mechanisms—in the new global capital order only one form of knowledge is recognized: Western scientific knowledge.⁴⁵²

Of course, knowledge rooted in traditions outside of “the west” is not inherently liberatory, just as “western” knowledge is not inherently destructive. However, when one way of knowing and/or one intellectual tradition is automatically assumed to be superior to others or becomes the singular and unquestioned standard against which others are measured, we can speak of epistemic coloniality. Currently, U.S. schools are, in general, maintaining and reproducing colonial relations rather than contributing to ongoing processes of decolonization.⁴⁵³ Through official and hidden curricula, schools are maintaining a hierarchy of knowledge and legitimizing individuals’ placement in a material hierarchy based on their relative mastery of those skills and ways of seeing/knowing that have been deemed superior. This is enacted in the name of equality of opportunity, albeit an equality of opportunity that is nowhere near actually existing and, given the high stakes, is unlikely to be achieved. And there is frequently silence around the fact that the answer to the question, “Equality of opportunity *to do what and on whose terms?*” is, to a large extent: to aspire towards mastery of those forms of knowledge, types of occupations, and ways of living deemed valuable and sanctioned by those currently in power. The goal of equality of opportunity is thus not only too limited, but is undesirable for the purpose of decolonization. Decolonization, which, as Tuck and Yang point out, “is not a metaphor”⁴⁵⁴ but includes abolishing the U.S. nation-state and capitalism, is not a feasible project within the equality of opportunity paradigm.

SCHOOLING FOR “SOCIAL JUSTICE”

Some schools and teachers explicitly mention “social justice” as a key purpose of education in their mission statements, offering this as an alternative to the three purposes Labaree identifies when writing about the historically shifting and overlapping purposes of U.S. schools, purposes that are all geared towards interacting with, rather than fundamentally changing, status quo structures and

⁴⁵¹ Stephen Jay Gould, *Bully for Brontosaurus: Reflections in Natural History* (New York: Norton, 1992), 430.

⁴⁵² Lander, “Eurocentrism, Modern Knowledges, and the ‘Natural’ Order of Global Capital,” 255.

⁴⁵³ For more detailed discussions of processes of enacting imperialism/colonialism through schooling, see Willinsky, *Learning to Divide the World*; Martin Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism*. (New York: Longman, 1974); Smith, *Conquest*.

⁴⁵⁴ Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor.”

relationships. Of course, even amongst those who deem it a primary purpose of schooling, how “social justice” is defined is contested. For example, the assumption that attaining equality of opportunity equates to social justice is a very different understanding of justice than that which Manish Jain articulated above, where a schooling system which creates failures is considered inherently unjust, even if everyone had the same opportunities to succeed or to fail.

As such, it might be more useful to focus on developing and implementing “education for decolonization,” as this names a specific diagnosis of past and current inequities. Examining coloniality also reminds us of our interconnectedness and of the global scale of relations of domination and inequality, rather than treating local contexts and/or nation-states as independent entities. This global analysis offers an important intervention to arguments such as those made by Friedrich Hayek who, in his essay, “Equality, Value and Merit,” begins by insisting that, “no argument of justice can be based on the accident of a particular individual’s being born in one place rather than another,”⁴⁵⁵ yet goes on to resist redistribution efforts by egalitarians under the assertion that “such claims would be especially difficult to defend where those who advanced them were unwilling to concede the same rights to those who did not belong to the same nation or community...[and] few people would be prepared to recognize the justice of these demands on a world scale.”⁴⁵⁶ Education for decolonization would precisely help more people “to recognize the justice of [redistributory] demands on a world scale.” However, that particular lesson is one that the white colonizer is generally in greater need of learning, as many of those who have been exploited by the existing systems have already learned it.⁴⁵⁷ In fact, education for decolonization intervenes in processes of whose knowledge is positioned as authoritative, and who is deemed an expert. In discussing the work of Aimé Césaire, Nelson Maldonado-Torres describes Césaire’s gift as “the reason of the enslaved or the condemned,”⁴⁵⁸ a reason which diagnoses the inhumanity of the colonizers/exploiters, and offers a method for them/us to regain that humanity by participating in decolonization.

In most interracial classrooms, however, as Zeus Leonardo and Ronald Porter point out, discussions about racism are “guided by the least competent students in the room,”⁴⁵⁹ i.e. white students, and cater to their remedial understanding of (and often resistance to) race literacy rather than proceeding from “the deep competencies that students of color have to offer,”⁴⁶⁰ positioning students of color as experts, and prioritizing their questions and concerns. Leonardo and Porter point out that this often happens in the name of creating a “safe space” for race dialogue rather than recognizing that “seeking a ‘safe space’ is itself a form of violence insofar as it fails to recognize the myth of such geography in interracial exchange...this process defaults to white understandings and comfort zones, which have a well-documented history of violence against people of color. It is a point of

⁴⁵⁵ Friedrich A. Hayek, “Equality, Value and Merit” in *Liberalism and Its Critics*, ed. Michael Sandel (New York: New York University Press, 1984): 100.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid, 101.

⁴⁵⁷ This is not to say that indigenous people and people of color are free of colonial ideologies, but that the lived experience of being positioned at the bottom of these violent hierarchies tends to (but does not always or automatically) lead at least to what Houria Bouteldja calls a “decolonial intuition,” even if this intuition has not yet been formed into a “decolonial consciousness.” (Talk given at University of California Berkeley, April 17, 2013.)

⁴⁵⁸ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Césaire’s Gift and the Decolonial Turn,” *Radical Philosophy Review* 9, no. 2 (2010): 132.

⁴⁵⁹ Zeus Leonardo and Ronald K. Porter, “Pedagogy of Fear: Toward a Fanonian Theory of ‘safety’ in Race Dialogue,” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 13, no. 2 (2010): 154.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid, 153

entry that is characterized by denials, evasions, and falsehoods.”⁴⁶¹ What Leonardo and Porter are proposing is simultaneously a curricular and pedagogical intervention: the curricular intervention is the explicit study of racism and white supremacy; the pedagogical intervention is to displace a power-blind analysis of all student voices being equal by privileging the voices of students of color. This is not a move which asserts that students of color are more worthy as human beings than white students, but one which assumes that violence is already in the room and that educators have a choice of either perpetuating the dehumanizing violence that is done to students of color in the name of “safety” or enabling a humanizing violence which whites “need to experience...if they expect to change.”⁴⁶² Drawing on Fanon, Leonardo and Porter explain that,

A humanizing form of violence is a pedagogy and politics of disruption that shifts the regime of knowledge about what is ultimately possible as well as desirable as a racial arrangement...Insofar as the theory of violence we put forth is positioned against racial domination, it is violently anti-violence.⁴⁶³

This understanding of violence requires the abolition of, not coexistence with, the inherently oppressive violence of colonial white supremacy. While curricular interventions themselves are no mean task, as can be seen, for example, in the backlash against ethnic studies programs and bilingual education, as well as in the refusal of the United States Congress to pass a bill that is just about *studying* the legacy of slavery (let alone passing redress legislation)⁴⁶⁴, it is essential to combine curricular interventions with pedagogical ones. Form is content – in the context of education, the hidden curriculum of our pedagogies may teach many unintended lessons that contradict or even undermine the curricular ones. To illustrate this issue, I discuss two examples: an undergraduate education course I taught at UC Berkeley, and a Bay Area social justice themed high school where I engaged in participant-observation.

Ed 190 & The Paulo Freire “Pop Quiz”

While a graduate student at UC Berkeley, I taught five semesters of a core course for the Education Minor, titled “Current Issues in Education,” but popularly referred to as “Ed 190.” The curriculum of the course engaged students in a wide range of scholarship on the reproductive and transformative potentials of education, examining the ways in which education interacts with other social institutions, while paying particular attention to the impacts of racism, heteropatriarchy, ableism, nationalism/citizenship, and language issues. The uniqueness of this course, however, was due to its pedagogies, which were heavily influenced by Paulo Freire’s work, in particular his insistence on praxis, i.e. action and reflection within community.⁴⁶⁵ The course’s commitment to praxis was manifested in the requirement that students engage in a (at least) semester-long

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, 152

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Ibid, 140.

⁴⁶⁴ Representative John Conyers (D-Mich.) has introduced H.R. 40 (“Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act”) at the start of every Congress since 1989.

⁴⁶⁵ Freire argued that, “to speak a true word is to transform the world...but while to say the true word—which is work, which is praxis—is to transform the world...no one can say a true word alone—nor can he say it *for* another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words.” Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New rev. 20th-Anniversary ed (New York: Continuum, 1993), 76.

participatory “community cooperative project,”⁴⁶⁶ as well as in the other pedagogies in the class which invite students, in community, to critically reflect on and shape the course itself.

These other pedagogies include addressing what Freire analyzes as the oppressive nature of the traditional teacher-student relationship by giving all students shared power over the curriculum, requiring that each student “team teach” (in groups of 3-5) one session during the semester, and the fact that the course itself is taught by a “facilitation team” of a graduate student in collaboration with 3-6 undergraduates who have taken the course in the past. Through these interventions, Ed 190 attempts to transform the traditional teacher-student relationship into what Freire calls “teacher-student with students-teachers,”⁴⁶⁷ wherein all are engaged “not only in the task of unveiling reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating knowledge.”⁴⁶⁸ Of course, in creating a “democratic” classroom, it is important not only to attend to power issues in relation to the teacher-student dynamic but also to not gloss over power-laden lines of difference among students themselves. This returns us to the issues raised by Leonardo and Porter above.

The course also takes seriously Freire’s critique of the “banking method” of education, in which the teacher assumes a narrative role and proceeds to make deposits into the students who record, memorize and repeat. This method, he insists, is dehumanizing and trains people to accept oppression. In education for liberation, on the contrary, education should be “problem-posing” and based in dialogue and praxis. In Ed 190, there are no exams and grading is taken out of the hands of the instructor/facilitation team. This act of relinquishing the power of grading is essential for truly *performing* the course’s commitment to “democratic education.” It does not, however, mean that there is no feedback given on students’ work – to the contrary, the facilitation team provides students with extensive qualitative feedback (in fact, many students comment that this is the first time in their schooling lives that they have received such deep engagement with their work) and students read and respond to each other’s work, as well. Additionally, the students in the course have to develop what is referred to as their “system of accountability” – detailing what they wish to accomplish through the course, methods for keeping themselves and each other accountable to that mission, and guidelines for grading. Through the process of creating their system of accountability, students engage in the kind of meta-theorizing around the purposes of education and evaluation that enables them to begin to break with ideology, even from within it, as proposed by Althusser. This process is typically quite contentious and frustrating for many students, as they begin to realize that they do not all have the same convictions regarding the purposes of education.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁶ I have actually generally felt that the community cooperative projects in Ed 190 fail to manifest Freire’s theories and pedagogies. A semester is not enough time for students to develop an understanding of what it means to engage in a participatory project (rather than an externally driven one) and to develop real relationships and investment in a community. Thus, with the exception of certain projects where students already had established relationships with the community in which a project took place, there tended to be a disconnect between the theory and the practice.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid, 67.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, 56.

⁴⁶⁹ For example, some believe that schools *should* rank students and that those who “work harder” or “perform better” should be distinguished as such; others believe schools should not treat students or their lives as if they were identical and could be evaluated through such direct comparison and insist that it is important to develop an understanding of and compassion for the various life-circumstances different students bring; others argue that comparative grading has no place in schools because education should be about development of knowledge based on intrinsic curiosity and needs; and still others argue that schools should be a place where people can build community and work together rather than being placed in competition. Students also come to realize that they have different needs regarding what kinds of structures help them stay motivated and engaged. For example, while some find grades punitive, fear-inducing and demotivating, others find that without that external “threat of failure” they start to get “lazy.” Interestingly, however,

There are two reasons why Ed 190 did not avoid the issue of grades altogether by being offered as a purely pass/fail course. One, grappling with the frustrating conversations that happen during the creation of the “system of accountability” leads students to start interrogating aspects of schooling that they have taken for granted and internalized, and to begin imagining alternative possibilities. Confronted with each other’s conflicting philosophies and needs, they also have to deal with conflict in what they consider a high-stakes situation (as their grades will be affected by the system they create) and create explicit policy around how decisions should be made: whether one system will account for everyone equally, whether they will insist on consensus, whether they will defer to majority rule and what this means for minority voices, etc. This, again, engages them in a process of meta-theorizing, questioning taken for granted notions of democracy and equity. Two, it is important that a course with such an alternative pedagogy be one of the core course requirements, rather than marginalized as an elective. Thus, given the constraints of the larger university which does not function on a purely pass/fail basis, Ed 190 provided letter grades.⁴⁷⁰

I provide all this background on the structure of the course not only as a model of pedagogical possibilities but also because it makes what happened consistently in the second week of the semester all the more remarkable. In the first week, chairs are set up in a circle in the room. While they will not actually begin creating their system of accountability until week three, in week one students receive an overview of the course, its pedagogies and its requirements, have read through the syllabus, are given a chance to ask any questions, and begin to reflect on what they see as the purpose of education. For week two, students are assigned a brief essay by Audre Lorde, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” in which she argues,

students expressing the latter sentiment often end up reflecting on one or two additional factors: 1) the fact that they are functioning within a larger institutional structure in which all of their other courses use the “threat of failure” and they thus find themselves prioritizing those other classes even if they find them less interesting and/or important; 2) they had not considered the fact that being co-responsible for others’ learning (not only their own), and having their contributions sought out and valued, is itself a source of external pressure that can serve a similar (and for some students even stronger) motivating role as the “threat of failure.”

⁴⁷⁰ Unfortunately, even though Ed 190 seemed completely institutionalized – it was a core course for 22 years in UC Berkeley’s Graduate School of Education – it was only one year after John Hurst’s retirement that the course was dismantled. The process of dismantling the course took the form of suspending it “for revisioning.” This decision was made without conducting any research on the impact of the course on the students who have taken and taught it. The manner in which this decision was made also completely contradicted the democratic pedagogy of the course itself. Based on what I know from my own students as well as from reports from other graduate students who have taught the course over the 22 years of its existence, such research would have revealed not only the rigor of the course and of the students’ engagement, but the pivotal role the course played in many students’ transformations in how they think about education, as well as about the various ways in which inequality and systems of domination are perpetuated – and, crucially, how they have thus come to act in the world both in and beyond (other) classrooms. Moreover, there has never been an attempt to insist that all courses in the Graduate School of Education use the same pedagogies as Ed 190. Even just for the sake of exposing students of education to a diversity of pedagogies within their core courses, it would be important to maintain this course. The value students place in the course was put publicly on display when, in 2008, the course was in danger of having some of the sections cut due to budgeting priorities. Hearing of this, former Ed 190 students – whose lives are already very busy – felt so passionately about this educational space that they launched a successful campaign to “Save Ed 190.” The strategy of “revisioning,” however, has made student involvement more difficult than an outright declaration of cutting the course. In spite of numerous emails and in-person requests indicating that I and other graduate and undergraduate students would like to be involved in that process, I never received any information about when, where, or how that revisioning process would take place. After a year’s suspension, the return of the course has been announced for Fall 2013 (after the submission of this dissertation). However, grading will no longer be in students’ hands – as such, I still consider the course to have been dismantled, as this was a defining feature.

It is necessary to teach by living and speaking those truths which we believe and know beyond understanding...And it is never without fear – of visibility, of the harsh light of scrutiny and perhaps judgment, of pain, of death. But we have lived through all those already, in silence, except death...we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us.⁴⁷¹

They are also assigned Chapter Two from Freire's book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. This is the chapter in which he discusses the teacher-student relationship and critiques the banking method of education as "education as the exercise of domination...indoctrinating them [students] to adapt to the world of oppression."⁴⁷² The chapter concludes with Freire declaring that people "subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation"⁴⁷³ and that because form is content,

leaders cannot utilize the banking method as an interim measure, justified on grounds of expediency, with the intention of *later* behaving in a genuinely revolutionary fashion. They must be revolutionary—that is to say, dialogical—from the outset.⁴⁷⁴

On the day for which students have prepared these two readings, the facilitation team arrives at the classroom early, and sets up the desks and chairs in rows facing the front of the room. We have prepared a "pop quiz" of the worst banking variety. There is space for students to fill in their names and student ID numbers at the top of the page. Questions include short answer ("What, according to Audre Lorde, is the final silence?"), fill in the blank ("Paulo Freire, born in 19____, published "Pedagogy of the _____" in 1968. It was written not in English, but in _____."), and multiple choice ("Characteristics of a banking education model, according to Paulo Freire, include, a) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing, b) the teacher learns alongside the students, c) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects, d) the teachers listen to the students' needs, e) both A and D, f) both A and C). As the students arrive, we instruct them to take their seats and to take out a pencil or pen as we will be having a short pop quiz. As soon as the course is scheduled to start, we hand out the quiz, face down, and instruct students that as soon as we say "go," they may turn over the paper and will have five minutes to complete the quiz, which will make up five points of their grade. (Latecomers are handed a quiz, informed that they are late and that they will not be given extra time.)

Not once, in my five semesters of teaching this course, has a single student refused to take the test or spoken up to question or object to it being administered. This has been the case in spite of the fact that the content of the quiz itself contains a scathing critique of this pedagogical method, the fact that most of them get all the answers on the quiz right (if by "right" we are simply looking at the ability to articulate something on paper, rather than the ability to live out what one has learned), and the fact that many of them are activists and no strangers to engaging in oppositional politics. However, the socialization of years spent learning not just the content of what is presented in schools, but *how to "do" school successfully*, which is how they/we made it to a top-tier university like

⁴⁷¹ Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 43–4.

⁴⁷² Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 65.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

UC Berkeley to begin with, runs deep. And the stakes of a UC Berkeley degree, especially one with a high GPA, are, after all, as discussed above, high. So even in a class where students are studying democracy and social justice, even in a class where the syllabus has told them they will be given the power to come up with their own grading system, and even though (as is revealed in conversation after the “quiz”) many of them were internally objecting to the hypocrisy of this pedagogy, the students did not resist when the habitual authoritarian methods of traditional classrooms reappeared. If our goal is education for decolonization, this “experiment” reveals the importance of employing pedagogies that engage the body as well as the mind, that lead to action, not only intellectualization.

Recognizing this issue – that our bodies as well as our minds are socialized – Augusto Boal, who was influenced by and later became friends with Paulo Freire, developed a form of theater (and published a book by the same name) called Theatre of the Oppressed. His method transforms spectators into “spect-actors,” and serves as what he calls “rehearsal for revolution”⁴⁷⁵ by training participants to engage in actions, including imagining the transformation of political and social realities and practicing (in the form of acting out) the steps that transformation might entail. The point in his theater is to avoid catharsis – as opposed to theater in which characters make revolution on stage and the spectators feel themselves to be triumphant revolutionaries. Instead, the point is for spect-actors practicing in the rehearsal room to foment a desire (and capacity) to enact liberatory practices in other spheres of their life as well. Having to perform scenes in which common relations of domination are enacted, while the protagonist(s) attempt(s) to transform them and the antagonist(s) attempt(s) to maintain them, reveals that revolutionary theories can often be difficult to implement, and forces spect-actors to become more creative in their/our oppositional strategies.

Unfortunately, however, the corporeal socialization students receive in most classrooms does not create revolutionary actors but what Michel Foucault describes as “docile bodies.” Docile bodies, he explains, are shaped through “disciplines.” Unlike mechanisms of overt control over others’ bodies, domination through discipline entails rendering the individual body self-governing and obedient to dominant norms. The prevalence of disciplinary power in schools should not, however, be understood to mean that other modes of power have ceased to exist. Disciplinary coercion has not replaced direct force, but supplemented it. Paying attention to the tiniest of details, disciplinary techniques separate each body as an individual unit of analysis whose behavior (often taking place within strict time-tables) can be surveilled, assessed, ranked, and judged in comparison to others. This requires elaborate technologies of observation, specifically in the form of “eyes that must see without being seen.”⁴⁷⁶

Here we can note the power of “the gaze.” Rather than observation being the sole purview of a monarch or totalitarian ruler, however, in disciplinary power all are “supervisors, perpetually supervised”⁴⁷⁷ within hierarchical relations. Moreover, the motivation of any given observer is irrelevant (“the curiosity of the indiscreet, the malice of a child, the thirst for knowledge of a philosopher who wishes to visit this museum of human nature, or the perversity of those who take pleasure in spying and punishing”⁴⁷⁸), nor is it necessary for there to be an actual observer present at any given moment – what matters is that individuals know that it is possible that, at any given moment, they *could* be observed, and thus begin to self-regulate.

⁴⁷⁵ Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*.

⁴⁷⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 171.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 177.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 202.

Docility is also fostered by “making the slightest departures from correct behavior subject to punishment.”⁴⁷⁹ What is punished is non-conformity. Disciplinary power, thus, is *normalizing* -- the elaborate processes of surveillance, ranked judgment, corrective measures, and rewards take place in relation to established norms. It is only possible to speak of an “achievement gap,” for example, within conditions of normalizing disciplines. Here, standardized tests act as one form of surveillance and ranked evaluation. As Foucault explains, “The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgment. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them.”⁴⁸⁰ As Patricia Baquedano-López, Rebecca Alexander, and Sera Hernandez point out, this mode of power, in the context of schools, is not only applied to students but also to parents and communities, with home-cultures being examined and parents being invited into regulatory and normalizing “partnerships.”⁴⁸¹

To illustrate the implications of these issues, I turn now to a discussion of a social justice themed high school in the Bay Area, focusing specifically on the ways in which a school’s pedagogies, in particular the inculcation of discipline in the Foucauldian sense, can contradict and undermine the lessons being learned in a school’s official curriculum.

The Observers and the Observed in a Social Justice High School

The following data is taken from six months of participant-observation during the first year of a social justice themed small urban high school (one of many small schools sharing a campus, as well as some building space and staff) in the San Francisco Bay Area. Over the course of these months, I was never actually allowed to sit in on classes, and I speculate on the reasons for that below. I did, however, attend teacher and staff meetings, class field trips, and parent-teacher gatherings. My analysis here does not constitute an evaluation of the school or of individual teachers, and I do not make any claims as to how (aspects of) the program affected students’ thinking or acting in the world. The examples regarding disciplinary technologies discussed below simply seek to act as a reminder and illustration of the fact that curriculum exists in every interaction, not just in official lesson-plans, and that if we are committed to pursuing social justice through schooling, we need to be just as concerned with pedagogical practices and overarching school structures as we are with curricula.

The first time I entered Social Justice High, I waited in the hall outside the principal’s office as she was finishing a phone call. As I was waiting, a teacher arrived with a cell phone she had confiscated from a student which she wanted to pass on to the principal. Shortly thereafter, another teacher walked by, and the two teachers discussed their confusion over the current cell phone policy, and whether they were actually supposed to take them from students or not. The principal came out of her office at this point, and clarified that, yes, phones should be confiscated, passed on to an administrator, and that students need to bring a parent to school to retrieve them. I introduced myself to the principal, and we set up an appointment to meet the following week – when I would

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid, 178

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid, 184

⁴⁸¹ Patricia Baquedano-López, Rebecca Anne Alexander, and Sera J. Hernandez, “Equity Issues in Parental and Community Involvement in Schools What Teacher Educators Need to Know,” *Review of Research in Education* 37, no. 1 (2013): 149–182.

witness the cell phone return policy in action. I returned for our appointment at 8am the following week, and the principal, a white woman in her 30s, began explaining the history of the school to me, which had only opened earlier that year and currently had 60 freshmen. As we were talking, a mother and son, both African American, arrived to retrieve the son's cell phone. The principal recognized the student but did not introduce herself to his mother; nor did she ask me to leave at this moment. Rather, she reached into her file cabinet to get the phone while asking the student to recite the cell phone policy to her. He did so, and she interrupted him once to correct a detail and asked him to repeat the policy in the corrected form -- Foucault's disciplinary power model at work. I mention the "race" of the principal, the student and the mother to point out that the disciplinary procedures at the school are also racialized, recreating the racialized criminalization of dark-skinned bodies across institutions within our context of colonial white supremacy. After the student and his mother left, the principal told me that she did not think he should have received his phone back as this was the second time it had been taken away from him and she thinks he is "difficult." She then invited me to attend the school's faculty meeting the following week.

The faculty meeting took place in the English/Social Studies teacher's classroom. Her walls were covered with posters: Che Guevara, Audre Lorde, Nelson Mandela, Albert Einstein, Alice Walker, Sojourner Truth, Emma Goldman, Frederick Douglass, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Judi Bari, Chief Joseph, Rigoberta Menchu Tum, rainbow flags, and a discussion of the use of the word "gay." When I arrived, she was the only person present, which gave us an opportunity to have a brief conversation about the school. She expressed mixed feelings about her ability to incorporate a social justice mission into her work:

You know, I've always taught a social justice curriculum, so that's nothing new for me. I was a teacher for eight years at [Middle School]...I left [there] to be part of the small schools because I thought the structure would be different. Trying to do anything really different is very hard. But we'll give it a shot. The students all know each other and the teachers all know the students and the parents, and the teachers get together regularly to talk. So that's good and different. But really trying to alter the structures, like set up alternative disciplinary structures or even trying to get the fuck out of the classroom is incredibly hard. Even one simple fieldtrip is incredibly difficult to organize.

The more time I spent with the teachers and staff, the more I noticed that, as is the case with the teacher quoted above, they had a critical analysis of the structures that constrained their desires for transformation. However, they also inhabited an uncomfortable position regarding "observers and observed" – surveillance, as Foucault analyzed, being a key technique of the prison/school industrial complex. I began to notice that the teachers were engaging in a kind of passive resistance regarding my requests to sit in on classes – ignoring emails I sent that included this request and avoiding making specific plans with me when I broached the topic in person. As illustrated in the quotes below, over time it became clear that this had less to do with me personally, but was part of a larger pattern of resistance to any sort of observation or evaluation. They did not, however, connect their own resistance to observation and evaluation to the fact that, inferring from the monitoring practices described below, they subjected their students to observation and evaluation on a daily basis. In fact, the teachers had to actively struggle against automatically associating observation of their work with evaluation, and associating evaluation with punishment or praise, and the expectation of finding fault or failure. This issue was worked through explicitly over the course of

multiple meetings, as the teachers talked about setting up peer teacher observations. The proposal was first brought to the table by the principal:

I wanted to bring up the idea of teachers doing mutual peer observations in order to help each other improve their practices. I used to do this myself when I was a teacher, and I found that when you do observations as a group of people with shared commitments and trust, it's really the way you learn the most. I have lots of techniques in this handbook on doing observations that we could use. You can meet with the person you're observing ahead of time and have them tell you what they want you to focus on. Anyway, it's up to you whether or not you want to do this, but I think it's fun and could be really useful. That's just my idea.

In spite of the principal's assurance that this would be an optional ("fun") practice that would provide learning opportunities among "people with shared commitments and trust," as the teachers began to respond to her idea the conversation quickly shifted to their negative experiences with being observed:

Look, I have no issues being observed, but I need to know that you're there to support me. The other day [the principal of this consortium of small schools] came into my room with no advance notice and no comment about what his purpose was being there. Now if he's there to support me, that's fine, but I need to know that or whether he's just there to gather more evidence for his negative campaign [against the social justice priority]. You have to have support for criticism to be okay.

By the end of this meeting, everyone acknowledged that these peer visits would be observations, not evaluations, and they agreed to coordinate attending one another's classes. This did not happen, however, so at the day-long professional development retreat one month later an hour was scheduled to further discuss the matter and schedule the observations. The teachers broke into pairs to respond to the prompt, "What do you need to have in place so that peer classroom observations are positive, worthwhile, and helpful?" When we came back as a full group to "share out," the following concerns were voiced:

We talked about feeling a lot of insecurity based on not knowing what other people's expectations are and whether we can live up to them.

We felt like you don't really learn when you're part of a culture of evaluation. If this is going to be valuable, we need to kick out any elements of evaluation.

I've gotten very little out of years of being evaluated. You're always your own hardest critic and best advisor. We should use these observations as a way to learn more techniques for your own teaching, not to tell other people about what they're doing.

A month later, no one had yet conducted any peer observations; in fact, none were conducted by the time I completed participant-observation at the school after six months.

While resisting being observed by others, however, the vast majority of the time in weekly teacher/staff meetings was spent discussing the need to document and archive anything and everything about each student. Every week, the teachers discussed strategies for facilitating this task

and making it less time-consuming. They designed “tutoring contracts” to hand out weekly to students determined in need of tutoring. The contracts have spaces to be filled in by the students’ teachers to designate what assignments the student should work on during tutoring. The tutors are asked to initial each of the assignments worked on and to sign the contract, which also must be signed by the student and his or her parent/guardian before turning it back in to the student’s advisor. Each teacher acts as an advisor to a handful of students whom the faculty have designated as having academic, behavior and/or attendance problems.⁴⁸² Tutoring lists, absentee lists, detention lists and suspension lists are all kept in a binder for cross-referencing. There is a pre-detention flowchart for each teacher to track students’ progression through the extensively discussed disciplinary procedures: warning; 15 minute detention; if student fails to show up, 30 minute detention the next day; if student fails to show up again, referral to the principal and call home. Teachers rotate daily detention duties, so there is also a need for a central detention log to track who is expected to show up on a given day. Each student has a personal binder where he or she collects all completed assignments (and grades received) alongside lists provided by each teacher as to what projects the student should have completed. Advisors are supposed to go over these binder contents during a weekly check-in with their advisees, and then contact the students’ parents with updates and to discuss any issues the student is having.

Strikingly, the teachers never voice concern that the students might be having similar reactions to those the teachers themselves repeatedly expressed when faced with such continuous monitoring and evaluation. As the observers rather than the observed, however, the faculty spoke about these observation and evaluation practices not as a matter of policing, but as a matter of parenting. There were jokes about explaining to the students, “I’m your momma for the year.” Furthermore, even though the teachers frequently brought up the fact that all of this paperwork is incredibly time-consuming without it being clear “whether any of this makes a difference,” deciding against it was an option I never witnessed being considered. One reason for this may not just be the habitual enactment of how to “do school,” but also because of feeling particularly scrutinized for their declared social justice mission. From time to time teachers would make comments about the fact that they have to demonstrate that “we are all working *way* above and beyond the hours we are being paid” to do everything in their power to ensure each student’s success.

In his discussion of political theater, Baz Kershaw explains the tactic of “rule-breaking-within-rule-keeping” as a way to enable an audience’s engagement with subversive elements of the performance that might feel strange or repugnant.⁴⁸³ Similarly, teachers at Social Justice High seem to believe that they have a better chance of maintaining their social justice curricula by going along with institutionalized pedagogies and disciplinary practices. While I do not have a conclusive answer to this question, this chapter does ask whether the hidden curriculum taught through pedagogical approaches might ultimately be more powerful than those of the overt curricula, and whether (under circumstances where comprise and “rule-breaking-within-rule-keeping” is needed) it might be more radical to focus on pedagogical change. This may not even be a feasible choice, however, as the teachers are only one link in that pyramid of “supervisors, perpetually supervised” which Foucault describes. They must submit to mandatory standardized tests and administrative observation and evaluation from authorities beyond their individual school, authorities which could shut them down

⁴⁸² Examples of these problems listed included students who are failing classes, disrupting classes, skipping school, getting into fights with other students, and making suicidal comments.

⁴⁸³ Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992).

altogether under the California Public School Accountability Act. One teacher's musing that it all just seems like "a big set up for failure" might not be so far off.

However, there is always a choice to be made, even though that choice may make one unemployable or even result in a school being shut down. As Lynice Pinkard argues, truly transgressive teachers are liable to be expelled and those who risk the sustainability of the school are likely to "be accused of ruining the education of all students."⁴⁸⁴ Pinkard's conclusion, however, is that this may be the necessary cost because "liberating education is not a matter of reform or improvements; it is indecent dissent (a rise) into crisis, chaos, and passion."⁴⁸⁵ Remembering Sandoval's discussion of differential consciousness and the strategic compromises made in the interest of carving out more space in which to move, complete overt transgression may not always be the most radical move. At the very least, however, it must be the ultimate goal and the distance from it, progress towards it, and cost-benefit analyses of the compromises being made along the way, must be constantly assessed in community with students.

One of the ways in which the teachers at Social Justice High committed to pedagogical change that reflected the social justice mission was in instituting de-tracked classes. The math teacher was particularly vocal about his commitment to de-tracked classes on multiple occasions, including at Back to School Night, when he explained his philosophy to the parents in attendance:

Social justice, for me, is about committing to a de-tracked classroom. That means an atmosphere where all the classes are high-achieving classes; where you get rid of the separation between high achievers and low achievers. This is also about reducing racism.

This commitment, however, met with enormous resistance on the part of some parents. For example, at a Family Night I attended a month later, one white parent explained,

I'm concerned that in the effort to be inclusive, certain students are not being taught to. Isn't this one-size-fits-all model going to result in holding some kids back and pushing others forward? You need to have an honors track – I want to make sure my son gets into college, and this is not going to cut it.

Some other parents murmured assent, and the principal responded by encouraging parents that, "You are the ones who will set the tone for the next four years – your input will help us shape this school so that every child who wants to can go to college." As mentioned above, this phenomenon of "elite parents" resisting detracking efforts has been widely documented by Wells and Serna.⁴⁸⁶ Moreover, the notion of ensuring that "every child who wants to can go to college," while well-intentioned, is disingenuous. As Hervé Varenne and Ray McDermott point out, the nature of the American school system is such that certain students' success *depends on* others' failure.⁴⁸⁷ This is the nature of comparative ranking, and any attempts to blur differentiation are typically resisted by those who benefit from it and/or those who believe they can or will end up on top. As discussed above,

⁴⁸⁴ Lynice Pinkard, "Jane in the Blackboard Jungle." Unpublished Manuscript. 2010, 7.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ See also Rick Ayers, "Constructing the Achievement Gap." *The Huffington Post*. February 8, 2010. Accessible here: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rick-ayers-/constructing-the-achievem_b_452786.html

⁴⁸⁷ Hervé Varenne and Ray McDermott, *Successful Failure: The School America Builds*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).

families with the resources to do so often demonstrate a great willingness to put many resources towards insuring that their children will, indeed, be among the winners. Meanwhile, teachers find themselves continuing to struggle to close “the achievement gap” within a context of inadequate funding⁴⁸⁸ and “being set up for failure.” They identified multiple sources of blame for this situation: the school board, central administration of the larger campus (of which this small school is a part), and the students’ families. One teacher redirected the conversation to the larger context:

This whole small schools idea – the power is in the hands of Ford, the Gates Foundation, etc. They give the money and then they take it away. What I want to know is, are any of these things we’re doing – peer observations, advisories, calling home – is it really going to help? Is it really just about me working harder, or is it about a whole system that doesn’t work? And is your getting me to do all this stuff just getting me to buy into this system? I feel like such a chump, because if there’s not even any money, why am I working so hard to fix a system that’s doomed to fail? I guess because I believe that if we’re ever going to create some change in the world, education is how we’re going to make that happen. But we need to step outside of the box.

Perhaps stepping outside of the box means stepping outside of schools, given how challenging it can be to create substantive change within them. In fact, Social Justice High closed its doors after five years. (It was absorbed into a new small school, one funded by a major energy company, which has shifted the primary emphasis to math and science classes and folded the “social justice” mission into an environmental branding.) Because of all of the institutional constraints to creating fundamental structural change within schools, some theorists and educators argue that a more fruitful approach is to put our energies into outside-of-school learning.⁴⁸⁹ This may, indeed, be necessary. However, for the purposes of decolonizing the white colonizer, I believe it is important not to give up on the classroom space. As Leonardo points out,

Communities of color have constructed counter-discourses in the home, church, and informal school cultures in order to maintain their sense of humanity. They know too well that their sanity and development, both as individuals and as a collective, depend on alternative (unofficial) knowledge of the racial formation. By contrast, white subjects do not forge these same counter-hegemonic racial understandings because their lives also depend on a certain development, that is, color-blind strategies that maintain their supremacy as a group...State sponsored curricula fail to encourage students of all racial backgrounds to critique white domination...[but] it is not only the case that whites are taught to normalize their dominant position in society; they are susceptible to these forms of teachings because they benefit from them.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁸ The lack of funding was visible, for example, in field trips being cancelled because there wasn’t enough money to cover the expense of a bus and substitute teachers; parents inquiring at the Family Night as to why they kept receiving requests to purchase books for their children’s classes; and in the wish list the science teacher put out at Back to School Night which included basic items such as paper towels, latex gloves, file folders and scissors.

⁴⁸⁹ Madhu Suri Prakash, *Escaping Education: Living as Learning Within Grassrootscultures*, 2nd ed, Counterpoints v. 36 (New York: P. Lang, 2008); Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*, 1st ed., World Perspectives v. 44 (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

⁴⁹⁰ Leonardo, *Race, Whiteness, and Education*, 83.

Given the relative unlikeliness of whites pursuing, developing, and practicing such counter-discourses voluntarily (at least initially), the ongoing (relatively) forced engagement of a classroom space offers a crucial opportunity for intervention. Of course, as Leonardo points out, the kind of radical interventions needed are not part of state sponsored curricula. As such, it is the job of critical educators to augment these curricula rather than, to refer to the Rodríguez quote above, participating in “genocide management.” Towards this end, Rodríguez advocates for

a pedagogical approach that asks the unaskable, posits the necessity of the impossible, and embraces the creative danger inherent in liberationist futures...The abolitionist teacher must be willing to occupy the difficult and often uncomfortable position of *political* leadership in the classroom...the imagination of the possible and the practical *is shaped but not limited* by the specific material and institutional conditions within which one lives...Rigorous experimentation and creative pedagogical radicalism is the very soul of this praxis. There is, in the end, no teaching formula or pedagogical system that *finally* fulfills the abolitionist social vision, there is only a political desire that understands the immediacy of struggling for human liberation from precisely those forms of systemic violence and institutionalized dehumanization that are *most culturally and politically sanctioned, valorized, and taken for granted* within one’s own pedagogical moment.⁴⁹¹

I believe that those of us working within schools can learn some useful skills for fostering such liberationist imaginations and praxis from non-school contexts – skills which can also be incorporated into the classroom. Towards that end, I turn now to a discussion of some lessons that can be learned from theater.

LESSONS FROM THEATER

All theater is not equal. However, all theater (like all education) is political, even if not intentionally or explicitly so. Kirk Fuoss argues that theater can be generally understood as either integrationist (i.e., perpetuating current power relations by convincing the audience that things are as they should be or, at least, as they always will be) or agitating (i.e., resisting current power relations by convincing the audience that things are not as they should be and can be changed).⁴⁹² Here, I focus solely on the latter form of theater, in particular community-based ensemble theater. Many theorists have argued for the potential of theater in this regard. To name just a few: Janelle Reinelt has described theater as one of the last available forms of direct democracy⁴⁹³; Kristin Langellier discusses theater’s transformative power as participants assert self-definitions about who and what matters⁴⁹⁴; Baz Kershaw sees theater as celebratory protest and challenging dominant ideologies through the production of alternative pleasures⁴⁹⁵; Jill Dolan argues that theater provides a participatory forum in

⁴⁹¹ Rodríguez, “The Disorientation of the Teaching Act,” 12–4. Italics in original.

⁴⁹² Kirk Fuoss, *Striking Performances: Performing Strikes* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997).

⁴⁹³ Janelle Reinelt, “Notes for a Radical Democratic Theater: Productive Crises and the Challenge of Indeterminacy” in *Staging Resistance: Essays on Political Theater*, eds. Jeanne Colleran and Jenny Spencer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998): 283–300.

⁴⁹⁴ Kristin M. Langellier, “Personal Narrative, Performance, Performativity: Two or Three Things I Know for Sure,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1999): 125–144.

⁴⁹⁵ Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance*.

which ideas and possibilities for social equity and justice are shared⁴⁹⁶; Bertolt Brecht used theater to raise political consciousness⁴⁹⁷; Bill Rauch and Cornerstone Theater Company employ theater to build bridges across ethnic, religious, and class lines and to combat (hetero)sexism⁴⁹⁸; John McGrath analyzed theater as a means of stopping ruling class values from being universalized as common sense or self-evident truths⁴⁹⁹; and Augusto Boal, feeling that theater is nothing short of “rehearsal for revolution,” spread theatrical training to social movements around the world.⁵⁰⁰ However, because the genres and processes of theater projects are so varied, it is difficult (if not impossible) to discuss the potential of theatrical interventions in the abstract, and so below I briefly analyze two very different community-based ensemble theater projects concerned with social justice, Albany Park Theater Project (APTP) and El Teatro Campesino,⁵⁰¹ and discuss their relevance for classroom pedagogies. First, however, I would like to point to some overarching aspects about theater which are relevant to pedagogical questions.

One of the techniques of theater is the gathering of people. Whether in the production process or in performances, this fosters the creation of communities. The sustaining power of these new communities stems from what Victor Turner has called *communitas*—a sense of unbounded connection to or communion with humanity.⁵⁰² Such a state is often experienced by participants in a theater project as well as by witnesses to engaging performances, and many companies purposefully aim to create such experiences in the hopes that this will provide the foundation for further action. However, as Sonja Kuflinec points out in her book on community-based theater, numerous social theorists⁵⁰³ remind us that such *communitas* “is complicated by what it conceals: the fragmented and exclusionary nature of community, and the fact that individuals identify with multiple groups.”⁵⁰⁴ Nevertheless, a sense of *communitas* does have the *potential* to unite a group of people towards collective action or, at the very least, to provide a source of moral or emotional support. And having experienced this union with one another may make individuals more likely to commit to working out problems that arise when factions within the community are revealed.

Schools also gather people – however, the nature of that gathering is one that most often places individuals in direct or indirect competition with one another, with tasks generally constructed in ways that make them comparable and rankable. In community-based ensemble theater, however, a “successful” product is a collective creation that is greater than the sum of the parts, i.e. everyone’s contributions to the process. There is a fostering of interdependency and shared responsibility, and while some performers (for example) might be arguably more “talented” than others, each person

⁴⁹⁶ Jill Dolan, “Geographies of Learning: Theatre Studies, Performance, and the ‘Performative,’” *Theatre Journal* 45, no. 4 (1993): 417–441.

⁴⁹⁷ Bertolt Brecht and John Willett, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964.

⁴⁹⁸ <http://cornerstonetheater.org/about/>

⁴⁹⁹ John McGrath, *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre: Audience, Class, and Form* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1996).

⁵⁰⁰ Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*.

⁵⁰¹ The discussion of APTP is based on the four and a half years I worked there, from 1999-2004; the discussion of El Teatro Campesino is based on literature about the company.

⁵⁰² Victor Witter Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982).

⁵⁰³ For example, Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990); Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.

⁵⁰⁴ Sonja Kuflinec, *Staging America: Cornerstone and Community-based Theater* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), 7. The exclusionary nature of community results from distinctions along identity politics divisions, particular interests, geography, or other defining qualities.

shines more to the extent that those around him/her/zir do, as well. The motivation to be “the best” one can be is in relation to service to the collective, not for the sake of competition.⁵⁰⁵ Integrating theater in the classroom can provide students with direct experiences of working together on a common project in ways that value each other’s distinct interests and capacities (e.g. for improvising, script-writing, performing in a variety of ways, designing, directing, conducting background research, etc.).

Another central concept in theater is “the willing suspension of disbelief.” Regardless of whether the genre of theater employed aims to evoke feelings of empathy or keep spectators at a critical distance, the audience is expected to understand and accept the events of a performance as both real and not real. Baz Kershaw asserts that such an acceptance puts the audience member in a *ludic*, or playful, role, “in the sense that it enables the spectator to participate in playing around with the norms, customs, regulations, laws, which govern her life in society.”⁵⁰⁶ As such, theater can act as a counter-disciplinary technology. Moreover, practicing “the willing suspension of disbelief” is particularly important for the white colonizer, and facilitates learning the lesson of analectics. Analectics is a concept developed by Enrique Dussel, who argued that we must learn to believe another who is speaking from beyond our own frameworks.⁵⁰⁷ This skill intervenes in tendencies by the white colonizer to either disbelieve the reality of the world as described by people of color and/or the attempt to make the other same.

Kershaw points out that the world presented on stage, however, does not have any *necessary* consequence as “audience members always have a *choice* as to whether or not the performance may be efficacious for them”⁵⁰⁸; one spectator might decide that the performance is merely a “possible world,” irrelevant to his or her own life, while another might decide that the performance is “of central significance to her or his ideology.”⁵⁰⁹ The latter choice, Kershaw argues, implies a commitment and “it is this commitment that is the source of the efficacy of performance for the future, because a decision that affects a system of belief, an ideology, is more likely to result in changes to future action.”⁵¹⁰ An audience member, thus, must feel implicated by that which is presented. As discussed in the examples below, this may or may not be achieved by the performance itself. In the classroom, this returns us to the issues discussed by Rodríguez and Leonardo & Porter, whereby critical educators need to participate in fostering our own and our students’ capacities for political analysis and liberatory engagement, rather than for tolerance and moral relativism.

Theater is also a means through which participants can be offered the freedom (and sometimes even given the mandate) to cast aside concerns with whether an idea is “realistic” or “politically feasible” and, instead, to expand the realm of the possible via imagination and embodied acting out of alternatives. One of the ways in which coloniality functions is in colonizing imaginations. As Rodríguez argues, “resistance to engaging with abolitionist praxis seems to also derive from a deep and broad epistemological and cultural *disciplining of the political imagination* that makes liberationist dreams unspeakable.”⁵¹¹ It is terrifying to me how often students in college classrooms, when given

⁵⁰⁵ This is obviously different in audition-based and star-culture theater.

⁵⁰⁶ Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance*, 24.

⁵⁰⁷ Enrique D Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985).

⁵⁰⁸ Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance*, 28.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 29.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid*.

⁵¹¹ Rodríguez, “The Disorientation of the Teaching Act,” 16–7.

the opportunity to brainstorm different structures (for example, creating a new approach to grading via a “system of accountability” of their own design) censor themselves and each other with statements about how realistic something is or whether it will work -- before even fully exploring their ideas and their implications. Ken Robinson discusses a study done on divergent thinking – the ability “to think analogically and associatively”⁵¹² and to come up with multiple possible answers to a question, i.e. not to take the “norm” for granted. This longitudinal study was administered to 1,600 kindergarten children, ages 3-5; 98% of them scored at the “genius” level for divergent thinking. The same test was administered to the same children when they were 14 and 15 years old; at this point, only 10% still scored at the “genius” level. (The test was also given to 200,000 adults, 2% of whom scored at the “genius” level.) The declining capacity for divergent thinking is likely not the sole responsibility of schools, but schools arguably contribute to it rather than educating against it. Theater, when practiced in non-standardizing ways, can provide a counter-education. In a socio-cultural context in which the “norm” is colonial white supremacy, i.e. violent and exploitative, counter-educations are desperately needed.

Imagining new possibilities is only one part of transformational processes, however. Even if, for example, new possibilities are imagined and presented, what of this question Kershaw raises regarding factors that might contribute to an audience member making a commitment to “changes to future action”? Here I briefly discuss two different strategies taken by two different theater companies, Albany Park Theater Project and El Teatro Campesino,⁵¹³ and the various kinds of commitments enacted (or not) by participants and audience members.

Albany Park Theater Project (APTP)

APTP is a theater company of adult directors, designers, and staff, and teenage performers, most of whom do not have prior theater experience and none of whom have to audition to become part of the company. (Nor do they pay anything to do so; in recent years, in fact, teens began receiving a stipend for their creative work at APTP.) The plays created by the company are based on stories told by the residents (including the company members) of Chicago’s largely immigrant and working-class Albany Park neighborhood. While many “social issues” are raised in these stories, for example, war, mental illness, Islamophobia, police brutality, (undocumented) migration, racism, homophobia, gang violence, racism, (sexual) abuse, and poverty, APTP plays are self-consciously non-didactic. This is not so much “social issues theater” as it is “personal narrative theater.” The purpose is to portray three-dimensional characters, with all the joy, suffering, hope, dreams, despair, and resilience of the lives and stories being shared.

Bertolt Brecht advocated for a *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect) in political theater, achieved through devices such as an actor stepping out of character to comment on the action, or placards announcing the content and key points of scenes before they happen. The purpose of this *Entfremdung* (alienation) is to prevent audience members from being swept up in the emotion or intrigue of a story, so that they might better remain critical observers. APTP, however, rejects Brecht’s notion of *Entfremdung* in an effort to counteract the alienation already felt by many of the ensemble members and others in the neighborhood within a colonial white supremacist United

⁵¹² http://www.ecs.org/html/projectspartners/chair2005/docs/sir_ken_robinson_speech.pdf

⁵¹³ My discussion of Albany Park Theater Project is based on my four and a half years working with the company, and continued attendance at performances and interactions with current and former company members since then. My discussion of El Teatro Campesino is based on literature on the company.

States. Instead, APTP seeks to create intimacy between the performers, the stories, and the audience, and to create complex alternative representations of people who are frequently marginalized and stereotyped in mainstream media. And, based on audience responses, the company is arguably highly successful in humanizing people who are frequently dehumanized. However, this alone may be necessary but not sufficient for “changes in future action.”

In “Peace and Proximity,” Emanuel Levinas argues that political problems cannot be solved by politics alone—that a peaceful and just society depends upon face-to-face interactions, developing a sense of ethical responsibility that enables a return to politics in the ensuing demand for justice. He describes this as “peace as awakens to the precariousness of the other.”⁵¹⁴ The “face” in the Levinasian sense is not necessarily the literal face of a person, but rather that which enables recognition of the extreme precariousness of another. The face demands us to remain in close proximity, bearing witness to the suffering of others, which Levinas argues serves as the foundation of ethical action. He is not referring to a simple empathy, but to being “held hostage” by another’s precariousness which demands responsibility from the perceiver, a responsibility resulting in “the impossibility of letting the other alone faced with the mystery of death.”⁵¹⁵

APTP, as an ensemble, fosters this proximity, recognition of precariousness, and resulting mutual responsibility between company members. This has resulted in adult and teen company members experiencing personal and interpersonal transformations (e.g. surrounding homophobia, racism, Islamophobia, and attitudes about undocumented immigration, as well as by fostering each other’s intellectual curiosity and capacities through a book group, annual artistic retreat, and the playmaking processes themselves) and has also resulted in material commitments. Such commitments have taken the form of company members’ families taking in other company members who would otherwise be homeless or in abusive living situations; the company prioritizing the securing of funding to cover stipends for company members’ time doing this artistic work; maintaining a fully stocked kitchen at the theater space; paying for physical and mental health services for members who need it and do not have insurance; and the creation of a college guidance program which has thus far resulted in 90% of company members going to college (90% of whom are the first in their families to do so).⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, “Peace and Proximity” in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996): 167.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ The college guidance program at APTP is quite intense. As described on the company website, “Teens begin the formal program with an overview of the different types of colleges and of the application and financial aid process. Thereafter, the process is entirely personalized. Students have individual college meetings with an APTP staff member on a weekly basis from the summer after their junior year through December of their senior year. Through these meetings, each student defines what he or she wants from a college, learns how to read college promotional materials, assembles a list of prospective colleges, and researches each college and narrows the list. Once each student has finalized a list of schools, APTP staff contact admissions officers at every school to personally advocate for each student. In many cases, colleges will pay to bring APTP teen artists to visit their schools; when this is not possible and the family can not afford the visit, APTP provides financial assistance to make the visit possible. The college process becomes most intense in the winter of senior year, as APTP staff guide and support ensemble members as they prepare their applications, write personal statements, and apply for financial aid. Come spring of their senior year, APTP works with students as they decide among the offers of admission and financial aid that they receive. APTP also frequently helps teens furnish and move into their new college homes, and select their first semester courses.” <http://www.aptpchicago.org/about/youth/college-guidance/>

The nature of the performance event, however, can inhibit the creation of such commitments for audience members. At APTP performances, audience members empathize with the people and stories portrayed on stage; but the very fact that these encounters are mediated by the *stage*, in incredibly high-quality polished performances, runs the risk of eliminating the sense of precariousness. Even though APTP plays certainly do not all have “happy endings” or imply that the conditions which led to various characters’ struggles have been transformed, the power of the performances themselves, and the vibrancy of the performers, can leave audience members with the impression that the issues are already being adequately dealt with. Some go so far as to assume that the theater company itself is “solving” the issues on display and thus the primary “future action” taken may be a donation to the company. However, while APTP as a company (as well as individual company members) is participating in social change (through its artistic and youth work, as well as through involvement in the broader community, including, for example, participating in immigrant rights rallies, demonstrations against the building of detainment facilities, and protests against foreclosures), the primary purpose of the company is not organizing work. Of course, these fields of work are interconnected and (in my opinion) can all be considered activism. However, there is a danger if audience members either a) do not recognize the connection between systemic structures and the individual stories being portrayed and/or b) believe that the work of a single theater company constitutes systemic change. This can result in audience members remaining stagnant at empathy rather than translating that empathy into a commitment and sense of responsibility. When this happens, we might say that audience members have seen the humanity of another without seeing another’s face, in the Levinasian sense. They can leave the theater saddened or outraged at the injustices experienced by others but without necessarily feeling personally bound to make changes in their own lives and/or to become engaged in ongoing work to change the circumstances that continue to give rise to superfluous suffering.

I would argue that this issue of provoking empathy without accountability is a frequent phenomenon in personal narrative performance and is the result of how experience is often dealt with in that context. In her essay “Experience,” Joan Scott discusses the dangers of turning to experience as “uncontestable evidence” of given ideological systems, allowing experience to be the explanatory element rather than that which needs to be explained. She states that, “Making visible the experience of a different group exposes the existence of repressive mechanisms, but not their inner workings or logics; we know that difference exists, but we don’t understand it as constituted relationally.”⁵¹⁷ By not questioning how these particular stories came to be lived by these particular people, and what can be done to prevent similar stories from being lived, told, and performed in the future, audience members miss the opportunity to use the resistance and resilience displayed by the company members (and/or the community members whose stories are being portrayed) as a “diagnostic of power” in the way that Lila Abu-Lughod advocates.⁵¹⁸ Instead, the plays are experienced primarily as “signs of the ineffectiveness of systems of power and of the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated.”⁵¹⁹ While this, too, is essential, it is not sufficient for creating a commitment to systemic change.

One way to increase the likelihood of such commitment would be to build into the performance itself (and/or into post-show conversations) more of the research that the company members

⁵¹⁷ Joan W. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 25.

⁵¹⁸ Lila Abu-Lughod, “The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women,” *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990): 41–55.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

conduct in the “scene development” phase of creating plays. Once a story has been shared at APTP, there is a multi-month process in which the entire company discusses it (analyzing it in the way one might analyze a piece of literature); researches relevant historical, political and social-cultural information; brainstorms ideas for the theatrical presentation of the story; and engages in writing activities as well as videotaped acting-, movement-, and music-based exercises to flesh out characters and relationships, to create dialogue, and to experiment with the various ideas proposed for performing the story. In the scene development process company members—often including the original storyteller—examine experiences not just to understand a character’s psychology, but also to understand how the socio-cultural, historical and political contexts created a given situation and resulted in participants’ actions within that situation. In its best moments, this stage in the process leads to in-depth conversations not just about specific topics such as the Bosnian War, Tourette’s Syndrome, gay rights, or living under the radar screen as an undocumented immigrant, but also about such overriding issues as structural racism, globalization, capitalism, and democracy. During scene development, a personal narrative or experience is, in fact, used in a way that Joan Scott advocates: not as “the origin of our explanation, the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced.”⁵²⁰

Unfortunately, much of this research and analysis work (which is what often leads the company, as well as individual company members, to become engaged in organizing efforts beyond the theater) does not appear in an overt way in the final product that is presented to an audience. This is partially due to the artistic challenge/decision to create non-didactic/non-explicatory theater. However, one could imagine including post-show conversations in which rigorous political analyses are shared with and solicited from audience members; inviting activists working on issues that surface within a play to give post-show presentations and/or to set up tables outside the theater with information on how audience members can get involved; handing out calls to action or political information in the program for the performance; etc. APTP has made some efforts in this direction. For example, at one APTP show, a petition was circulated among the audience, asking for support to pressure legislators to pass the DREAM Act. On a couple of occasions, the company has hosted special events to coincide with a play, for example, panels on food justice and undocumented immigration. And it is possible that the company’s most recent play, “I Will Kiss These Walls,” which focuses on foreclosure stories, moves further in this direction as the advertisement for the show describes it as, “Part people’s history, part road story, and part call to action.”⁵²¹

Even in the absence of such efforts, however, witnessing an APTP play is not necessarily useless in regards to bringing about social change. It is very possible that seeing these stories awakens an awareness in audience members that might heighten their sensibility to recognizing oppressive structures in their daily lives. And perhaps the theatrical encounter that humanized a group of people for some audience members might enable them, in a future situation, to look at the face of another and to respond in an ethical way – *for to see the face, we must first recognize it as such*. Perhaps this is the groundwork that personal narrative theater can lay: a creation of the conditions needed for future face-to-face encounters to take place in the way Levinas imagines. This is of particular import for the issue of decolonizing the white colonizer, given the many ways in which coloniality functions by (willfully) mis-recognizing even the humanity of others, rendering them subhuman or inhuman.

⁵²⁰ Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” 26.

⁵²¹ This is the first play since beginning to work with the company in 1999 that I will not see, as the show dates coincide with the time period of finishing this dissertation, so I can unfortunately not comment on it here.

In regards to integrating theater in the classroom, the issues relating to audience members may seem less relevant than the issues relating to members of the ensemble and their creation processes. However, I present these issues here because while there is certainly intrinsic worth in the theater creation process itself, working towards something that is going to be shared with an “outside” audience also enables important interventions. For one, it frequently has the effect of deepening participants’ engagement, due to the pressures of performing. Furthermore, a positive reception from an audience (especially when audience members declare themselves educated, moved, transformed, and/or affirmingly or helpfully represented by the work) creates a visceral experience of agency, of the sense that one can, indeed, make a difference in the world. Additionally, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith pointed out at an event on “Decolonizing Knowledge,” part of the process of affirming the value of the knowledge one has is sharing it in public. If the audience is made up of members of the performers’ community, she argued, this is the best accountability system you can have, and they will help you keep the knowledge robust and rigorous; if the audience consists of people in power, she explained, there is no guarantee that they will listen with their two ears – listening, however, she reminded us, is also enabled “through eyes, nostrils, stomach, and skin, and the use of poetry, song, ceremony, spirituality, and performance can help get through to people when the two ears don’t know how to listen – the *way* we speak can matter greatly.”⁵²² As such, it is worth considering whether integrating theater in the classroom can also be done in ways that lead to performances outside of the classroom space.

El Teatro Campesino

El Teatro Campesino was founded in 1965 as the cultural branch of Cesar Chavez’s Mexican-American farmworkers union, the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee. The plays the company created during its affiliation with the union consisted of *actos*, short interactive satirical performances that depicted the conditions of migrant farm workers and encouraged them to join the union, often staged on the back of flatbed trucks in the fields, with the audience members consisting of fellow farmworkers. While in later years El Teatro Campesino shifted its focus away from agitational protest theater, I focus on this period of the company’s work because it provides a well-documented example of a different prevalent style of political theater from that of personal narrative performance. El Teatro Campesino’s theatrical style included slapstick humor, stock characters, narrative songs, folklore, and signs announcing the action of the scenes. This style was in line with the Brechtian ideal of *Entfremdung*, which Teatro founder Luis Valdez claims as an inspiration. The emphasis, he explained, was to “clearly express the issues, openly, without falling back on a plot or characters.”⁵²³ It was important to keep audience members consciously focused on the connection between the on-stage action and their real-life struggles.

In contrast to APTP’s focus on personal narratives, El Teatro Campesino’s early performances were 100% issue-driven. The plays were geared towards affirming collective cultural pride (rather than focusing on individuals’ particular stories, even as parts of collective cultures) and raising social consciousness. The hope was that audience members would join the union and the fight for farmworkers’ rights. To achieve this goal, the company employed three primary tactics. The first was to undermine the dominant social order by casting authority figures and their institutions in a

⁵²² April 26, 2003. “Decolonizing Knowledge: Towards a Critical Research Justice Praxis.” Oakland, CA.

⁵²³ Kourilsky, Françoise. “Political Theater in France since 1968.” *The Drama Review* 19, no. 2 (1975), translated by and quoted in Van Erven, Eugene, *Radical People’s Theatre*, p. 46.

negative light—in stark contrast to the righteous farmworker. In doing so, the performers also challenged the dominant culture’s constructions of right and wrong and what is deemed criminal. The second tactic was to model a more desirable “possible world” as well as a plan for its realization. El Teatro Campesino’s performances typically featured the stock character of the “Everyman” Farmworker whose only solution to economic exploitation is to join the union and strike, an action which the *actos* show to be successful. As Harry Elam Jr. explains in Taking It to the Streets,

El Teatro used the transformative power of theatrical performance to persuade their audiences that their own real-life “social dramas” were ultimately transformable...By predicting revolutionary victory, the performances renewed the audience’s commitment to struggle. The success of the social protest cause was shown to be distinct, specific, and attainable.⁵²⁴

Finally, El Teatro Campesino *actos* always included audience participation. Kimberly Benston explains that inviting the audience to participate moves a performance away from “mimesis, or representation of an action [and towards] methexis or “communal helping out” of the action by all assembled. It is a shift from drama—the spectacle observed—to ritual, the event which dissolves traditional divisions between actor and spectator, between self and other.”⁵²⁵

Thus, by participating in the performance, the audience members were using theater in the way that Boal conceives of the medium, as a “rehearsal for revolution.” Boal distinguishes audience participation in social protest performances from the cathartic response that critics often assert will purge an audience member’s energy for action outside of the theater. Catharsis, he explains, is related to a focus on, and a processing of, tragic events of the past, whereas social protest performances are focused on the future and the potential for revolutionary change. Thus, an audience’s emotional involvement is not a release of that energy but indicative of the performance’s success in heightening it. This kind of audience participation, of course, presupposes more-or-less sympathetic spectators. In contrast to APTP shows, which (at least in regards to the significant part of the audience which consists of middle-class white people) attempt to bridge divides by displays of humanity (and perhaps risk the evocation of catharsis rather than revolutionary drive), El Teatro Campesino’s plays are not trying to convert anyone but to incite the already converted to action.⁵²⁶

The power of audience participation in the *actos* does not stem merely from the vocal responses to calls from the performers but also from the sheer act of attending the performance at all. Early El Teatro Campesino shows were performed on the backs of flatbed trucks in the fields, and the farmworkers had to leave their work to attend these performances that were often surrounded by armed field supervisors and police. Simply being an audience member of El Teatro Campesino often

⁵²⁴ Harry Justin Elam, *Taking It to the Streets: The Social Protest Theater of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 74.

⁵²⁵ Kimberly W. Benston, “The Aesthetic of Modern Black Drama: From Mimesis to Methexis” in *The Theatre of Black Americans: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Errol Hill (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1980): 62.

⁵²⁶ I should be clear that APTP plays are not simply about conversion. In regards to the part of the audience that is of the community (and those who are from similarly situated communities in relation to colonial white supremacy), they also function as what Dwight Conquergood has described as “community auto-ethnography,” asserting authority over representation. In this way, APTP plays function along the lines described by Kristin Langelier: “Personal narrative as cultural performance has transformative power to assert self-definitions about who matters and what matters: the existence, worth and vitality of a person or group as meanings not otherwise available to an audience.” Langelier, “Personal Narrative, Performance, Performativity,” 134.

already implied an act of social defiance, creating a co-conspiracy between the performers and the audience and thus elevating a sense of *communitas* and the potential for future action. This *communitas* was further enhanced by two factors: the fact that the performers themselves were also farmworkers, providing the plays with a greater authenticity; and the incorporation of culturally relevant spiritual and mythical characters that sanction the actions proposed.

One aspect of these performances that is relevant for integrating theater in classrooms is the element of joyful daring. The performances were fun (for participants and audience members), while doing serious and risky work. Teachers and students can similarly rehearse for revolution by preparing and staging “guerilla” performances in their schools, i.e. performances that have not been pre-sanctioned by the authorities, and which might be surprises to the audience members. For example, in 2005, I was part of a group of students from a Popular Education class at UC Berkeley which staged “stock character” performances in conjunction with the AFSCME campus service workers strike. These characters included “the chancellor,” “his lackey,” and “the custodian.” We entered and interrupted large lecture classes with skits about working conditions, and raised questions about what these exploitative campus policies are teaching us about justice and human dignity. We handed out informational flyers, and encouraged students to leave class and join the strike. We also planted “performers” as students in the classes who kicked off the audience participation by getting up and interacting with the performers and declaring their decision to leave, encouraging their fellow classmates to join them, many of whom did. When these kinds of actions are done in conjunction with a teacher or professor, it lowers the risk for the students involved and enables opportunities to practice “acting out” in future situations where the stakes and potential consequences may be higher (such as was the case, for example, for those participating in UC Berkeley campus building occupations in 2009 and 2011 who faced police brutality and arrest). In the process, students’ bodies learn to take risks and also learn the importance of community and solidarity – the risks are often minimized by the power of numbers.

Although El Teatro Campesino presented counter-images to the negative stereotypes promoted by the dominant culture, they still created images of Chicanos as “types” rather than as complex, three-dimensional, diverse people. While this is a problematic practice, it is possible that in that particular time and place, with its particular audience, it may have served a useful purpose in uniting the farmworkers (who presumably did not misrecognize themselves as one-dimensional as a result of these performances) towards collective action, and may have contributed to the 1970 signing of the contract between the union and the 26 major growers. These performances did not, however, show members of the dominant culture the “face” of the oppressed. This results in a situation in which those in power may feel compelled to a certain level of acquiescence in order to neutralize potential antagonism, but do not feel committed to revolutionizing the current social systems or allowing themselves to be transformed. As Ernesto Laclau explains, “A class is hegemonic not so much to the extent that it is able to impose a uniform conception of the world on the rest of society, but to the extent that it can articulate different visions of the world in such a way that their potential antagonism is neutralized.”⁵²⁷

What pedagogical practices, then, might serve the project of decolonizing the white colonizer, so that he/she/ze may contribute to proliferating rather than neutralizing antagonism? Towards this end, I offer a list of lessons and skills I believe the white colonizer needs to learn.

⁵²⁷ Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: NLB, 1977), 161.

SCHOOLING THE WHITE COLONIZER

One of the primary lessons the white colonizer needs is to *learn (our) history and its relation to the present*. For some people and organizations, such as the national Coming to the Table project,⁵²⁸ this includes genealogical work (via archives and/or oral histories) to learn the details of one's own family's specific involvement in and/or resistance to relations of domination. These personal stories can be incredibly powerful for revealing particularities and personalizing these enormous issues, and can provide material for the kind of personal narrative theater described in the section above on APTP. However, even if one is not capable of learning one's specific family history and even if one's family history appears to be (primarily) one of resistance to colonial white supremacy, this does not mean one is not complicit with colonial white supremacy. Here, a lesson about the significance of history from James Baldwin:

The fact that they [white people] have not yet been able to...face their history, to change their lives—hideously menaces this country. Indeed, it menaces the entire world. White man, hear me! History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations. And it is with great pain and terror that one begins to realize this...In great pain and terror because, thereafter, one enters into battle with that historical creation, Oneself, and attempts to re-create oneself according to a principle more humane and more liberating: one begins the attempt to achieve a level of personal maturity and freedom which robs history of its tyrannical power, and also changes history...people who imagine that history flatters them (as it does, indeed, since they wrote it) are impaled on their history like a butterfly on a pin and become incapable of seeing or changing themselves, or the world...in those stammering, terrified dialogues which white Americans sometimes entertain with that black conscience, the black man in America...[whites] plea: do not blame me, I was not there. I did not do it. My history has nothing to do with Europe or the slave trade. Anyway, it was your chiefs who sold you to me. I was not present on the middle passage, I am not responsible for the textile mills of Manchester, or the cotton fields of Mississippi. Besides, consider how the English, too, suffered in those mills and in those awful cities! I also despise the governors of Southern states and the sheriffs of Southern Counties, and I also want your child to have a decent education and rise as high as his capabilities will permit...[but] the white American remains proud of that history for which he does not wish to pay, and from which, materially, he has profited so much...White people fall into the yet more stunning and intricate trap of believing that they deserve their fate...they can scarcely dare to open a dialogue which must, if it is honest, become a personal confession-- a cry for help and healing, which is, really, I think, the basis of

⁵²⁸ Coming to the Table was founded by descendants of slaveholders and descendants of enslaved people, “to heal from the racial wounds of the past—from slavery and the many forms of racism it spawned.” The organization’s approach entails “facing history, healing wounds, making connections, and taking action.” Genealogical research (via archives and oral history) are one aspect of the “facing history” component.

all dialogues-- and, on the other hand, the black man can scarcely dare to open a dialogue which must, if it is honest, become a personal confession which, fatally, contains an accusation. And yet, if neither of us cannot do this, each of us will perish in those traps in which we have been struggling for so long.⁵²⁹

The above is a long quote. As explained in the Introduction, I use lengthy quotes throughout this dissertation. This relates to another skill the white colonizer needs to develop, which Baldwin indicates above: to learn not just any version of (our) history, but to *learn to see ourselves and (our) history through the eyes of indigenous people and people of color*. This, as Baldwin explains, is necessary for everyone's freedom, and requires cross-racial dialogue which entails an accusation from people of color. Sara Ahmed emphasizes that really hearing this accusation "requires that white subjects inhabit the critique, *with its lengthy duration*, and to recognize the world that is re-described by the critique as one in which they live."⁵³⁰ Under conditions lacking widely institutionalized or freely chosen (sustained) proximity, the desegregated school classroom (which has unfortunately become a more rare phenomenon again) may thus provide one of the few circumstances in which such listening can, depending on the pedagogy, take place. George Yancy describes the institution of this pedagogy in his class:

"Look, a white!" Becomes a shared perspective, a shared dynamic naming process, buttressed and informed by the insights regarding whiteness that black people and people of color have acquired. The strategy is to have my white students see the white world through *our* eyes, a perspective that will challenge whiteness... "Look, a white!" is meant to be unsafe, indeed, to be dangerous to whites themselves. By "dangerous" I mean *threatening* to a white self and the white social system predicated on a vicious lie that white is right—morally, epistemologically, and otherwise.⁵³¹

The ability for the white colonizer to engage in and be transformed by such a pedagogy requires the learning of a host of other skills, including⁵³²:

- *Understanding the difference between prejudice and racism*: racism = prejudice + power. As such, there is no such thing as reverse racism in a white supremacist society, because racism depends upon having the power to institutionalize one's prejudices.
- *Understanding the difference between equality and sameness*: under conditions of domination, movement towards equality entails not treating everyone the same, but privileging those perspectives and practices that counter domination. This includes not giving equal weight to white utterances in the classroom (as distinct from but also overlapping with utterances by white people). Given analyses of human development and "legitimate peripheral participation,"⁵³³ however, it might be pedagogically necessary to sometimes have segregated "break out" sessions so that white people can engage in more remedial-level race literacy in a space where fears, questions, tears, and resistances can be raised and addressed without further traumatizing people of color and/or placing people of color in caretaking positions.

⁵²⁹ Baldwin, *James Baldwin*, 722–5.

⁵³⁰ Ahmed, "Declarations of Whiteness."

⁵³¹ Yancy, *Look, a White!*, 12.

⁵³² This list of skills has been developed over the course of my research. It draws from others' scholarship as well as from anti-racism, decolonial and racial justice workshops, and from my own observations and reflections.

⁵³³ Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

The work done in such white spaces should, of course, remain accountable to people of color. Relatedly, it is also important for white people to understand and respect the importance of autonomous people of color spaces for organizing, developing analyses, imagining and implementing alternatives, and healing. Understanding the difference between moves towards equality and sameness can also mitigate against colorblind racism and against assuming that liberatory strategies employed by people of color can be emulated wholesale by white people.

- *Fostering one's imagination.* In addition to the essential roles played by imagination discussed above, Maxine Greene also points to the connection between imagination and empathy: “imagination is what, above all, makes empathy possible. It is what allows us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called “others” over the years. If those others are willing to give us clues, we can look in some manner through strangers’ eyes and hear through their ears. That is because, of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternate realities.”⁵³⁴ The importance of developing this skill cannot be understated when it comes to the white colonizer, especially as recent brain research has shown that white people have a tendency to lack empathy for people of color at the neurological level. Research by Jennifer Gutsell and Michael Inzlicht, which studied 30 white people, demonstrated that “participants displayed activity over motor cortex when acting and when observing ingroups act, but not when observing outgroups – an effect magnified by prejudice and for disliked groups.”⁵³⁵ The motor cortex activity in question is known as the “mirror-neuron-system”⁵³⁶ and involves “perception-action-coupling.”⁵³⁷ This is how people understand each other’s actions, intentions and emotions. As Gutsell and Inzlicht explain, “When people connect with others, they resonate with them by adopting their postures, intonations, and facial expressions, but also their motivational states and emotions. Such perception-action-coupling is implemented by brain mechanisms that allow observers to mirror the actions and emotions of those they observe.”⁵³⁸ Their research monitored white participants’ brain activity when watching people of various racial-ethnic backgrounds drink a glass of water. The diminished mirroring when the person being observed was a person of color demonstrates a basic lack of empathy, what Sylvia Wynter would describe as not recognizing the other as part of the “propter nos,” i.e. part of one’s concept of humanity. As she (and neuroscientists) point out, however, the brain is elastic, and we are constituted both genetically and via culturally-informed systems of representation. As such, it is possible to expand the realm of the “ingroup” to include all of humanity (as well as, presumably, other species). Language socialization studies can help us to understand the ways in which one’s language, as one primary system of representation, functions in the service of this goal or as an impediment to it, and can thus offer both

⁵³⁴ Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*, 1st ed (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995), 3.

⁵³⁵ Jennifer N. Gutsell and Michael Inzlicht, “Intergroup Differences in the Sharing of Emotive States: Neural Evidence of an Empathy Gap,” *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 7, no. 5 (2012): 596–603.

⁵³⁶ Giacomo Rizzolatti and Laila Craighero, “The Mirror-neuron System,” *Annual Review of Neuroscience* 27 (2004): 169–192.

⁵³⁷ Jean Decety and Philip L. Jackson, “The Functional Architecture of Human Empathy,” *Behavioral and Cognitive Neuroscience Reviews* 3, no. 2 (2004): 71–100.

⁵³⁸ Gutsell and Inzlicht, “Intergroup Differences in the Sharing of Emotive States.”

diagnostics and insights for change.⁵³⁹ Students can learn the methodology of language socialization and also employ the skills of oppositional consciousness described by Chela Sandoval in analyzing the data they gather.⁵⁴⁰ Theater and dance practices, in which participants literally mirror each other's physical movements and practice portraying a range of characters, may be an essential technique for fostering empathy at the neurological level as well as an imaginative consciousness.

- *Developing the capacities to engage in analectics and nepantlismo.* Analectics is a concept developed by Enrique Dussel, who argued that the proximity Levinas describes for seeing another's "face" is not sufficient, that we must also learn to believe another who is speaking from beyond our own frameworks.⁵⁴¹ The other's voice is believed out of respect for *zif*/him/her, which is an act of faith because it does not always correspond to evidence as evidence is understood within one's existing frames of reference. By believing the other without attempting to make the other same, critiques to internalized norms and common sense are enabled. Gloria Anzaldúa draws on the Nahautl word "nepantla" to describe this process of transforming consciousness in which "different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas, tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures."⁵⁴² She argues that the *conocimiento* thus enabled can lead to periods of depression but also to a commitment to learn from and work with others to transform oneself and the world.
- To follow through on such commitments requires *developing the skills of staying engaged* (physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually), including in the face of conflict, and not insisting on repressive rules of engagement such as "polite" speech, which can often serve to reinscribe colonial white supremacy. As Leonardo points out, "Feelings have to be respected and educators can establish the conditions for radical empathy. That said, anger is also a valid and legitimate feeling; when complemented by clear thought, anger is frighteningly lucid. Thus, a pedagogy of politeness only goes so far before it degrades into the paradox of liberal feel-good solidarity absent of dissent, without which any worthwhile pedagogy becomes a democracy of empty forms."⁵⁴³ Engagement also entails not being conflict-avoidant by hiding.
- This hiding is, I would argue, largely related to not *understanding the difference between guilt and shame*. This is a difference that I've found is frequently glossed over even in anti-racism spaces, where "white guilt" is described as counter-productive. White people should, however, feel guilty. As Brené Brown explains, it is shame, not guilt, which is paralyzing: "Shame is a focus on self, guilt is a focus on behavior. Shame is, 'I am bad'; guilt is, 'I did something bad.'" She notes that, "Empathy is the antidote to shame. If you put shame in a petri-dish it needs three things to grow exponentially: secrecy, silence, and judgment. If you

⁵³⁹ For an overview of the theoretical and methodological contributions of language socialization, see Garrett and Baquedano-López, "Language Socialization." For an example of a language socialization study and the relevance of language to forming understandings of self and other, see Patricia Baquedano-López, "Creating Social Identities through Doctrina Narratives" in *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*, ed. Alessandro Duranti. (Malden: Blackwell, 2001): 343–358.

⁵⁴⁰ These skills include semiotics (sign-reading), deconstruction (of those signs), meta-ideologizing (resignification), democracies (an egalitarian ethic), and differential consciousness (a flexible engagement with various oppositional ideologies and strategies, depending on the circumstances, but always guided by the egalitarian ethic). Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*.

⁵⁴¹ Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*.

⁵⁴² Gloria Anzaldúa, "Now Let Us Shift...the Path of *Conocimiento*...Inner Work, Public Acts," 548.

⁵⁴³ Leonardo, *Race, Whiteness, and Education*, 179.

put shame in a petri-dish and douse it with empathy, it can't survive."⁵⁴⁴ For the purposes of decolonizing the white colonizer, it is important to point out that the issue of "judgment" here is related to shame, not to guilt. It is important that we be able to judge actions according to whether or not they are contributing to domination or to love. Empathy (which every person can extend to oneself as well as to others, but which should be seen as a gift, not a responsibility or requirement, when extended from people of color to whites) is a means through which to foster resilience by continuing to love (oneself) even in the face of (one's) imperfections. Understanding the difference between guilt and shame can also help the white colonizer to remain focused on the material and symbolic violences of racism, rather than becoming consumed with whether one looks/sounds racist.

- Remaining committed also means *learning to accept shifting strategies and insecurity of outcomes* (including the impossibility of "getting it right" or being redeemed) *and not basing one's commitment on the approval of others*. As hooks insists, "Often the anti-racist white person must endure social isolation, rejected by racist white folks and by people of color who may either fear being betrayed or who may simply be enacting dominator power via exclusion...It is vital that we refuse to allow rejection by any group to change one's commitment to anti-racism. Love of justice cannot be sustained if it is only a manipulation to be with the in-crowd, whoever they may be...ongoing resistance to white supremacy is genuine when it is not determined in any way by the approval or disapproval of people of color."⁵⁴⁵
- *Developing an understanding of interconnectedness*. This refers both to the ways in which education is connected to all other institutions and aspects of life, and the ways in which people's lives are connected to each other and to all other beings and phenomena. An intellectual understanding of this can be developed through studying the work of dependency and coloniality theorists and studying the eco- and biospheres. I have personally found that Buddhist teachings and, critically, *practice* (especially from the engaged Buddhism tradition) are incredibly helpful for cultivating a more deeply internalized understanding of the truth of interconnectedness. It is important not to confuse interconnectedness with parity, however. hooks, for example, discusses the ways in which she has seen queer white women use their/our experiences with discrimination as a bridge for understanding racial oppression, and that this is only effective when, "Rather than assuming that this pain was identical to the pain they experienced, they accepted the "bridge" as merely a base to walk across, allowing them to learn from people of color the nature of our experience in the social context of white supremacy."⁵⁴⁶ An understanding of interconnectedness can also enable the white colonizer to recognize that participating in decolonization processes is not something done for others, but something done for all of us, i.e. that our own freedom and ability to love depends upon dismantling domination and that that which we must let go of in this process is not a punishment but a prerequisite (p/reparations) for the possibility of liberation.
- *Developing a sense of humor, maintaining hope, and cultivating joy*. Mab Segrest shares that, "My comic sense...encourages my white self not to hate itself since I can change. For white women doing anti-racist work, one of our chief challenges is to find ways of overcoming our feelings of self-hatred and despair brought about by an increased knowledge of our white

⁵⁴⁴ March 2012 TED Talk, "Listening to Shame," available here:

http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_listening_to_shame.html

⁵⁴⁵ bell hooks, *Teaching Community: a Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 64–5.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 62.

heritage. The sense of humor is also the sense of faith and trust and hope.”⁵⁴⁷ It is essential that the hope one maintains be, in Jeff Duncan-Andrade’s terms, “critical hope” rather than “false hope.”⁵⁴⁸ Critical hope entails active struggle against systems of domination, including through rigorous intellectual/emotional analysis, the transferring of material resources, and solidarity based on an understanding of interconnectedness.⁵⁴⁹ As Thich Nhat Hanh explains, interconnectedness is not only relevant in regards to contemporary beings, but also to the past and the future: “All your ancestors continue in you, and when you transform the habit energies that they have transmitted to you, you are being reborn in the past.”⁵⁵⁰ As such, our hopeful commitments transform not only present conditions, but also transform the past and the future. This insight and possibility is itself a cause for joy, as is the tremendous resilience and creativity of the human spirit and the planet itself. Learning to be in touch with joy is crucial in order to remain committed to facing domination without (complete) despair. As such, Paulo Freire argues that educators “must do everything to ensure an atmosphere in the classroom where teaching, learning, and studying are serious acts, but also ones that generate happiness.”⁵⁵¹

- *Recognizing the unknowability of an other (human, being, phenomenon) and yet still trying to draw closer in understanding.* This is the difference between the pursuit of mastery, i.e. knowledge for the purposes of grasping and possessing, and the pursuit of relationship, i.e. increased understanding for the possibility of intimacy. This entails what María Lugones describes as “world”-traveling, which is not the agonistic imperialist travel of the conqueror who destroys the worlds to which he travels but loving travel to an other’s multiple worlds in which we attempt to “understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes.”⁵⁵² It can be useful to develop an orientation towards knowledge in which what is learned opens up an even greater awareness to the vastness of what is not fully known. This is not limited to any particular topic or subject area. For example, Becky Jaffe shared with me that her fascination with biology, chemistry and physics is that she is constantly reminded of how miniscule the glances of understandings into the workings of the physical world she receives are; the continual pursuit of “scientific” knowledge, for her, is not about becoming master of the universe (or even of one tiny part of the universe) but to continually humble herself. Drawing closer entails sustained attention and the learning of new languages, whether these are cultural/national languages, “disciplinary” languages, and/or non-verbal languages. hooks encourages teachers to create space for multiple languages in the classroom, and to help students understand “the moment of not understanding what someone says as a space to learn. Such a space provides not only the opportunity to listen without “mastery,” without owning or possessing speech through interpretation, but also the experience of hearing non-

⁵⁴⁷ Mab Segrest, *My Mama’s Dead Squirrel: Lesbian Essays on Southern Culture* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1985), 53.

⁵⁴⁸ Duncan-Andrade, “Note to Educators.”

⁵⁴⁹ On the distinction between hope (based on a sober assessment of how far there still is to go to achieve a post-race world) versus optimism (based on a false assessment of how much progress has already been made), see Zeus Leonardo, “After the Glow: Race Ambivalence and Other Educational Prognoses,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 43, no. 6 (2011): 675–698. Cornel West also provides a helpful distinction between hope and optimism, stating that optimism is “based on the notion that there’s enough evidence out there to believe things are gonna be better,” whereas hope looks at the evidence and says, “it does not look good at all. But gonna go beyond the evidence to create new possibilities based on visions that become contagious to allow people to engage in heroic actions always against the odds, no guarantee whatsoever.”

⁵⁵⁰ Nhat Hanh, *no death, no fear*, 131.

⁵⁵¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Heart* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 90.

⁵⁵² Maria Lugones, “Playfulness, ‘World’-Travelling, and Loving Perception,” *Hypatia* 2, no. 2 (1987): 17.

English words. These lessons seem particularly crucial in a multicultural society that remains white supremacist, that uses standard English as a weapon to silence and censor.”⁵⁵³ We also censor students when we only value verbal work (whether oral or written) in the classroom and do not create space for other means of expression, such as visual, musical, and/or embodied. “World”-traveling can also help the white colonizer to remember that his/zir/her own languages and ways of seeing only provide a partial perspective.

- *Learning to let go of senses of entitlement.* This needs to be fostered in relation to material resources as well as in the realm of agenda-setting. For example, having a PhD in Ethnic Studies and/or donating lots of money to support a racial justice organization does not mean the white colonizer is entitled to set the agenda or be in a leadership position. If what is needed is grunt work, for example, that is what should be offered.
- *Developing physical and emotional resilience.* In the Bay Area, some activists/healers offering training in this area include Victor Lee Lewis and Vanissar Tarakali. Trained in neuro-linguistic programming, emotional freedom techniques, generative somatics and other techniques for healing trauma, Lewis’ and Tarakali’s work focuses on recognizing, assessing, and soothing the body’s stress responses in order to remain present and care for self and others. Meditation and mindfulness practices, as well as fostering one’s spiritual formation with the help of whatever traditions/communities/practices speak to one’s soul, can also aid the development of physical and emotional resilience.

The primary methodologies involved in the cultivation of the above skills are ongoing deeply engaged listening—whether to people who are co-present or to people’s expressions via their work—and ongoing embodied practice, i.e. the development of counter-disciplines of the body. Some of these counter-disciplines might be better understood as anti-disciplines, i.e. training the body/mind to be flexible and improvisational; paradoxically, this capacity is sometimes precisely trained via repetitive exercises but with a consciousness of alert engagement and paying attention rather than docile obedience. Pinkard describes the stakes of these counter-disciplines in her discussion of the overwhelmingly white female teaching force in communities of color:

there are two types of discipline: that of the slave and that of the warrior. The slave is taught to obey external authority figures and constraints. The warrior is taught to focus her internal power so that no external power can stop her. Audre Lorde’s “Uses of the Erotic” shows that the warrior’s power is deeply rooted in chaos and passion; the urge for life and love in the nihilism of the oppressive system. The teacher, as the servant of the master, cannot embrace the subversive nature of this chaos and passion. She must believe that her students can excel within the system. ...To work for the authentic advancement of marginalized communities requires one to be subversive and transgressive. Unless [the white teacher] is willing to undermine the very systems that frame her existence...she is forced to make slaves rather than warriors.⁵⁵⁴

This requires, then, that critical (white) teachers must practice what we preach. This entails committing to our own intellectual, political, emotional, and spiritual decolonization, and a willingness to be vulnerable and take risks in and beyond the classroom. As hooks argues,

⁵⁵³ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 172.

⁵⁵⁴ Pinkard, “Jane in the Blackboard Jungle,” 6–7.

Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered in the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks...It is often productive if professors take the first risk, linking confessional narratives to academic discussions so as to show how experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of academic material.⁵⁵⁵

When teachers and students are encouraged to bring their/our full selves (and all our languages) into the classroom, and when the expectation is that part of learning includes a transformation of self via a process of what Pinkard describes as “being cross-fertilized by others and allowing that which does not serve the flourishing of life to die,”⁵⁵⁶ a classroom can become a community. hooks emphasizes the importance of centering community rather than “safety” in order to “create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor.”⁵⁵⁷ Integrating theater in the classroom is one powerful way of achieving this. In Ed 190, other pedagogies through which we strove to build community included everyone (students and facilitators) sharing our “personal accounts,” i.e. our educational journeys in- and outside of classrooms; spending an entire period early in the semester outdoors, engaging in team-building and trust-games; starting each period with icebreakers geared towards getting to know one another and/or breaking down inhibitions and being silly; and even going on an overnight retreat together. Taking the time to build relationships and community facilitates students’ abilities to challenge each other (and the teacher) and to be challenged, and not only “by choice.”⁵⁵⁸ As with theater, these classroom practices, even when they are counter-disciplinary, are not the revolution, but they do provide important opportunities to rehearse (for) revolution.

There are definitely institutional constraints to navigate, depending upon one’s context. However, even if it is not possible, for example, to do away with testing and grades in your context, educators can engage students in a meta-analysis of these functions. And even if one’s pedagogies and/or curricular interventions come under direct attack, the way in which teachers and students respond to those attacks can provide some of the deepest learning, politicization, and community-building of all. This can be seen, for example, in the documentary *Precious Knowledge*,⁵⁵⁹ which chronicles the attacks on the Tucson High School’s ethnic studies program and the ongoing mobilized resistance by students, teachers, and the community as a result. This brings me to another essential lesson the white colonizer must learn: *how to take concrete action in solidarity with oppressed communities*.

Decolonial solidarity, as described by Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, is *relational* (recognizing that we are made (and transformed) by each other and that we are placed in hierarchical positions relative to one another as a result of conditions of domination and inequality), *transitive* (engaging in actions in relationship to another which also transform the self, with no guarantees as to the outcome), and

⁵⁵⁵ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 21.

⁵⁵⁶ Personal conversation.

⁵⁵⁷ hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 40.

⁵⁵⁸ “Challenge by choice” is a frequent “guideline” for discussions about racism in both cross-racial and all-white dialogue groups that I have attended. It entails asking someone whether they are open to receiving feedback before simply commenting on something they have said or done. In my opinion, this generally inhibits both growth and the building of relationships.

⁵⁵⁹ Ari Palos, director. *Precious Knowledge*, Documentary, 2005.

creative (engaging with others in ways that utilize all of one's senses and means of expression and collectively developing new cultural practices which enable us "to rethink the human"⁵⁶⁰). Decolonial solidarity is pedagogy and praxis, "premised on a profound faith in the imaginative capacities of human beings to transform the conditions—and thus the definitions—of their existence."⁵⁶¹ This involves loving action guided by "the particular context and the experiences of those who have suffered the most damaging consequences resulting from current conceptions of what it means to be human: the victims of genocide, slavery, and wars of conquest."⁵⁶² Thus, as described in Chapter One, concrete actions are required but the particular form they take must be determined through the development of relationships of solidarity -- which necessitates the transformation of the white colonial self. And while listening and dialogue constitute crucial forms of action, if they are not accompanied by material action and spiritual transformation we might consider them rendered deaf and mute.

⁵⁶⁰ Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández, "Decolonization and the Pedagogy of Solidarity," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 59.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

“CHAPTER” FIVE: PERFORMING WHAT I’M PREACHING

I think it is important when doing research on white supremacy and coloniality to recognize, as Gilroy has pointed out, that racial [and colonial] terror has often been unspeakable but not inexpressible,⁵⁶³ and to deal not only with the discursive and material elements but also with what Raymond Williams calls “structures of feeling.”⁵⁶⁴ I believe this is of special importance in regards to the question of decolonizing the white colonizer, where a range of distancing techniques function as what Mab Segrest has described as “the anesthetic aesthetic of racism,” whereby “people don’t...respond to what they can pretend they do not know, and they don’t know what they can’t feel.”⁵⁶⁵ Furthermore, as I discuss in Chapter Three, live performance lends itself to holding that tension which is a recurring theme in this dissertation: white people must reject whiteness without removing ourselves from it. In a live performance, even as the white performer voices critiques of whiteness, even as she speaks and aligns herself with the words of decolonial theorists of color, her embodied whiteness remains on display. Not as a fixed essence, but as something inescapable, implicating me, and a continual reminder to the audience—and to myself as I see myself through the eyes of those in the audience—of my complicity with these structures of domination. Many scholars have critiqued the mind/body split and, to a great extent, this is what the discipline of Performance Studies has grown around. Dwight Conquergood has argued that a major part of the “western” epistemic hierarchy which coloniality theorists discuss is rooted in textocentrism. The problem is not texts, but the valorization of texts “to the exclusion of other media, other modes of knowing.”⁵⁶⁶ Performance Studies, Conquergood argues,

makes its most radical intervention...by embracing *both* written scholarship *and* creative work, papers and performances...the struggle to live betwixt and between theory and theatricality, paradigms and practices, critical reflection and creative accomplishment...a comingling of analytical and artistic ways of knowing that unsettles the institutional organization of knowledge and disciplines...A number of performance studies-allied scholars create performances as a supplement to, not substitute for, their written research.⁵⁶⁷

The inclusion of a performance as a chapter of this dissertation is a methodological/theoretical intervention which insists on not only engaging in performance “as a supplement to...[my] written research” but as an integral part of it; and not only as a methodology which is then analyzed in writing, but *as* analysis which must be engaged on its own terms. My inclusion of performance *as part of*, rather than in addition to, the dissertation is an attempt to continue to deconstruct what Conquergood describes as “this deeply entrenched division of labor, apartheid of knowledges, that plays out inside the academy as the difference between thinking and doing, interpreting and making,

⁵⁶³ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.

⁵⁶⁴ Williams, “Structures of Feeling.”

⁵⁶⁵ Segrest, *Born to Belonging*, 162.

⁵⁶⁶ Conquergood, “Performance Studies,” 151.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 151-2.

conceptualizing and creating.”⁵⁶⁸ To offer this intervention from a Department of Education rather than from a Performance Studies Department further challenges disciplinary apartheid.⁵⁶⁹

I am not arguing here that written work or performance work are not powerful and useful in their own rights, but that something powerful can *also* happen when they cross-pollinate. As such, I am not arguing that every scholar and/or artist should always (or even ever) combine written work and performance work. Rather, I am objecting to their *forced* segregation. Furthermore, I do so not only on theoretical and methodological grounds, but also for pedagogical reasons. I would like for academia to feel accessible to a wider range of people. As a person without an academic background, entering graduate school entailed a long slow process of learning to speak new languages. I frequently found the university to be an alienating place, and was constantly on the verge of dropping out. However, due to the efforts of those professors and students mentioned in the acknowledgements, who carved out radical spaces within the academy, I managed to stay. In the process, I have learned to better understand academic genres, and have learned a tremendous amount from scholars writing in those genres. Furthermore, I have come to believe that some of these critical teachings need to be expressed in these genres. However, I know that these genres are a turn-off to very many people. Crucially, I believe this is not only due to the challenges of needing to learn new academic languages, but due to the (in my opinion accurate) perception that, in general, academia remains very myopic and insular regarding what constitutes knowledge. As such, there is a rejection of engaging academic work on its own terms because such respectful engagement is not generally reciprocated for other ways of producing knowledge. Many scholars who have come from marginalized positions have managed to transform academic norms, insisting on the importance of previously delegitimized topics of study, methodologies, and even genres of writing. My dissertation seeks to contribute to this legacy by also insisting on the importance and legitimacy of multiple modalities of communication beyond writing *within academia*, not just as phenomena for academics to write about.

Viewing a video recording of a live performance is a completely different experience than attending in the flesh. However, to provide at least an approximation of this part of the dissertation, I have uploaded a video of the performance here: <http://decolonizingthewhitecolonizer.wordpress.com/>

Because of the fortuitousness of having been offered a job, my timeline for filing this dissertation was shortened. As a result, the performance is not taking place until after the dissertation has been filed. Thus, I cannot comment on the details of the creation process or its reception here; however, such commentary is included on the website.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid, 153.

⁵⁶⁹ Incorporating the arts is not only limited to the “humanities” and “social sciences.” I am particularly enamored by the annual “Dance Your Ph.D.” contest for people who have received doctorates in the “natural sciences.” While this is an example of performance “in addition to” rather than “as part of” the dissertation, it does provide an example of the ways in which this intervention can be applicable across fields. For more on this contest (and to view videos of past winners), see <http://gonzolabs.org/dance/>

INCONCLUSION: WHY WOULD THE WHITE COLONIZER WANT TO DECOLONIZE?

Some people wanna die, so they can be free. – Prince

While it may be clear that the white colonizer should and must decolonize, why assume that ze/he/she would want to, and would take any steps in that direction? I have been asked this question in many ways by many people, but most recently and insistently by Jocyl Sacramento. I am grateful to her for pushing me to articulate a response. There have been times when I have felt defensive when faced with this question, offended by the assumption that anyone would *want* to be a colonizer, a dominator, an oppressor. But, of course, the lack of substantial transformation of relations of domination and exploitation over the centuries would indicate that this is indeed the case; or that, at the very least, there is an attitude of indifference if not outright desire. This reveals an important prerequisite for the process of decolonizing the white colonizer: one must first recognize oneself as such. While there may be some who desire or are indifferent to an oppressor identity, I would posit that most people embrace such identities by (willfully) not recognizing them as such.

The ideological investment and labor that goes into enabling this misrecognition is immense. I argue that this immense investment in misrecognition is due to fear of the consequences of recognizing oneself as colonizer. For recognizing oneself as such is accompanied by a moral imperative, a demand to decolonize. And this demand is demanding, requiring substantial transformations of oneself and one's way of life – materially, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. Additionally, even committing to such fundamental transformations does not guarantee “redemption” because that is not an individual matter. I return to these points below, and discuss why, once one has recognized oneself as colonizer (and simultaneously as colonized by a colonial system) there is not only a desire to decolonize, but also an existential need to do so – death and life take on new meanings. But first I would like to reflect a bit more on how this recognition is avoided.

The white colonizer is invested in existing relations of domination. Of course, not all white people are equally positioned within existing hierarchies, but the equality of opportunity doctrine (discussed in Chapter Four) enables even the poor queer white woman to believe that it is possible to “succeed” within existing systems, and that failure to do so is one's own fault. In our current era of colorblind racism,⁵⁷⁰ where barriers to “opportunity” have purportedly been made illegal, this doctrine also infects people of color. However, white people are far more invested in not learning how colorblind racism functions, as this would entail a reckoning with how existing inequities came to be and continue to be recreated. Critiques which emphasize the absurdity of believing that a legal change which asserts “we're all equal now” makes it so do not go nearly far enough. Such critiques often use the metaphor of starting a new race when one runner is already five laps ahead, without providing the compensatory resources to bring all runners to the same starting point, i.e. “leveling the playing field.” The goal of “leveling the playing field,” however, at least in the way in which it is typically articulated, does not challenge the assumption that hierarchical outcomes are just.⁵⁷¹ To

⁵⁷⁰ Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in Contemporary America*.

⁵⁷¹ One could imagine a version of “leveling the playing field” which would result in determining which people are best suited for which kinds of tasks, but that the tasks themselves would not be hierarchically valued, nor would the people doing the various tasks, and that everyone would have the opportunity to contribute their various talents, skills, time,

dismantle colonial white supremacy requires the dismantling of hierarchical relations writ large, as they are all entangled and mutually reinforcing. In Chapter Two, I discussed the ways in which (white) investment in U.S. nationalism perpetuates colonial white supremacy both “domestically” and globally, and how (hetero)patriarchy naturalized hierarchy in the process of instituting colonization in the area that became the United States. In Chapter Four, I discussed the role of schooling in naturalizing and legitimizing hierarchy. Here I would like to offer a few more thoughts on the ways in which a capitalist economic system itself also naturalizes hierarchy.

It is remarkable that a system (capitalism) based around the creation of inequality and hierarchy *by design* has been embraced by so many, including many who do not benefit from it. I argue that this is partly because capitalism has been sold not merely as an economic system, but as a package deal, declared unseverable from democracy, equality, progress, freedom, civilization, and, frequently, Christianity. Rosa Luxemburg argued that “capitalism is the first mode of economy with the weapon of propaganda.”⁵⁷² Regardless of whether or not one agrees that capitalism is the *first* mode of economy to sell itself with propaganda, it certainly has been successful in this regard. Capitalism’s propaganda depends upon the construction of its binary opposite, not an other whose complex difference brings “a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic,”⁵⁷³ to quote Audre Lorde’s definition of difference, but difference which is constructed as, at best, inferior and, at worst, as evil. Because of the package deal propaganda, however, the so-called “defeat” of communism with the fall of the Berlin wall has not resulted in an absent other for capitalism, but in a shift in emphasis. In fact, the word “capitalism” itself was not mentioned in the speech Ronald Reagan gave at the Brandenburg Gate in which “victory” over communism was announced as he famously declared, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” Instead, the word “freedom” was substituted, with a decidedly neoliberal understanding of the term:

In the Communist world, we see failure, technological backwardness, declining standards of health, even want of the most basic kind--too little food. Even today, the Soviet Union still cannot feed itself. After these four decades, then, there stands before the entire world one great and inescapable conclusion: Freedom leads to prosperity. Freedom replaces the ancient hatreds among the nations with comity and peace. Freedom is the victor.⁵⁷⁴

In this speech, the “communist world” of “the East” is defined as a technically backward failure (“because it does such violence to the spirit”⁵⁷⁵), incapable of providing its citizens with enough food and suppressing “love and worship.”⁵⁷⁶ Oppositionally, the “free world” (i.e. capitalist world) of “the West” is defined as the site of “a technological revolution,” prosperous, peaceful, and loving. Even the sun is positioned in support of the (capitalist, Christian) West as its light – reflecting off of the “secular structure” of the television tower which war-damaged East Berlin “erected [prior to] rebuilding its churches” – “makes the sign of the cross” and proves that “symbols of love, symbols

and efforts, without being subjected to poverty and/or social death. This, unfortunately, is not the kind of equality of opportunity most advocates of the concept have in mind.

⁵⁷² Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 447.

⁵⁷³ Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 111.

⁵⁷⁴ Ronald Reagan, “Address from the Brandenburg Gate,” June 12, 1987. Accessed here: <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3415>.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ Reagan, “Address from the Brandenburg Gate.”

of worship, cannot be suppressed.”⁵⁷⁷ Freedom, i.e. The Christian West, i.e. Capitalism, is declared “the victor.”

As self-declared victor, however, and constantly in danger of being revealed for the poverty and lack of freedom for which it (this one (white capitalist) nation, under god, actually) stands, a new fear-inducing threat requiring loyalty to the protector-nation was needed. Terrorism came to occupy the space vacated by the so-called end of Communism. It is inconsequential that no one speaks of the “terrorist mode of production.” Because the package deal of capitalism contains so much more than economics, this need not be the primary point of comparison. Rather, the issue of “freedom” remains salient for this propaganda machine. Fear is fostered of “rogue states” that harbor and nourish violent Anti-Western Terrorists who threaten Civilization and Progress (including “The American Way of Life”). This emphasis predates George W. Bush’s Operation Enduring Freedom and Axis of Evil. In a 1985 meeting to celebrate the first “free trade area agreement” between the U.S. and Israel, Reagan was already speaking of “the evil scourge of terrorism” as “the cynical, remorseless enemy of peace [that] strikes most viciously whenever real progress seems possible.”⁵⁷⁸ This is a bipartisan project. Speaking to the U.N. in 1996, Bill Clinton declared us to be living in “an age of new threats: threats from terrorists, from rogue states that support them ... threats [that] will be more dangerous if they gain access to weapons of mass destruction.”⁵⁷⁹ He went on to detail how these threats can be conquered: “In the fact that democracies, opened markets and peace are taking hold around the world, we are moving in the right direction....Real zero tolerance [of terrorism] requires us to isolate states that refuse to play by the rules we have all accepted for civilized behavior.”⁵⁸⁰ While the command to tear down the Berlin Wall was accompanied by talk of (dis)armament,⁵⁸¹ talk of terrorism interfered with the hope of destroying weapons of mass destruction. War has become one of capitalism’s lifelines. Individual deaths and national debts increase while capitalism’s profits flood up. *War is Peace.*⁵⁸² (*Capitalism is Peace. Capitalism is War.*)

As discussed in Chapter Two, in this war the U.S. nation-state and capitalism are (white) allies, and barricades and bars are erected to keep out “the illegal alien” and “the (colored) criminal” who are constructed as threats, potential terrorists, and enemies (except when needed by capitalism and pulled in as unworthy, and thus cheap, labor). By equating the white capitalist U.S. nation with freedom, democracy, equality, progress, civilization, and godliness, fear is created that challenges to these structures will result in an un-free, undemocratic, unequal, undeveloped, ungodly world.

As Heidi Hartmann and Evelyn Nakano Glenn have pointed out, the persistence of hierarchy is achieved by creating “vested interests” in the hierarchical systems: “Those at the higher levels can

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Shimon Peres of Israel,” October 17, 1985, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/101785c.htm>.

⁵⁷⁹ Bill Clinton, “Address by President Bill Clinton to the UN General Assembly,” September 24, 1996, <http://www.state.gov/p/io/potusunga/207410.htm>.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁸¹ Reagan stated, “today we have within reach the possibility, not merely of limiting the growth of arms, but of eliminating, for the first time, an entire class of nuclear weapons from the face of the Earth. ... But we must remember a crucial fact: East and West do not mistrust each other because we are armed; we are armed because we mistrust each other. And our differences are not about weapons but about liberty.” Reagan, “Address from the Brandenburg Gate.”

⁵⁸² George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Signet Classic, 1960), 6.

“buy off” those at the lower levels by offering them power over those still lower.”⁵⁸³ Lower-class men achieve greater privileges through the labor of women and people of color. For white women, “to challenge the inequitable gender division of labor was too difficult and threatening, so white housewives pushed the dilemma onto other women [of color].”⁵⁸⁴ As explained in Chapter Four, the equality of opportunity doctrine plays a major part in this process of (misin)vested interests, leading to the false assumption that capitalism and equality are compatible. This logic has also been applied to the global scale, in which equal opportunity capitalism is portrayed as the solution to global poverty: if you follow the proven successful path of capitalism, and we provide some developmental aid as resources for “leveling the playing field,” then a fair race will begin from which all will benefit, even if some benefit more than others. The token mobility by poor people and people of color in the U.S. discussed by Jay MacLeod in Chapter Four is discussed at the global scale by Ramón Grosfoguel. Grosfoguel details the massive investment in some countries (in the forms of aid, flexible loan terms, favorable trade conditions that create access to metropolitan markets, technological transfers, etc.) to create strategic showcases to support capitalist developmental models. He points out that most of these prototypes’ success is short-lived, but that “they serve a crucial role in the production of ideological hegemony over Third World peoples in favor of developmentalist programs...the capitalist world-system gains credibility.”⁵⁸⁵

Those who reject capitalism and its equality of opportunity doctrine are framed as bigots who would prefer a system of nepotism, as communists who would prefer the massive curtailing of democracy and freedom, or as (potential) terrorists (or terrorist harboring nations) that want nothing more than to destroy civilization. These framings are racialized, nationalized, gendered, sexualized, and (often) Christianized. But here it is worth highlighting a key difference between some of these entangled hierarchies. Christianity, for example, is not inherently oppressive, but becomes so when it is asserted as orthodoxy and as superior to other belief systems. Similarly, male-ness and heterosexuality are not inherently oppressive but become so when asserted as superior to other gender and sexual expressions (i.e. heteropatriarchy). In all of these cases, it is the meaning that is made of these constructed categories that is at stake. By contrast, the constructs of whiteness, U.S.-ness, and capitalism are *inherently* oppressive. They were created in order to dominate and exploit. Domination and exploitation have not necessarily always been their only characteristics, but they have always been constitutive to them. As such, while male-ness, heterosexuality, and Christianity⁵⁸⁶ can be reconstructed in non-supremacist ways, this is not possible for whiteness, U.S.-ness, and capitalism. Decolonization necessitates their abolition.

So while a prerequisite for the white colonizer wanting to decolonize requires recognizing oneself as such, and recognizing that coloniality (which includes white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and overt colonialism, including the existence of the U.S. nation-state) must be abolished, this dissertation has emphasized repeatedly that this is not an individualist task. One cannot become free of these identities until the structures which create them have been dismantled. As such, I have

⁵⁸³ Heidi I. Hartmann, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union,” *Capital & Class* 3, no. 2 (1979): 101.

⁵⁸⁴ Glenn, “From Servitude to Service Work,” 71.

⁵⁸⁵ Ramón Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Rico in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 3.

⁵⁸⁶ I do not mean to imply that other religions are less prone to oppressiveness or exploitation than is Christianity. I am highlighting Christianity in this discussion because, in the context of the United States and global power relations, it is hegemonic, and some of these hegemonic expressions of Christianity explicitly promote the religion as singularly and absolutely superior, including a mandate to “save” unconverted souls.

argued that the white colonizer must recognize her-/zer-/himself as such (generally achieved through the gift of the mirrors indigenous people and people of color hold up to us), while understanding that these positions we occupy are inherently oppressive even as we are not completely reducible to them – there is space for movement, and we have agency to engage in processes of transformation. Focusing specifically on the potential of power-conscious hybridity (Chapter Three), disloyalty to the U.S. nation-state (Chapter Two), and adopting a philosophy and praxis of p/reparations (Chapter One), I provided a range of possibilities for such engagement; in Chapter Four I discussed a set of skills the white colonizer needs to develop to serve these efforts, and some pedagogical tools for fostering them. Upon recognition of oneself as colonizer, however, the primary *motivation* for continually recommitting to processes of decolonization is ultimately a spiritual one.

In his article, “Lessons from Suffering: How Social Justice Informs Spirituality,” john a. powell argues that spirituality and social justice are mutually constitutive. He distinguishes existential suffering (also referred to as ontological or spiritual suffering) from surplus suffering (also referred to as social or secular suffering). Existential suffering is inherent to life -- it is the result of the facts of loss, pain, and death. Surplus suffering, however, is unevenly distributed and is the result of systems of domination manifested in our structures and institutions. As such, spirituality must be concerned with institutional and structural change, not just with the transformation and/or solace of the individual. As has been pointed out throughout this dissertation, however, individuals and structures exist in mutually constitutive relationships. Recognizing this, powell emphasizes the importance of the nature of our spiritual formation in both its inner and outer manifestations. At its core, this all turns on the recognition of interconnectedness; what powell emphasizes is that we need structures that can foster our recognition of that interconnectedness and enable ethical ways of being as a result. This is not about altruism, but about relationship: “We must engage the world not to save it but to save ourselves—or perhaps more accurately to become ourselves.”⁵⁸⁷ Our very selves are dependent upon our relations with others, human and non-human. When these relations are defined by domination, we become oppressors and love becomes impossible:

the suffering that comes from separation from the other is profound and cannot be easily healed at the level of the individual. A self that is constituted through relationship is constantly in the process of being cocreated. The project is both personal and social...In addition, this process is mediated through language, culture, and structures...What is needed to constitute oneself is institutional and arranged. This means that to address our being, to heal our suffering, we must be willing to engage the institutional and structural arrangement that causes this breach.⁵⁸⁸

Personal and interpersonal healing *requires* structural transformation. And structural transformation—which entails nothing short of the dismantling of colonial relations—requires personal transformation. As Albert Memmi points out in his critique of the leftist “colonizer who refuses” colonization, it is absurd to believe that one’s self remaining intact is compatible with decolonization.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁷ powell, “Lessons from Suffering,” 111.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 114.

⁵⁸⁹ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, expanded edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991).

When we do not recognize our connectedness with others, when we see them as separate, we become more capable of treating them in oppressive and/or indifferent ways. This placement of certain people as outside of (perceived) connection (what Sylvia Wynter has described as the “propter nos”) results in what Orlando Patterson, in his discussion of slavery, has described as “social death.”⁵⁹⁰ We can currently also see the creation of social death for undocumented migrants and those criminalized and incarcerated. In the analysis this dissertation puts forth, however, the ultimate solution (even though it might be a provisional strategic one) is not more documentation and greater access to the spoils of a colonial white supremacist nation, but de-documentation and disinvestment from the U.S. nation-state. As Martin Luther King, Jr. commented to Harry Belafonte in a conversation they had shortly before King was assassinated,

I’ve come upon something that disturbs me greatly. We have fought hard and long for integration, as I believe we should have, and I know that we will win. But I’ve come to believe we’re integrating into a burning house...I’m afraid that even as we integrate, we are walking into a place that does not understand that this nation needs to be deeply concerned with the plight of the poor and disenfranchised.⁵⁹¹

I do not believe it is possible for “this nation” to come to that understanding or that concern. It is, however, possible for people within it to do so and, as a result, to collectively work towards the dismantling of “this nation” and the creation of alternative political, economic, social, and cultural structures. This work should be informed by all those who have maintained and/or developed liberatory alternatives to the capitalist heteropatriarchal white supremacist colonial structures of this nation, especially indigenous people and people of color. Moreover, “the poor and disenfranchised” for whom King argued we need to demonstrate concern are, as Powell emphasizes, “embodied interbeings, not...abstract beings to be pitied, but...aspects of ourselves, the other and the divine.”⁵⁹² Recognizing this calls us into meaningful relationships, but it does not mean adopting a simplistic power-blind attitude of “we are all one.” We must work from where we are at, and create/foster the conditions, relationships and structures which will actually allow our daily lives to reflect and manifest the truth of our oneness. (Oneness, here, does not imply sameness, but lack of separation and domination.)

That which is needed to propel us towards changing ourselves and existing social structures in ways that enable non-distorted relationships is love:

Love gives us the hope and the reality of reconnecting. It heals the sense of loss and separation that haunts the egoistic self. And for love to be realized, the ego is called beyond itself...We are pushed out of the prison of separation by the suffering of isolation. We are pulled out by the hope of love.⁵⁹³

While all are called to this project of loving transformation of suffering via the creation of alternative social structures which enable relations based on reciprocity rather than domination, Powell points out that “those who are indifferent to or benefit from social suffering are the cause of spiritual

⁵⁹⁰ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁵⁹¹ <http://www.scu.edu/ethics/architects-of-peace/Belafonte/essay.html>.

⁵⁹² Powell, “Lessons from Suffering,” 115.

⁵⁹³ Ibid, 121-122.

decay”⁵⁹⁴ and that “it is particularly troublesome when one is actively or passively the beneficiary of such suffering.”⁵⁹⁵ This, powell explains, renders one antispiritual, cutting oneself off from the divine, from others, and from one’s own humanity. He argues that this antispiritual behavior is driven by the ego’s fear of death and need for permanency. This need, in contrast to physical needs (e.g. for food and shelter) and emotional needs (e.g. for love and engagement), cannot be satisfied, “leaving us wanting, little more than hungry ghosts.”⁵⁹⁶ It is by relentlessly pursuing that which is impossible to achieve (the avoidance of spiritual suffering, e.g. pain and death) that surplus suffering is created.

So we must deal with the issue of death. Most significant for me on this topic have been Buddhist teachings and practice, in particular in the engaged Buddhism tradition, which emphasizes social action as well as personal and interpersonal healing.⁵⁹⁷ These teachings recognize our variously embodied selves while also emphasizing that there is no permanent self even though we are also never annihilated. Rather, we, like all beings (so-called “animate” as well as so-called “inanimate” ones), are in a constant state of transformation. Matter, energy/spirit, emotions, and mental formations manifest in different ways according to current circumstances, and change with them, as well. Furthermore, all beings are made up of other elements and the deeper one contemplates this, the more it becomes clear that (due to interconnectedness) all beings are made up of all other beings, past, present, and future. Thich Nhat Hanh’s book, no death, no fear, is very helpful on this topic. He writes,

Nothing has a separate self, and nothing exists by itself...all phenomena, including ourselves, are composites. We are made up of other parts. We are made of our mother and father, our grandmothers and grandfathers, our body, our feelings, our perceptions, our mental formations, the earth, the sun and innumerable non-self elements. All these parts depend on causes and conditions. We see that all that has existed, exists, or will exist is interconnected and interdependent. All that we see has only manifested because it is a part of something else, of other conditions that make it possible to manifest...to understand this intellectually is not enough. To really understand this is to be free from fear. It is to become enlightened. It is to live in inter-being.⁵⁹⁸

Becoming free from fear requires dedicated continual practice as the teachings which can enable this run counter to much of what we have learned, many of the ways in which we have been socialized, and most of the practices our institutions structure and promote. To transform our habits requires that we recognize them and practice developing alternatives – this is a life-long process.

Like powell, Nhat Han also argues that what we fear is death, and that this can lead to surplus suffering. However, Buddhism teaches that reality is not about existence and nonexistence, being and nonbeing. This does not mean that there are no historical realities. Rather, there is both a “historical dimension” and an “ultimate dimension.” To cultivate greater living in the latter, we must

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid, 109.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid, 122.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid, 114.

⁵⁹⁷ I have been influenced by and am grateful for the teachings as shared with me by Mushim Ikeda, Anushka Fernandopulle, Brother ChiSing, Larry Yang, Spring Washam, and Zenju Earthlyn Manuel.

⁵⁹⁸ Nhat Hanh, *no death, no fear*, 12–3.

contend with the former, not attempt to remove ourselves from it, which would be an (impossible) attempt at separation. powell speaks to this issue when he argues that the spiritual project “requires a love that is engaged in our situatedness with all its imperfections...We have not created much space to recognize our interbeing. To act as if we had would prevent us from pragmatically moving in that direction based on where we are...This is a call to become responsible for the institutional structures we inhabit and inhabit us. This is a call for self- and world-making and the bridge between them.”⁵⁹⁹ The conditions and components necessary for this self- and world-making already exist; the work is to *cultivate* those conditions and components that lead to the manifestation of greater life/love/spirituality and not those which lead to surplus suffering.

Understanding “no death” can be of great help for the project of reducing surplus suffering by reducing the ego’s existential fears. Nhat Han provides some helpful metaphors to deepen our understanding of the fact that “nothing is born and nothing dies:”⁶⁰⁰

The cloud does not come from nothing; there has been only a change in form...Sooner or later the cloud will change into rain or snow or ice...The cloud is not lost; it is transformed into rain, and the rain is transformed into grass and the grass into cows and then to milk and then into the ice cream you eat...There is no real death because there is always a continuation.⁶⁰¹

I have a photograph of myself when I was a boy of sixteen. Is it a photograph of me?...Is that boy still alive or has he died? He is not the same as I am and he is also not different...A person is made of body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness, and all of these have changed in me since that photograph was taken. The body of the boy in the photograph is not the same as my body, now that I am in my seventies. The feelings are different, and the perceptions are very different. It is just as if I am a completely different person from that boy, but if the boy in the photograph did not exist, then I would not exist either.⁶⁰²

The flame has always been in the box of matches and also in the air. If there were no oxygen, the flame could not express itself. If you lit a candle and then covered the flame with something, the flame would go out for lack of oxygen. We cannot say that the flame is inside the box of matches or that the flame is outside the box of matches. The flame is everywhere in space, time and consciousness. The flame is everywhere, waiting to manifest itself, and we are one of the conditions that will help the flame to manifest. However, if we blow on the flame we shall help the flame stop showing itself. Our breath, when we blow on the flame, is a condition that stops the manifestation of the flame in its flame form.⁶⁰³

Contemplating these examples, we can see that while there is no death – only transformation and manifestation – we have shared agency regarding the particular nature and timing of those manifestations and transformations. There are many ways in which a life might “end,” i.e. change

⁵⁹⁹ powell, “Lessons from Suffering,” 126–7.

⁶⁰⁰ Nhat Hanh, *no death, no fear*, 33.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid, 25-26.

⁶⁰² Ibid, 27

⁶⁰³ Ibid, 29.

form. There is no escaping that which we call “death,” but the manner in which it happens is not predetermined. Similarly, there is no escaping pain and suffering as part of life, but the frequency, manner and degree thereof are affected by the conditions we participate in enabling.

If we can let go of our attachments to our own bodies as they currently exist, recognizing that immortality cannot be sought in permanence but only in impermanence, that is, if we can cultivate fearlessness as a result of understanding “no death,” then what Huey Newton called “revolutionary suicide” can become a way of life.

Expanding Emile Durkheim’s thesis that suicide is primarily related to societal forces, rather than individual internal ones, Newton distinguished between “revolutionary suicide” and “reactionary suicide.” The latter, he explained, “is the reaction of a man [sic] who takes his [sic] own life in response to social conditions that overwhelm him [sic] and condemn him [sic] to helplessness.”⁶⁰⁴ Sometimes this results in taking one’s physical life, and sometimes it results in what Newton describes as “spiritual death,” ceasing to fight against oppression due to believing it is hopeless. While Newton is focused on “the Black community,” Reverend Lynice Pinkard discusses the role of this “helplessness” as manifested by those with privilege, and by white women, in particular:

White people expect assistance from People Of Color, and men expect assistance from women. Men will often reveal their own gross incompetence or weakness to women, just as white people often reveal incompetence and weakness to People Of Color...Most times this assistance is compelled through force or economic pressure, but privilege allows the oppressor to believe that this assistance is the only natural and proper behavior of the oppressed. Indeed, the tendency to assist can be maintained even without compulsion. How many times have women seen the nauseating weakness of men and helped out of compassion? How many times have People Of Color seen white people flopping helplessly about and assisted because they were simply tired by the sight of it? It’s difficult not to feel pulled by the crocodile’s tears. One might think that the common experience of being oppressed (while spoon-feeding the oppressor) would create a natural bond between white women and People Of Color...But political analysis of the white women’s movement has continued to show that white women are some of the most accomplished practitioners of helplessness. To be sure, this weakness has a price. It allows men to maintain the illusion that they are coddling women, when in fact men are oppressing and being propped up by them. However, it also allows white women to exert privilege over People Of Color.⁶⁰⁵

Assertions of helplessness lead to paralysis on the part of the white colonizer, rather than to participation in processes of decolonization and, when coupled with a cry for help (without, however, being willing to participate in the process of being helped), can drain the energy of people of color who respond to the cry. Please note that crying in and of itself is not indicative of helplessness or weakness as being discussed here. The problem is not found in tears which display compassion and/or vulnerability, including the recognition that one needs help and the request for it. After all, the notion that one could “go it alone” or be independent is itself a problematic illusion. The problem is not needing help, but helplessness, i.e. an unwillingness (which often masquerades as

⁶⁰⁴ Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009/1974), 2.

⁶⁰⁵ Pinkard, “Jane in the Blackboard Jungle,” 1.

an assumed incapacity) to be an active part of collective struggles against oppression, which includes dedication to personal and structural change.

Newton argues that as opposed to the helplessness which underlies reactionary suicide, revolutionary suicide is the result of a commitment to opposing oppressive and exploitative forces while remaining fully aware that to do so may bring about premature physical death. This risk is embraced as a result of seeing one's "death and life as one piece"⁶⁰⁶ rather than risking spiritual death as a result of surrendering to domination:

it is better to oppose the forces that would drive me to suicide than to endure them. Although I risk the likelihood of death, there is at least the possibility, if not the probability, of changing intolerable conditions...we are all—Black and white alike—ill in the same way, mortally ill. But before we die, how shall we live?...Revolutionary suicide does not mean that I and my comrades have a death wish; it means just the opposite. We have such a strong desire to live with hope and human dignity that existence without them is impossible...Considering how we [black people] must live, it is not hard to accept the concept of revolutionary suicide. In this we are different from white radicals. They are not faced with genocide.⁶⁰⁷

Newton points to the structurally imposed different positions occupied by black and white people in the U.S., and that these positions make the concept of revolutionary suicide more or less comprehensible and palatable. As such, for the white colonizer to want to decolonize, a few components must be in place. First of all, as stated above, we must recognize ourselves as colonizers. Then, following Aimé Césaire, we must "study how colonization works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him [sic] in the true sense of the word, to degrade him [sic], to awaken him [sic] to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism."⁶⁰⁸ As we study how colonization works, we learn, as Césaire illustrates, that in colonialism there is:

No human contact, only relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production...Colonization = thingification.⁶⁰⁹

All people, colonizer and colonized, are dehumanized and thingified under colonial conditions. In fact, we might more accurately describe everyone as colonized (hence the need for everyone to decolonize), albeit in different ways – some are colonized into the role of colonizer, some into the role of colonized. This is not, as explained in Chapter One, a passive process, but one in which we partake, albeit with different amounts of power with which to assert our agency.

Moreover, the understanding of interconnectedness teaches us that we are all, ultimately, each other, that our fates are inextricably tied up in one another. If we can cultivate this understanding, which includes cultivating a deeper empathy, then another's pain—even if it is never *fully* understood or experienced by me—is also my pain. If we can recognize and experience this, then the pursuit of a

⁶⁰⁶ Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide*, 6.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid, 3-4.

⁶⁰⁸ Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 35.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid, 42.

pain-free life (e.g. by exploiting others' labor and resources in an attempt to increase my comfort and sense of security) can be understood as not only an impossible endeavor but as counter-productive because, in the process, so much more pain is being produced. We are all a part of each other, and thus we all need all of each other to get free. As Solomon Burke and Blind Boys of Alabama sing, *Well, you better listen my sisters and brothers, cause if you do, you can hear there are voices still calling across the years. And they're all crying across the ocean, and they're crying across the land, and they will till we all come to understand: none of us are free if one of us are chained. And there are people still in darkness and they just can't see the light: if you don't say it's wrong then that says it's right. We've got to try to feel for each other, let our brothers know that we care. Got to get the message, send it out loud and clear: None of us are free if one of us is chained. Now I swear your salvation isn't too hard to find – none of us can find it on our own. We've got to join together in spirit, heart and mind, so that every soul who's suffering will know that we're not alone. None of us are free if one of us are chained. If you just look around you, you gonna see what I say. Cause the world is getting smaller each passing day. Now it's time to start making changes, and it's time for us all to realize that the truth is shining bright right before our eyes: None of us are free if one of us is chained.*⁶¹⁰

Decolonization for “the colonized” includes becoming disenchanted with the colonizer, and disinvesting from assimilationist projects. Revolutionary suicide, here, entails recognizing the colonizer's way of life as zombified – the walking dead who feed on others (and others' brains), creating more death in the process – and choosing life instead, recognizing that choosing life places one in opposition to deathly forces and thus may entail one's current physical manifestation passing on into something else sooner rather than later.

Decolonization for “the colonizer” entails a similar yet distinct process. We must become disenchanted with our lives as they currently exist; we must recognize the zombification of ourselves and become uncomfortable with the “comforts” thus enabled; we must recognize, in Pinkard's words, that “the opposite of rich is not poor, the opposite of rich is free.”⁶¹¹ Are we willing and prepared to choose freedom? The answer is not as easy as it appears. Pinkard points out that in the Bible, the only person who denies Jesus' healing is the rich man, who preferred bondage to freedom.⁶¹² Wealth, here, is seen as an affliction, and one for which healing is not only difficult but, when offered, is even rejected. As Pinkard points out, however, it is not impossible to heal from this affliction: many of the disciples left their more lucrative lives because compared to love and freedom, nothing else seemed nearly as important, including the fact that this choice places one in opposition to deathly forces and may thus lead to premature “death” at their hands.⁶¹³

This seems so simple and yet our addictions, our fear of (physical and emotional) pain and death, and our incredibly limited notions of who we consider our kin (our propter nos, our brothers and sisters), make it challenging. The elite parents described in Chapter Four experience themselves as acting out of love when they advocate for structures that will enable their children to get ahead in the world;⁶¹⁴ those of us who save for the future, for retirement, for health emergencies, to take care of our kids and parents, to share with our friends, etc. believe ourselves to be acting out of love and

⁶¹⁰ Solomon Burke, “None of Us Are Free,” Don't Give Up On Me. Fat Possum Records, 2002. The video for the song can be seen/heard here:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFkmRp_G2uo

⁶¹¹ Lynice Pinkard, “The Opposite of Rich,” Sermon, 2008.

⁶¹² Ibid.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ As Pinkard always asks when there is talk of getting a-head, “*whose head?*” (Personal conversations.)

responsibility for ourselves and those closest to us. I am not arguing that we need to become anorexic ascetics, and I am certainly not arguing that we should not be concerned about our loved ones' welfare. I am simply saying that it is worth interrogating our lives as well as our institutions for what we/they are consuming and producing, materially, spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, aesthetically, and relationally, and whether those "products" are serving life, love and freedom. There is no space of purity from which to act, but it is possible to improve. As we say in *Recovery from the Dominant Culture*, "we claim spiritual progress, not spiritual perfection."

Revolutionary suicide for the colonizer entails active participation in the killing of those aspects of ourselves and our institutions which need to die in the service of life, love and freedom. Active participation because, as Fanon has pointed out, no one can give you your freedom.⁶¹⁵ To *want* to do this requires falling in love. Falling in love with life, with freedom, with the divine that is all beings, including oneself. Falling in love requires intimacy, i.e. a radical openness to and deep engagement with that which exists, so that in the reality of constant transformation, we might participate in transforming and being transformed in liberatory decolonizing ways.

The other night, I dreamt that I was stuck inside a man-made canyon, pinned in place. Through the cracks, I could glimpse the world beyond, and struggled to break free into it. Although I could not see anyone else, I knew I was not alone. I felt guiding hands pushing and pulling me, and someone somehow offered me a pair of scissors, which I took. In what felt like an incredibly slow process, I began to pull at bits of my clothing, gathering enough to cut at them and create a bit more wiggle room. This continued, and I also began to cut at bits of my skin, piecing off the parts that were keeping me stuck. It was painful, but this was not a nightmare. Since childhood, I have often been plagued by nightmares in which I and/or others I care about are chased, paralyzed, tortured. These nightmares used to be so bad that I learned to dream lucidly in order to interfere when things got too awful, and even once I had managed to move the dream in a different direction, I would still wake up exhausted, heart beating fast, adrenaline-filled. The morning after the man-made canyon dream, however, I woke up feeling strong and peaceful. The dream had not "ended," in the sense of having resolved itself. I was still stuck, still cutting away, not knowing how it would turn out, but feeling supported and filled with faith. I awoke earlier than usual, and heard birds singing. And I pray(ed) for the love and community needed to continue cutting, even when the sense of strength dissipates, fear and anxiety (re)appear, and faith falters.

Thank you to those and that on whom and which I and they consciously and unconsciously draw.

⁶¹⁵ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

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