

Looking at examples of presenting practices in Berlin and Toronto, this essay sketches the difficulties that arise when embarking on a curatorial practice with a decolonial impulse. This text is a partner to “On Smuggling and Drawing. A Conversation in Blocks”, a dialogue between curator Juana Awad and artist Luisa Ungar, written in 2020 and appearing in the publication *Künste dekolonisieren. Ästhetische Praktiken des Lernens und Verlernens* (edited by Julian Bauer, Maja Figge, Lisa Grossmann, Wilma Lukatsch; Berlin, Transcript Verlag, forthcoming.) But while the dialogue focuses on Ungar’s creation process of the over one hundred original drawings intervening throughout the publication, this essay brings to the forefront Awad’s questions about, and experiences and observations with the mingling of the curatorial and the decolonial, from her perspective as a curator and cultural worker.

The term curator does not appear in its contemporary meaning until at least the second half of the twentieth century, relating principally to an exhibition history, which starts in the 1960s and that forms now the canon of curatorial discourse.¹ It is from the 1990s on that the curatorial, as field of knowledge production, begins to be theorized;² relationality, transculturality and transdisciplinarity being its defining features. But, what happens when one approaches the curatorial from the perspective of decoloniality³? Can a form of inquiry such as this one help us in shifting our own (Enlightenment derived), aesthetic epistemes beyond rhetorical exercises?⁴ How to engage in a curatorial mode of knowledge production that can unsettle its own hierarchies, and remain well away from well-intentioned but sometimes toxic solidarity? Recording some personal experiences and observations, this essay⁵ approaches the possibility of decolonizing the curatorial, while highlighting the ambivalences I, as practitioner, have encountered along the way, most recently in Berlin.

Taking as point of departure a conversation between curators and theorists Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck on the principal distinctions between curating and the curatorial,⁶ the curatorial can be defined as the interrelating of theoretical and practical constellations, which (prior, during and after public presentation) open new spaces for perception and inquiry. It is by necessity collaborative and relational, bringing together objects, spaces, persons and institutions, and aims at creating new types of knowledge, and new engagements through transdisciplinary enquiry. While curating emphasizes the “need to become public,”⁷ its potential laying on “the power to turn the aesthetic into something else,”⁸ the curatorial “allows us to stay with the questions until they point us in some direction we might not be able to predict”.⁹ In this mode of inquiry the exhibition is a principal tool – the international biennale of contemporary art embodies possibly its most characteristic representative. But it is not restricted to exhibition making or contemporary art; other disciplines and modes of constellating works, peoples, objects, institutions, discourses, which lead to public presentation, can all act as *modi operandi*. In this way, not only

research or aesthetic practice but also the institutional and the production apparatus become constitutive. Peoples and structures are what set directions and enable the public moment; without organization, the coming together does not take place. Relationality becomes central, and the less glamorous, mediating imperatives that enable the curatorial strongly participate in defining the knowledge it can produce. Curator and educator Paul O'Neill states that "[t]he significance of curating as differentiated from say art making, is that it acknowledges cultural production as a field of organization, (...) and not as a result of the supposed authorial primacy of the individual."¹⁰ Curator and theorist Simon Sheikh goes further to suggest that "curating should (...) be implemented in community building."¹¹

Irit Rogoff sketches the promise of the curatorial by proposing smuggling as its model. Smuggling operates in grey areas, where constant negotiation is necessary and socio-economic structures become murky. As a model for the curatorial, smuggling represents the grey area in which critique can be embodied, aiming for "possibilities for larger agendas,"¹² (...) and an "emphasis on the trajectory."¹³ Smuggling is a practice born out of the need to trespass and bypass controlled borders, and it involves resistance and resilience. In this way, the concept of smuggling can be elongated to suggest a method of quiet subversion: for me, as a practitioner, it acts as the image, concretizing a possible strategy with which to begin to redo from within.¹⁴

On Practice and Encounters. A First Report

The first time that the phrase 'decolonial aesthetics' appeared in my life was almost 20 years ago in the early 2000s by way of Arlan Londoño, a recently exiled Colombian intellectual, while I was taking on the titanic task of taking off the ground a festival of experimental film and video in Toronto, Canada, to where I had emigrated as a refugee with 19 years of age, at the end of the 1990s.

AluCine was an international festival focused on the artistic practice of artists from Latin America, and the Latin American diaspora in North America. As such Chicana, LGBTIQ2S, and generally very political works defined its program. The festival was meant to open up a space for the public presentation of artists' film and video that fell off the radar of more established artistic milieus: Latinxs¹⁵ also did artistic research. The need to exist in the visual imaginary of the geography we inhabited – in complex and multilayered forms, rather than in the agglomerated Latinx stereotype I learnt along the way in North America – drove my work. The goal was to create a space for visibility and for self-representation, where it could be possible for the Latinx artistic community to experiment intellectually and artistically while cooking together. While in Manizales, Colombia, in the early 2000s, the discussion on how to decolonize thought through the arts was taking place,¹⁶ in Toronto, Canada, the issue for us (two committed and badly paid artists plus two committed but unpaid artists) was rooted on identity politics: on extracting from the underground a critical mass of artists joined by cultural, ethnic and/or historical-geographical identity markers and making the Latinx-Canadian community visible. That entailed the creation of structures, which should survive long term.

We were claiming the right to exist of arts organizations of minority artists; the right to be read as pertaining to the categories of excellence and innovation on which funding bodies used to base their decisions when granting support; the right to appear in the public imagination as multilayered communities and individuals. And we did this while researching for, organizing, alas curating, two international festivals per year, where we presented hundreds of artists and their works; and advocating for and raising the financing necessary to remunerate the work of those, who would join the endeavour. We wanted, made and demanded a heterogeneous cultural landscape.

I remember thinking after my conversation with Londoño that we could not take on decolonizing anything if we did not first exist.

By 2006 the funding of AluCine and its structure were secured, other Latinx arts organizations were presenting actively, and I migrated again, this time to England. Shortly ten years after that conversation, in 2013, Arlan Londoño and Julieta Maria's platform e-fagia conceptualized and

presented the *Symposium on Decolonial Aesthetics from the Americas* in Toronto.¹⁷ By then, I was engaging on the next titanic endeavour in Berlin.

On Urgency and Enduring Coloniality

Speaking from her position in Latin America, critical theorist Zulma Palermo describes the root of Eurocentric rationality as a “problem of *difference and distance* between cultures in conflict, as value systems established by the culture of domination, and then naturalized – owned – by the ones fallen under control. Difference installs the criteria of superiority[//]inferiority between cultures; distance marks a double span: on the one hand, physical: distance to the center of power; on the other, temporal: progress/backwardness that denies contemporaneity to the different; and both constitute the relationship between civilization and culture, as well as culture and nature.”¹⁸ This rationality, which up until today underlies systems of cultural value at all levels of society in formerly colonized areas as well as in former colonial centres of power is a deeply violent one: it is capable of, and indeed sometimes it necessitates, dehumanizing human beings because of their perceived difference and distance to the one uttering.¹⁹ It is a violence embedded in language and other objects of signification, learnt through education systems, which sometimes appears coarse and cruel, but that can very well be inscribed into apparently ‘neutral’ forms or ‘friendly’ endeavors. It is a violence based on a twofold logic of annihilation: material and epistemic, that have been carried out legally²⁰ or with the tacit approval of government and societies at large.²¹ The struggles for shedding the remnants of colonial violence are not abstract, nor are they in the past. These are struggles that go hand in hand with activist, community and political practice, as they address structural matters of absolute necessity; they require a common effort to question underlying assumptions and to be willing to shift our paradigms, in order to undo a self-proliferating value system that deprives certain peoples of their humanity, and certain forms of their worth.

On the Conundrum of Decolonizing the Curatorial

Within the context of a curatorial discourse and practice with a wide international reach, in which cross-cultural cooperation is almost normative, and critical artistic and intellectual positions expected, it could then be asked: how to dispose of the hierarchy that stipulates the ‘different’, the ‘distant’, as inferior, relinquishing value stratifications, and replacing it with a non-dualist structuring system? Is it enough to find exquisitely executed works, question the singularity of the curator or history of an institution, or to present politically engaged positions? Where to go beyond presenting artists of diverse backgrounds, regions, histories, genders, languages, sexual orientations and various other identity markers?

With all my commitment to diversity in arts and culture, I fear that while trying to expand the body of the gallery, the theatre, the concert hall or the museum, more often than not, certain power relations and capitalist conditions are reinforced, rather than dismantled. It seems to me that, now and again, new ‘diverse’ positions expand the cannon and enrich the cultural landscape as we know it, but fundamental aesthetic categories and value systems are not shaken. As sociologists Schultheis, Single, Köfeler and Mazzurana point out in *Art Unlimited?: Dynamics and Paradoxes of a Globalizing Art World*, it is necessary to ask whether “the existent intercultural and transnational diversity of artists and works of art does in fact reveal an all-round permeability of the former boundaries (...) [or if] the continued existence of powerful monopoly positions of a few western art institutions and art centers in the legitimate definition of art must be assumed.”²²

The notion of a single enduring, normative and legitimate definition of art is not only supported by the conclusions of such a statistical-sociological study, which somewhat unsettles the ‘global’ validity of the

transcultural curatorial framework. This notion comes to the forefront when looking at the curatorial with a historicist eye. In his “Notes on Exhibition History in Curatorial Discourse” art historian Felix Vogel touches upon the standardization and homogenization of exhibition formats occurring within the contemporary canon of the curatorial to conclude that “[w]hen conventions are constructed by an exhibition history that considers itself transcultural, these conventions in turn are defining of and have a normative effect on this supposedly global form of exhibition making.”²³ We need to consider the possibility that with the presentation of diverse positions in transnational settings, the art world might not be opening up to other aesthetics and new paradigms, and that these positions rather adjust to and make use of expected (and learnt) perception standards to enter a homogenizing ‘transcultural’ art-world. The issue to negotiate is not only whose artworks and what artistic positions are being shown and/or sold – the issue of re/presentation – but more so a question of the epistemological basis defining modes of engagement with and presentation of positions, and the field in general. Although the curatorial as such is only beginning to be theorized, and curating, as we recognize it today, appears as a recent practice, its “innovations are only recognized as such when situated in and delimited by a larger tradition beginning at the latest in the 18th century.”²⁴ Alas, with the rise of the discipline of aesthetics and the second wave of European expansionism.

For all its lofty intentions, the curatorial is tightly linked to a specific European philosophical aesthetic and to a specific western hegemonic art history. Regardless of the claims to transculturality of the curatorial, the hierarchies embedded in the epistemic structure of aesthetics remain. Its very mechanism cannot but self-proliferate: curating and the curatorial mark the entrances and exits of artists and artworks into its realms, necessarily embroidering them in art-historical theoretizations to justify their inclusion, more so, if they are to gain relevance and value.

It is the curator, more than any other figure, who defines and legitimizes what can be considered as art: curators position practices as valuable (or by omission not-valuable) within the artworld through selection for exhibition; with the investment of its resources in their presentations, institutions underscore the distinction between what qualifies as art and what does not; the theoretization of artistic practices positions them within hierarchies of knowledge, etc. Without needing to meander through other art philosophies, western history of aesthetics delivers a cue as to the capacity for meaning and value creation that curators (and with them the curatorial) have. Philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto describes the “difference between art and non-art as (...) philosophical” rather than factual, “for there is no particular way in which art has to look.”²⁵ The curator, thus, needs to rely on their particular knowledge to *create* this difference. This marks a central conundrum in the mingling of the curatorial and the decolonial: a decolonial impetus in a curatorial practice necessarily exists in a double-bind as it puts into question the definitions of the discipline, which legitimate its existence.

On Practice and Encounters. A Second Report

In 2013 I started co-directing the Karneval der Kulturen in Berlin, under the umbrella of the Werkstatt der Kulturen directed by Philippa Ebéné. The Karneval der Kulturen and the Werkstatt der Kulturen under these direction followed strong mandates not only to present diverse arts and artists, but more so to refocus the debate within the German cultural landscape, pointing to structural barriers and discriminating assumptions that prevent(ed) these artists and their works to be perceived as pertaining to the aesthetic realm rather than to a socio-cultural sphere.

²⁶

It was not an easy task. When the Werkstatt der Kulturen was established, it was conceived as a community space where “groups of foreigners could celebrate their festivities.”²⁷ As such, it was placed under the mandate of the Berlin’s Senate Department for Integration, Labor and Social Affairs. With the beginning of her term as artistic and managing director in 2008, Ebéné took to the task of constructing a center of expertise in

transculturality²⁸ at both program and institutional levels, engaging with culture politically and with politics culturally.²⁹ Since 2013, Vassiliki Gortsas and myself, then co-directors of the Karneval der Kulturen – at the time the best known festival by the Werkstatt der Kulturen – took to reworking the event conceptually while maintaining its celebratory ethos, and dealing with conflicting perspectives on how to ensure the safety of 1.5 million people taking over the streets of Berlin during its four days.

The aims were monumental: to undo the image of otherness and claim belonging in the national cultural landscape; to celebrate ‘difference’, shifting the meaning of the term from a subalternizing ‘othering’ to an acknowledgement of and revelling in heterogeneity; to insist on the contemporaneity and the art status of practices perceived by the majority German society as foreign, folkloric traditions; to highlight the necessarily transcultural artistic forms stemming from centuries of colonial and migration histories; to advocate for practices that were art without being for art’s sake; the list can go on.

At the root of it all was the working against an entrenched system of hierarchization, which Walter Mignolo, describes as arising hand in hand with the advent of the field of aesthetics in 18th century European thought. Mignolo states: “(...) from this on, and it can be detected clearly in Kant’s Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime (1776, section IV), the more that European thought turns to the south and the east, and arrives to Asia, Africa and America, the less it seems to be – for this mode of thinking – the capacity of the non-european populations to feel the beautiful and the sublime (...).”³⁰ Mignolo continues to analyze the interplay between the rise of secular rationality and an aesthetics that necessitates such a devaluation of the sensorial experience of other civilizations, pinpointing that “[so] appears the criteria that a “canvas”³¹ is art, but that a ceramic object is “craft” (...) So is it explained that (...) codices of the Aztec civilization are on display in a Museum of Natural History in Chicago.”³² Choosing to present a carnival, in which most of the participants in its parade and concerts were artists from minority communities, who found in it the space to perform to an audience otherwise unthinkable in other settings, was a way to work against that entrenched system of hierarchization. In the Karneval der Kulturen in Berlin groups presenting and representing a plethora of non-western performance and musical forms, as well as groups taking over the streets to make noise for a young, urban, post-migrant, transcultural city took part. Usually with a minimum of resources, they brought their expertise to the stage/street to build community. However, regardless of the level of artistry, the non-western, traditionalist touch usually stroke a bad note with a lot of members of the city’s contemporary art scene and the wider academic sphere, who more often than not, tried to distance themselves from such a setting. The somewhat incommensurable gap between art and non-art could not have been clearer.

The shifting of the narrative stirred from 2008 to 2018 by the Werkstatt der Kulturen in Berlin was radical, not primarily because it embodied a cultural political change toward more representatively diverse state funded arts organizations, but more so, because it went directly to the heart of the very definition of what was supposed to be art and what was not.

However the clash of notions did not play out at a conceptual level. Instead, the conflict was displaced into the administrative and the managerial: 2014 saw the dispute between the Werkstatt der Kulturen and the Berlin Senate heightened, after requests for funding for a new safety concept for the Karneval der Kulturen went unanswered, putting the finger on the city’s paradoxical relationship with the event.³³

After two years of swimming against the stream, by placing not openness and colourfulness at the centre of my work³⁴ but rather thematizing the complicated relationship between cultural difference and cultural policy in Germany³⁵ I left the organization.

In 2015, in light of the possibility of the Werkstatt der Kulturen not producing the festival because of insufficient safety assurances for its audiences, the city removed it from its presenter and gave it to my predecessor to organize under the umbrella of Kulturprojekte Berlin, the city’s cultural production body. Philippa Ebéné continued focusing on presenting other festivals, arts and music series, (co)produced by the

house.

The year 2018 saw a change most significant in the dismantling of a stratification that kept non-european-stemming artistic practices outside of the category of aesthetics in the legal-political framework: the budget allocation for the Werkstatt der Kulturen was changed from the Senate Department for Integration, Labor and Social Affairs to the Senate Department for Culture and Europe.³⁶

Paradoxically, the new funding section decided to dismantle the institution, announcing a new organization to develop its legacy in 2020³⁷ under the premise of the need to leave behind the socio-cultural to enter the arts and culture sphere: a most exemplary case of dissonance between discourse and practice.

On Practice and Discourse in Berlin

In the last few years several events discussing the legacy of the colonial and the potential of the decolonial have taken place at key state cultural institutions in Berlin, including for example at the Akademie der Künste³⁸ or the Haus der Kulturen der Welt.³⁹ Even though it tingles with a bit of novelty, this recent discussion has fitted well into a critical examination of German colonial repercussions, which dates back decades. Groups such as in Hamburg 1967/68 or in Bremen 1979 criticized in particular the “ignorance of the western world about fundamental questions of the perception of the self and of the other, in which a structural racism has been inscribed.”⁴⁰

This critique has been advanced in Germany in the last decade principally by independent artists and cultural workers of colour. Three examples come to mind: firstly, the debate on black-facing in state theatre,⁴¹ which beyond having shaken national theatrical conventions, revealed a lack of understanding of structural racism as inscribed in representation, and saw the international press report the plights of minority communities in a much more positive tone than the national press. Secondly, the children’s book ‘censoring’ controversy,⁴² which revealed the complications when negotiating between structural racism, arts autonomy and free speech. Thirdly, the question of how audience development should operate,⁴³ in which once again, minorities were talked about but only tangentially invited to talk, regardless of the fact that what was referred to as audience development contained, in large part, the need to encourage minority populations to become audiences of national institutions.

In cultural state institutions, structural racism and the questioning of a homogeneous national identity have only slowly begun to appear in some programming, primarily as thematic foci for temporary exhibitions or discourse programming.⁴⁴ How these presentations have led to reassessing or reformulating the institutions themselves is a matter for debate, although there seems to be a big divide between discourse and practice. Transformative is the case of the Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin starting with the 2013/14 season under the artistic direction of Shermin Langhoff and Jens Hillje, specifically because this theatre took as its mission to “represent a new idea of what German identity is, or is going to be”⁴⁵ with the image of the “post-migrant”⁴⁶ and the analysis of race, class and gender lines of exclusion traversing through its content and organization.⁴⁷

The term ‘decolonial’ seems to have gained momentum in the city in the last couple of years, not only with exhibitions and programmes using the term on their titles, but also with new cultural and presentation initiatives using the term in their names and slogans. It is thus that for example in January 2020 an alliance of civil society actors, who have been working “for years for a critical examination of the history and present of colonialism and racism (...)”⁴⁸ is founded under the name Decolonize Berlin⁴⁹ or that the project Dekoloniale Memory Culture in the City was founded in January 2020 “as cultural project to critically deal with the history of colonialism and its consequences”⁵⁰ being “significantly upheld by stakeholders who for years have been committed to achieving a critical appraisal of colonialism by the city of Berlin”⁵¹ ; or that the follow up institution to the Werkstatt der Kulturen, Oyoun

KulturNeuDenken, opening its doors in January 2020, presents itself with the slogan “#decolonial #queer*feministisch #migrantisch.”⁵²

Most of these instances have for years been engaged in activist, cultural and presenting practices investigating and denouncing discrimination and structural racism in Berlin and Germany, and have been visible in the past under other headlines, including for example multiculturalism⁵³ or migration.⁵⁴ But the term ‘decolonial’ has come to describe most of these critical stances. Moreover, as the use of the slogan “#decolonial #queer*feministisch #migrantisch” suggests, the term also speaks to a younger generation of artists and cultural actors, who have not been part, and might be unaware, of the years of anti-racist mobilization by older German activists.

Although this encapsulation of cultural actors might suggest the term ‘decolonial’ as a new branding mechanism, or possibly a fashion, I believe that the ubiquitousness of the term points in another direction; I speculate that the term ‘decolonial’ imbues these initiatives with a certain philosophical aura, which removes them from the grass-roots-feel that anti-racist activism has, bringing them in line with academic discourses, more readily acceptable with a public that visits traditional institutional structures. In this way, the term makes more palatable the challenges that these initiatives might pose to an artistic intelligentsia, while using its own vocabulary – positioning cultural workers of colour, who challenge the status quo within acceptable limits. At the same time, the recurrent use of the term ‘decolonial’ in exhibitions and programs by national state institutions has brought these institutions in line with popular concerns and a growing public interest in debates on diversity and representation, without the need for a major institutional restructuring, and without losing the claim to exclusivity so defining of the artworld.

Such phenomena bear the question: is epistemological violence reinforced when the decolonial functions as rhetorical tool with the prestige of intellectuality? Sociologist and historian Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui observes that “the postcolonial is a desire, the anti-colonial a struggle, and the decolonial a fashionable unpleasant neologism.”⁵⁵ Such an assessment jumps to mind when pondering this question; not because the “demolition”⁵⁶ of internal colonialism (by all) is not to be sought, but rather, because the current ubiquitous use of the term ‘decolonial’ (at least in current practice in Berlin) appears, from institutional side, usually far removed from its application – by that I mean the revision and rearrangement of colonial structures, which are based on and proliferate discriminatory regimes, as well as the consideration of aesthetic and community-building practices that challenge the high vs. popular culture divide.

This is a conundrum for cultural workers in Berlin who need to cope with the dissonance of the paradoxical undertaking: on the one hand, academic, art and cultural institutions rest on the very philosophies put to the test in decolonial positions, and on the other, they offer the very few spaces and financial structures for these positions and endeavours to resound. For cultural workers of colour the situation is even more dissonant, when we smuggle ourselves into institutions in which we need to open spaces, while a very slow practice catches up with a rapidly disseminating discourse.

How not to lose the impulse, and keep on forging a practice self-critical enough as to withstand its own failings? When asked about undoing internal colonialism Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui proposes that “we need to deepen and radicalize difference: *in, with, and against* the subaltern.”⁵⁷ Underlining and reveling in difference is exactly the opposite as conferring dissimilar value. The ‘different’ is not rationalized in hierarchical terms – superior vs. inferior; as sociologist Aníbal Quijano points out “historical-cultural heterogeneity implies the co-presence and the articulation of diverse historical “logics.”⁵⁸ However, the task of engaging in heterogeneity, when translated into artistic and cultural presenting, might immediately put one out of work; value is not attributed singularly. Redistributing status is a communal, time-bound act, a process that continues long after (what was qualified as) (non)art has appeared in public. It takes more than a group of cultural workers to convince the public sphere that forms

with which they might not be familiar, or that fall outside established western art historical canons, can be art – rather than, for example, craft or popular celebration. Rivera Cusicanqui continues, “no one can decolonize on their own (*solito*), because as Jim Morrison and also Foucault said, we carry the masters inside because of cowardice and laziness.”⁵⁹ However, the issue, at least locally in Berlin, might not only be a matter of constituting a critical mass of practitioners of decolonization in the arts struggling through the maze of contradictions, rather, the key might rest on the durational: I hold the hope that we might be able to maintain a decolonial impetus, if resting on a yet to be written⁶⁰ comprehensive history of the contributions that local actors in anti-racist, diasporic and decolonial movements have rendered to our current understanding of and practices in arts and the cultural sphere in the city. Which leads me to the next questions: what to do in the meantime, if not begin to gather and compose such a history? And how to withstand the dissonance, and engage in opening spaces for heterogeneous practices without falling off the wagon of funding structures, media outlets, and alas, colleagues? If decolonization is, as proposed by Rivera Cusicanqui, a declassificatory movement, “one that even allows us to understand “whitening processes as survival strategies”⁶¹, then along the same lines it could be argued that using well tested exhibition and presentation strategies, smuggling ourselves into institutions and changing codes as needed, might secure the continuity of cultural actors engaged in decolonization, even when not able to enact the changes sought immediately. There is no black or white recipe. We need to test strategies for longevity by trial and error, and build on the steps that have come before us. In time, with a diachronic critical mass of actors, a reshuffling of paradigms might begin to emerge.

Coda

While this essay sketches the difficulties that arise when embarking on a curatorial practice with a decolonial impulse – including for example having to deal with a high degree of contradiction when conducting decolonial curatorial endeavors in any institutional alignment, or having to decide whether to incorporate code-switching into expected presentation modes and discourses, while surreptitiously smuggling difference – it actually raises more questions than it is able to or it aims to answer. Can a form of inquiry such as the curatorial help us in shifting our own epistemes beyond rhetorical exercises? Perhaps, perhaps not; the issue here is if we can sustain ourselves, our impetuses and actions, long enough to survive within the ambivalences of what I consider the curatorial’s double-bind⁶² to be able to enact and perceive a shift. And can we handle the dissonance we experience as practitioners while constructing alternatives? For now it might be a start to engage in a curatorial mode of knowledge production that aims at unsettling its own hierarchies, even if from the sidelines, even if constantly negotiating code and longevity. In this way, arts and culture practitioners of color are called on to develop strategies with which to rest on these ambivalences while remaining congruous; to enable multiplicity, getting rid of dualisms and stratifications – not looking to replace categories or reverse the hierarchies; and to smuggle the unexpected into institutional processes, when probably inserting ourselves into the back-office machineries of art and knowledge institutions, which is more often than not, already a political gesture.

- 1 See Vogel, Felix. "Notes on Exhibition History in Curatorial Discourse" in *On Curating* Issue 21, (New) Institution(alism), https://www.on-curating.org/issue-21-reader/notes-on-exhibition-history-in-curatorial-discourse.html#.X_QxSC0ZPQQ, (accessed 18.12.2020).
- 2 O'Neill, Paul. *The curatorial Turn* in Rugg, Judith; Sedgwick, Michèle (eds.) *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*. Bristol/Chicago: Intellect Books, 2007. p. 14.
- 3 Walter Mignolo delineates the difference between decolonial aesthetics and decoloniality or decolonization of aesthetics, which I follow in this text. Mignolo writes: „(...) 'decoloniality or decolonization of aesthetics' means that, far from being a natural process (like rain or thunder), aesthetics emerged as a discipline (that is, as a form of control and formation of subjectivities) with the European bourgeoisie, influencing the ideology of imperial/global designs and the projects of regulation of subjectivities on the planet." Mignolo, Walter. Preface in *Arte y estética en la encrucijada descolonial*, edited by Zulma Palermo, Buenos Aires 2009, p. 13, translation Juana Awad.
- 4 I include myself in the question because, as an urban Latin American myself, it would be at its best naïve to pretend that my thinking is not configured by an European derived epistemic structure. Persons growing up and educated in urban Latin America are the heirs of 500 years of colonization and an independence movement, which saw half of the South American northern territories turn into republics in the early 19th century with inspiration from the French Revolution. Ultimately, I aim at decolonizing my own thinking as much as to engage in a collective decolonization of arts and culture.
- 5 Arising from the same series of conversation which spun the dialogue "On Smuggling and Drawing. A Conversation in Blocks" by Juana Awad and Luisa Ungar in *Künste dekolonisieren. Ästhetische Praktiken des Lernens und Verlernens*, (edited by Julian Bauer, Maja Figge, Lisa Grossmann, Wilma Lukatsch, Berlin, Transcript Verlag, forthcoming) this essay overlaps and shares various references with the dialogue at some instances.
- 6 Von Bismarck, Beatrice; Schaffaff, Jörn; Weski, Thomas (eds.). *Curating / Curatorial – A Conversation between Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck*. Cultures of the Curatorial. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012.
- 7 Von Bismarck, Beatrice in *Curating / Curatorial – A Conversation between Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck*, in Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schaffaff, Thomas Weski (eds.), *Cultures of the Curatorial*. Sternberg Press, 2012, Berlin, p. 24.
- 8 Sheikh, Simon. Interview with Gerd Elise Mørland and Heidi Bale Amundsen, *The Politics of the Small Act*, *On Curating* Issue 04/10, *The Political Potential of Curatorial Practice*. https://www.oncurating.org/files/oc/dateiverwaltung/old%20Issues/ONCURATING_Issue4.pdf, p. 4, (accessed 20.04.2020).
- 9 Rogoff, Irit. „Schmuggeln“ – ein kuratorisches Modell, in Vanessa Joan Müller und Nicolaus Schaffhausen (eds.), *Under Construction, Perspektiven institutionellen Handelns*, 2006. p. 3.
- 10 O'Neill, Paul. Interview with Gerd Elise Mørland and Heidi Bale Amundsen, *The Politics of the Small Act*. *On Curating* Issue 04/10. *The Political Potential of Curatorial Practice*. www.oncurating.org/files/oc/dateiverwaltung/old%20Issues/ONCURATING_Issue4.pdf, p. 8, (accessed 15.04.2020).
- 11 Sheikh, Simon. Interview with Gerd Elise Mørland and Heidi Bale Amundsen, *The Politics of the Small Act*. *On Curating* Issue 04/10. *The Political Potential of Curatorial Practice*. www.oncurating.org/files/oc/dateiverwaltung/old%20Issues/ONCURATING_Issue4.pdf, p. 4, (accessed 15.04.2020).
- 12 Rogoff, Irit in *Curating / Curatorial – A Conversation between Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck*, in Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schaffaff, Thomas Weski (eds.), *Cultures of the Curatorial*, Sternberg Press, 2012, Berlin, p. 22.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Or rather within/without, resting on Trinh T. Minh-ha's notion of the insider/outsider. See Trinh T., Minh-ha, "Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and

- Difference”, <https://culturalstudies.ucsc.edu/inscriptions/volume-34/trinh-t-minh-ha/>, (accessed 09.08.2020).
- 15 Latinx (plural Latinxs) is as a gender-neutral word to refer to persons of Latin American origins. The letter ‘x’ replaces the feminine denotative ‘a’ (Latina) or masculine denotative ‘o’ Latino. In 2003 we were using the word Latin@. Latinx corresponds to a more recent development that also moves away from the gender binary a/o also visually recalled with @.
- 16 Arlan Londoño in personal conversation with Juana Awad September 2004.
- 17 https://www.e-fagia.org/news/decolonial_symposium2013.html, (accessed on 22.05.20).
- 18 Palermo, Zulma. *Arte y estética en la encrucijada descolonial*, Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Signo, 2009. p. 16.
- 19 As a recent example, Brazilian news outlet Noticias UOL quotes the current president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, during the announcement of his vice president as head of the Amazon Council as stating: “indians are evolving, becoming more and more human, like us.” <https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2020/01/23/indio-ta-evoluindo-cada-vez-mais-e-ser-humano-igual-a-nos-diz-bolsonaro.htm>, 23.01.2020, translation Juana Awad, (accessed on 04.05.2020).
- 20 Being a naturalized Canadian, I cannot ignore the example of the Indian Residential Schools in Canada as a most significant and recent representative of a legal system based on this twofold logic of annihilation. Material annihilation included the death of over 4,200 Indigenous children, while under school supervision and after being forcibly removed from their families, between 1831 and 1996. Moreover, with guidelines such as prohibiting (and severely punishing) the speaking of native languages and practice of traditions, the system aimed at securing that these knowledge repositories were not transmitted to future generations, ensuring a slow epistemic decimation: “Residential schools were established with the assumption that aboriginal culture was unable to adapt to a rapidly modernizing society. It was believed that native children could be successful if they assimilated into mainstream Canadian society by adopting Christianity and speaking English or French.” in *A History of Residential Schools in Canada*, CBC News, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/a-history-of-residential-schools-in-canada-1.702280>, 16.05.08, (accessed on 05.05.2020).
- 21 To which numerous press releases by the Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (ONIC) noting the serial assassination of indigenous and community leaders can attest, for example. See Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia, <https://www.onic.org.co>, (accessed on 18.05.20).
- 22 Schultheis, Franz; Single, Erwin; Köfeler, Raphaela; Mazzurana, Thomas. *Art Unlimited?: Dynamics and Paradoxes of a Globalizing Art World*, Translation James Fearn. Bielefeld: Transcript. 2016. p. 18.
- 23 Vogel, Felix. Notes on Exhibition History in Curatorial Discourse in *On Curating* Issue 21, (New) Institution(alism). https://www.on-curating.org/issue-21-reader/notes-on-exhibition-history-in-curatorial-discourse.html#.X_QxSC0ZPQQ, (accessed on 18.12.2020).
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Danto, Arthur. *Beyond the Brillo Box. The Visual Arts in Post-historical Perspective*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. p. 7.
- 26 For a description of the mandate of Werkstatt der Kulturen see http://www.werkstatt-der-kulturen.de/en/art_culture_advocacy/, (accessed on 13.05.2020).
- 27 Ebéné, Philippa in „Wir brauchen für Vielfalt eine Quote“ Interview by Alke Wierth 20.10.2008 <https://taz.de/Montags-Interview-mit-Philippa-Ebene/!5174132/>, (accessed on 20.05.2020), translation Juana Awad.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.

- 30 Mignolo, Walter. Preface in *Arte y estética en la encrucijada descolonial*. (Palermo, Zulma ed.) Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Signo, 2009, p. 10, translation Juana Awad.
- 31 Translation note: in the original Spanish text the word used is “tela”, which can be translated into English as fabric, textile or (painted) canvas. This gesture underlines the correlation between both objects –painted ceramic and painted fabric– further problematizing the differentiation between art and craft.
- 32 Mignolo, Walter. Preface in *Arte y estética en la encrucijada descolonial*. (Palermo, Zulma ed.) Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Signo, 2009, p. 11, translation Juana Awad.
- 33 Although the Karneval der Kulturen was at its best a fringe event in Berlin in terms of its significance within the art world, it was important for the economy of the city, which saw a high revenue in return for little investment: as reported by the Berliner Morgenpost on 21.05.2013, “according to figures, (...) from the City Councillor for Culture Monika Hermann (B90/ Die Grünen) (...), the Carnival of Cultures has accounted for 53,2 million euros of Berlin’s gross domestic product in the last five years. That means more than 10 million euros every year.” Pressespiegel Karneval der Kulturen 2013, p. 193, translation Juana Awad.
- 34 The mediatic representation of the Karneval der Kulturen usually describes the event and the city during the event as “weltoffen” (open to the world) and colourful. See, for example, the city’s description in <https://www.berlin.de/events/2092491-2229501-kerneval-der-kulturen.html>, (accessed on 28.05.2020).
- 35 These topics were not only put into practice and discussed internally, but also prepared for open discussion during the international symposium “In, Out, In-between. Kulturpolitik, Stadtpolitik, Identitätspolitik” an event to celebrate the 20 years of the Karneval der Kulturen, conceptualized and organized by Juana Awad in cooperation with Philippa Ebéné and Vassiliki Gortsas. Unfortunately the conference was cancelled amidst the political turmoil at the end of 2014, which saw the Karneval der Kulturen being removed from its presenter.
- 36 See announcement on <http://www.werkstatt-der-kulturen.de/en/>, (accessed on 08.05.2020).
- 37 Senatsverwaltung für Kultur und Europa Berlin, Press release Kultur NeuDenken – neue Trägerschaft des landeseigenen Kulturstandortes Wissmannstraße 32 vorgestellt vom 25.11.2019 <https://www.berlin.de/sen/kulteu/aktuelles/pressemitteilungen/2019/pressemitteil>, (accessed on 14.05.2020).
- 38 See for example the large scale focus program *Colonial Repercussions* running during 2018/19, <https://www.adk.de/colonial-repercussions/>, (accessed on 15.05.2020).
- 39 The HKW has presented (at least) sixteen events between 2018 and 2019 in which decoloniality has played a role. See https://www.hkw.de/en/app/search/index?q=*decolonial, (accessed on 15.05.20).
- 40 Thiemeyer, Thomas, *Deutschland postkolonial*. Merkur Deutsche Zeitschrift für Europäisches Denken. Heft 806, 70 Jahrgang, Juli 2016, p. 35, translation Juana Awad.
- 41 Trueman, Matt. Connolly, Kate. *Bruce Norris stops Berlin staging of Clybourne Park after blacking up row*. The Guardian, 18 Oct 2012, www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/oct/18/bruce-norris-clybourne-park-blackface-row, (accessed on 10.05.2020).
- 42 Capon, Felicity. *Racist language in children’s books: In or out?* The Telegraph. 4 Feb. 2013, www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/booknews/9842757/Racist-language-in-childrens-books-In-or-out.html, (accessed on 10.05.2020).
- 43 Mandel, Birgit. Renz, Thomas (eds.) *MIND THE GAP! Zugangsbarrieren zu kulturellen Angeboten und Konzeptionen niedrigschwelliger Kulturvermittlung*. Stiftung Universität Hildesheim 2014, [www.uni-hildesheim.de/media/fb2/kulturpolitik/publikationen/Tagungsdokumentation_Mind th](http://www.uni-hildesheim.de/media/fb2/kulturpolitik/publikationen/Tagungsdokumentation_Mind_th), (accessed on 10.05.2020).
- 44 For example at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) including “early” discussions such as *multikulti what to do?*, 2. Oct. 2008, www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/veranstaltung/p_28329.php, (accessed on 10.05.2020). The Exhibition *Deutscher Kolonialismus* at the Deutsches Historisches Museum,

- 10.05.2020).
- 45 Hillje, Jens. Personal interview with Juana Awad. 28 Sept. 2017.
- 46 Shermin Langhoff coined the term in 2008 while directing the independent theatre Ballhaus Naunynstraße in Berlin. Langhoff explains: „We have given ourselves the label „postmigrant“ because we wanted to break with the state described above. [The actual state unfortunately cements the perception as „other“ more often than it breaks it. Where the thematic complex of migration is not omitted per se, a sensationalistic exploitation of clichés often occurs. The figure of the migrant is quasi ventriloquistically led by white, solely German-descent speakers and, at most, authenticated by using actors with the „right“ background]. At the same time, it is about the stories and perspectives of those who have not migrated themselves, but who bring this migration background with them as personal knowledge and collective memory. Moreover, in our globalized, above all urban life, „postmigrant“ stands for the entire common space of diversity beyond origin.” Langhoff, Shermin. Interview with Katharina Donath. *Die Herkunft spielt keine Rolle – „Postmigrantisches“ Theater im Ballhaus Naunynstraße*, Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 10 March 2011, www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/kultur/kulturelle-bildung/60135/interview-mit-shermin-langhoff?p=all, (accessed on 10.05.2020), translation Juana Awad.
- 47 Öziri, Necati. Hillje, Jens. Personal interviews with Juana Awad. 21 and 28 Sept. 2017.
- 48 Ein gesamtstädtisches Aufarbeitungskonzept zu Berlins kolonialer Vergangenheit: Politik, Verwaltung und Zivilgesellschaft im Gespräch https://eineweltstadt.berlin/wp-content/uploads/2020-02-06_doku_ber-nwt_decol-kickoff_final.pdf, (accessed 02.05.2020), p. 2, translation Juana Awad.
- 49 At the time of its founding the alliance is composed of the following organizations: AfricAvenir, AFROTAK TV cyber- Nomads, Berliner Entwicklungspolitischen Ratschlag – BER, Berlin Postkolonial, Each One Teach One (EOTO), glocal, Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland – ISD-Bund and the Tanzania Network. And is supported by a network of at least 100 individuals.
- 50 See <https://dekoloniale.de/about>, (accessed on 20.12.2020).
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 See Oyouun KulturNeuDenken, <https://oyoun.de/en/>, (accessed on 22.05.2020).
- 53 For example *Multikulti – What to do* in 2008, a conversation about Germany’s multicultural society with some of its staple advocates. See HKW Programm, All Projects, *multikulti what to do?*, 2. Oct. 2008, www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/veranstaltung/p_28329.php, (accessed 18.05.2020).
- 54 See for example <https://www.museumbund.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/leitfaden-kulturellevielfalt.pdf>, (accessed 22.05.2020).
- 55 Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui quoted by Verónica Gago in *Contra el colonialismo interno* <http://revistaanfibia.com/ensayo/contra-el-colonialismo-interno/>, (accessed on 13.05.2020).
- 56 In her note for the English translation of the piece *The Potosí Principle: Another View of Totality*, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui states: “When somebody asked me what alternative terms [to ‘decolonial’] I would suggest, I frankly and impolitely said that along with many Bolivians, I prefer to speak about ‘demolition’ instead of ‘deconstruction’, and ‘anticolonial’ instead of ‘decolonial’, because I think it is more coherent to try to connect with the direct language of subalterns, rather than with the word-games of high-brow *afrancesado* intellectuals.” <https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/emisferica-11-1-decolonial-gesture/11-1-essays/the-potosi-principle-another-view-of-totality.html>, (accessed on 04.05.2020).
- 57 Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui cited by Verónica Gago in *Contra el colonialismo interno*, <http://revistaanfibia.com/ensayo/contra-el-colonialismo-interno/>, (accessed on 05.05.2020), translation Juana Awad.

- 58 Quijano, Aníbal, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality", *Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2-3, p. 168-178, here p. 177.
- 59 Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui cited by Verónica Gago in *Contra el colonialismo interno*, <http://revistaanfibia.com/ensayo/contra-el-colonialismo-interno/>, San Martín 2015, (accessed on 05.05.2020), translation Juana Awad.
- 60 According to historian Christian Kopp during the „Gemeinsam Berlin dekolonisieren!“ conference by Bündnis Decolonize Berlin, Berlin 15.- 16. September 2020, there is no written comprehensive history or archive of postcolonial actors in the city.
- 61 Gago, Verónica. *Contra el colonialismo interno*, <http://revistaanfibia.com/ensayo/contra-el-colonialismo-interno/>, (accessed on 05.05.2020), translation Juana Awad.
- 62 See prior section *On the Conundrum of Decolonizing the Curatorial*