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THE ARTIST AS POSTINDIAN WARRIOR: SAVIOURISM, APPROPRIATION AND CARE IN THE ART OF KENT MONKMAN

Casualties of Modernity by the Canadian artist of Cree ancestry Kent Monkman was commissioned for the BMO Project Room (January - November 2015). When visitors entered the gallery on the 68th floor of the Bank of Montreal, they encountered a hospital room setting with a life-size model of Miss Chief Eagle Testicle (Miss Chief for short), Monkman's gender-fluid alter ego, whose name is a play on the words mischief and egotistical. In this multi-media installation, Monkman's artistic persona plays the part of a celebrity socialite inspired by Princess Diana. Clad in a skimpy nurse's uniform, wearing seven-inch red patent platform heels and eye-catching bling, she is standing at the bedside of a female patient who is gasping for air. Miss Chief appears downcast as she ponders the dismal state of the flattened, distorted and fractured body in



[Fig. 1]. Kent Monkman, *Casualties of Modernity*, 2015. Mixed media installation. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Photo of the installation at the BMO Project Room by Tony Hafkenscheid. Courtesy of the artist.

the hospital bed whose form is inspired by Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (1907) and who is attached to an electrocardiogram machine that monitors her heartbeat with intravenous drips connected to her arms.

The screen in the top left hand corner of the room shows an episode from Miss Chief's soap opera *Casualties of Modernity*, in which she stars with a Doctor of Fine Arts, a nurse and a number of patients referred to as casualties. Visitors are offered bedside chairs to watch the high-definition digital video (14 min, 45 sec) that shows Miss Chief striding through the Modern Wing of a hospital specializing in conditions afflicting Modern and Contemporary Art and is introduced to patients that include Romanticism, Cubism, Conceptual Art, Performance Art, and Painting. They are treated for conditions such as an acute infection of Primitivism, cultural amnesia, spiritual starvation, and nihilism.

When told about the death of painting, Miss Chief is incredulous. She asks how can painting die, and offers to help, stating “I have been known to dabble a little bit myself”, adding “[o]h dear Painting, I can give love for a minute, for half an hour, or for a month, I can give, I am very happy to do that, I want to do that”. She further comments that “[a]ll the great painters of our time, my dear great friends Tiziano, David, Delacroix, Manet, they would be rolling in their graves if they could hear this”, adding “I have learnt a lot from my dear friends, whom I have already spoken of with great affection, their exciting work is alive to me today as the day it was made in their honour, this great tradition must be kept alive”.¹

Monkman’s choice of presenting a Cubist figure inspired by *Les Desmoiselles* in the installation part of the multi-media piece highlights Primitivism’s appropriation of Indigenous visualities, while Miss Chief’s offer ‘to help’ draws attention to the linked double-coded notions of saviourism that, on the one hand, legitimated European colonial expansion as civilizational uplift and, on the other, authorized the turning of modern artists to Indigenous cultures in search of authenticity, energy, and inspiration; that is, for healing from the ills of the industrialized cultures of the Global North. This trajectory is mirrored in the current ‘Indigenous turn’ across disciplines in the Global North, which yet again look to Indigenous cultures for salvation, in particular from the perils of climate change², the woes of logocentrism,³

¹ Monkman, Kent, *Casualties of Modernity* (video), transcript.

² Mendoza, Breny. (2018). Can the Subaltern Save Us? *Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society*, 1(1), 109-122, 111; Kuokkanen, Rauna. (2007). *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes and the Logic of the Gift*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 125.

³ Braidotti, Rosi. (2019). *Posthuman Knowledge*. Cambridge and Medford: Polity, 147.

and the legacies of coloniality.⁴ So, how is Miss Chief's offer to help and to love "for a minute, for half an hour, or for a month" to be understood in this context and in view of the notion of the artist as postindian warrior proposed by Monkman?⁵

Cubism, Picasso and Miss Chief

Monkman's work makes frequent reference to Cubism and to Picasso, the celebrated heroic creator of the Cubism break-through painting *Les Femmes d'Alger* 'O' 'inspired' by African masks. They range from renditions of quasi Cubist figures in installations (Fig. 1), video (Fig. 2), and painting (Fig. 7) to depictions of the Picasso shown in his trademark Breton striped top (Fig. 3).

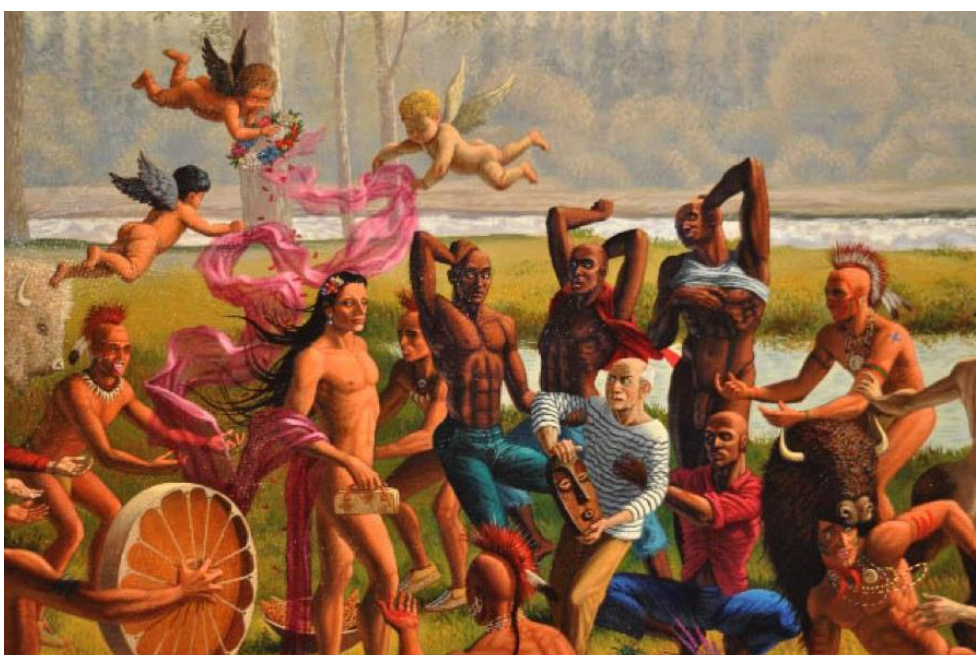
And while the video *Casualties of Modernity* shows Miss Chief lovingly tending to one of the female nudes from *Les Femmes d'Alger* (Fig. 2), *The Triumph of Mischief* (Fig. 3) presents her creator incongruously inserted into a North American landscape setting, combining a critique of Primitivism with Monkman's strategy of re-appropriating settler art by re-painting and re-envisioning settler renditions of North American landscape scenes, often focusing on the work of Albert Bierstadt (Fig. 4). This approach counters the suggestion made by such work that the land was uninhabited when European settlers arrived by inserting the Indigenous presence the genre disavows.

⁴ Kuokkanen, *Reshaping the University*, 143.

⁵ McIntosh, David. (2009). Kent Monkman's Postindian Diva Warrior: From Simulacral Historian to Embodied Liberator. *Fuse Magazine*, 20(3), 12-23; 14.



[Fig. 2]. Kent Monkman, *Casualties of Modernity*, 2015. Video still. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Courtesy of the artist.



[Fig. 3]. Kent Monkman, *The Triumph of Mischief* (detail), 2007. Acrylic on canvas. National Gallery of Canada. Courtesy of the artist.



[Fig. 4]. Albert Bierstadt, *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California*, 1868. Oil on canvas. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Bequest of Helen Huntington Hull, granddaughter of William Brown Dinsmore, who acquired the painting in 1873 for 'The Locusts', the family estate in Dutchess County, New York.

The Triumph of Miss Chief shows an encounter between Miss Chief and Picasso, who is taken aback and clearly perplexed by her appearance. Striking a classical contra-posto pose she adopts the stance of the model, conventionally a subservient position. Yet Miss Chief is in power in this encounter. In fact, Picasso is visibly shaken by her presence and needs to be propped up by one of the figures from *Les Femmes d'Alger*, except the primitive female nudes he depicted are now dark-skinned men who show off their physiques to Miss Chief, hoping to draw her attention while displaying no interest in their 'creative master'. With Picasso's nudes transformed into men, the hetero-normative gender binary of the artist-model dyad is dissolved, and with it, it seems, Picasso has lost his power. He is shown clutching an African mask for support, as if ossified notions of indigeneity associated with museum objects could exorcise the live Indigenous presence that seems too close for comfort. Picasso, no longer a figure of heroic creativity, is presented as a dwarfed im-

poster. He is outshone by Miss Chief, who, replete with fluttering pink scarf and stylish clutch bag, subverts gender assumptions along with Primitivist ones at the flick of her black tresses, provocatively drawing attention to the phenomenon of a third gender prevalent in Indigenous cultures of North America in pre-colonial times, when men or women living as members of the opposite sex were referred to as ‘two-spirited’ and were often highly revered.⁶

Miss Chief

Monkman created Miss Chief in 2004 and invented a life history around her. Her story begins in the nineteenth century as a performer in the First Nations troupe of dancers that accompanied the Native American Indian show of the journalist and painter George Catlin, who made a career of painting Indian portraits to document and ‘salvage’ a ‘vanishing culture’ (Figs. 5 and 6).

She toured Europe with Catlin but left the troupe in England, where she embarked on a series of adventures, including meeting Robin Hood, beginning a rampage through art and time that marks her as a trickster figure, who changes history through her interventions on canvas and in live performances, and has led to the suggestion of Monkman’s work as a ‘postindian project’.⁷ The artist describes the role of his alter ego as follows:

Using humour, parody, and camp, I’ve confronted the devastation of colonialism while celebrating the plural sexualities present in

⁶ Monkman, K. (2017). *Shame and Prejudice: Canada at 150*. TVO Current Affairs, 6-7.

⁷ McIntosh, Kent Monkman’s Postindian Diva Warrior, 23.



[Fig. 5]. Kent Monkman (in collaboration with photographer Christopher Chapman and make-up artist Jackie Shawn), *Miss Chief as Vaudeville Performer* from the series *The Emergence of a Legend* (2/5), 2006. Chromogenic print on metallic paper. Courtesy of the artist.

pre-contact Indigenous North America. A gender-bending time-traveller, Miss Chief lives in the past, present and future. She embodies the flawed and playful trickster spirit, teasing out the truths behind false histories and cruel experiences.⁸

⁸ Monkman, Kent. (2019). *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*. Montréal: Musée McCord, 52.



[Fig. 6]. George Catlin, *Shón-ka, the Dog, Chief of the Bad Arrow Points Band*, 1832. Oil on canvas. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr.

Postindian Storying

The concept of the postindian was created by the Anishinaabe author and scholar Gerald Vizenor in contestation of the term ‘Indian’, which, as he points out, is “an occidental invention” that “superseded the real tribal names” and is devoid of a “referent in tribal languages”.⁹ Postindian, moreover, is related to survivance, another neo-logism devised by Vizenor. A composite of survival and resistance it references a “trickster hermeneutics of liberation” that entails, as Vizenor relates, the upending and retelling of established cultural narratives in ways that create a

⁹ Vizenor, Gerald. (1999). *Manifest Manners. Narratives on Postindian Survivance*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 11.

“counter causal liberation of the mind” by means of a “puzzling inconsistency”.¹⁰ For Vizenor, these conceptions are central to the notion of the postindian, which exceeds colonial tropes such as that of the vanishing Indian, the noble savage or the ferocious primitive. As Vizenor points out, these conceptions are not only repeated ad nauseam in cultural productions but have also become points of reference for Native American identity.¹¹

This observation and critique resonates with reflections by Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a professor of Maori education, who urges recognition of the notion of a “‘traditional’ society” as “constructed under modernism”, and who argues that the reclaiming of Indigenous histories needs to “explain our existence in contemporary society”.¹² It is thus important to note that when Miss Chief makes her appearance in *Casualties of Modernity* as aristocratic socialite and patron of the arts, she refuses the stereotype of the ‘traditional’ native, thus signalling a postindian stance that speaks to the contemporaneity of Native American life.

Monkman addresses this issue explicitly in the painting *Death of the Female* (2014) (Fig. 7), where he presents an urban scene in Winnipeg, a city known for its large Indigenous population, where the artist grew up. It shows a nude female figure inspired by Picasso’s Cubist oeuvre in the

¹⁰ Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, 66 and 77; see also Carlson, David J. (2011). Trickster Hermeneutics and the Postindian Reader: Gerald Vizenor's Constitutional Praxis. *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 23(4), 13-47.

¹¹ See Lee, A. Robert. (2010). Gerald Vizenor: Postindian Gamester. In D. Seed (Ed.), *A Companion to Twentieth-Century United States Fiction* (505-513). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 506.

¹² Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. (1999). *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London and New York: Zed Books Ltd., 35, 38, and 39.



[Fig. 7]. Kent Monkman, *Death of the Female*, 2014. Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

centre of action, who has been ejected from the black car that is shown speeding away. A group of Indians dressed in traditional outfits based on portraits by George Catlin are oblivious to the plight of the female. Striking grandiose poses they gaze into the distance as if they were looking out over the prairie or had walked straight out of a film set or museum diorama. Their aloofness declares them to be ‘unreal’ cardboard cut-out figures in contrast to the contemporary Indigenous men, who, unglamorously clad in T-shirts, shorts and jeans, come to the aid of the stricken female, a contrast that adds further nuance to the themes of indigeneity, modernity, and care of Miss Chief’s Lady Di impersonation. Moreover, as Miss Chief explains, the Cubist-inspired fragmentation of the female body in this image references the violence against Indigenous women and the female spirit in the modern period:

Too many of my sisters are stripped of their honour and grace by men who are afraid of the power of the feminine. I try to bring hope, some laughter, a respite from the crushing weight of

poverty and violence that keeps my people from seeing the sacred within themselves.¹³

The notion of the postindian, however, exceeds the mere refusal of stereotypes and builds on what Vizenor has called the ‘native reason’ of trickster stories. As Vizenor suggests, they are characterized by teasing and irony, entail the upending and retelling of established cultural narratives by means of a “puzzling inconsistency” and constitute a “trickster hermeneutics of liberation” that creates a “counter causal liberation of the mind”.¹⁴ Miss Chief’s rampaging through time and art history thus performs a postindian, creative, counter-colonial perspective that is aligned with the figure of the trickster, exemplified, for instance, by Miss Chief’s citing of ‘Titiano, Manet and Ingres’ as her friends, in *Casualties of Modernity* and her exclamation:

Oh yes, I knew a lot about the Romantic savage. Europeans projected their fantasies on to us. But I have to admit I absolutely thrived on the attention – [...] how I was the toast of Europe, performing with my mentor, and lover George Catlin in Paris and in London. [...] Oh, doctor!¹⁵

When Miss Chief reminisces about her ‘lover’ Catlin and claims her experience as one of “having been the toast of town”, Monkman thus presents a story of survivance, that is a narrative which, according to Vizenor, presents an “active repudiation of dominance, tragedy and

¹³ Monkman, *Shame and Prejudice*, 143.

¹⁴ Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, 66 and 77; see also Carlson, *Trickster Hermeneutics and the Postindian Reader*, 13-47.

¹⁵ Monkman, *Casualties of Modernity* (video), transcript.

victimry”¹⁶ and “a clever and imagic manner of resistance, and, of course, ironic survivance”.¹⁷

Saviourism, Indigeneity, and Decoloniality

As Vizenor declares in a witty layering of the West, the Western, and prevalent registers of saviourism, the postindian constitutes an instance of “postwestern salvation”.¹⁸ Yet Miss Chief’s professed readiness “to give love for a minute, for half an hour, or for a month” to save European painting seems surprising given the colonial duo of saviourism and appropriation; that is the coupling of a rhetoric of civilizational uplift through colonization which legitimated the seizing of Indigenous land and resources and the appropriation of the Indigenous arts. So how is Miss Chief’s offer to help to be understood, playing as it does straight into suggestions presently made in the context of the Anthropocene which propose to “find [...] salvation among the Indigenous peoples”?¹⁹

In “Can the Subaltern Save Us?”, feminist scholar of Latin American history Breny Mendoza points out that saviourism continues to inhere the culture of the Global North under the guise of coloniality, colonialism’s pervasive legacy. As the prominent decolonial scholar Walter D. Mignolo argues, coloniality is inseparably linked to modernity. As he states, “[c]oloniality, ... is constitutive of modernity—there is no modernity without coloniality”, an understanding that is acknowledged in the combined term of modernity/coloniality.²⁰

¹⁶ Vizenor, Gerald. (1998). *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 15.

¹⁷ Vizenor, Gerald. (2012). *Chair of Tears*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 32

¹⁸ Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, 7

¹⁹ Mendoza, Can the Subaltern Save Us?, 111.

²⁰ Mignolo, Walter D. (2011). *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*. Durham and

Mendoza's text is offered as sequel to Gayatri Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak". It examines the interest in Indigenous cultures in discussion around the Anthropocene, posthumanism, and the decolonial through the lens of the long-standing European tradition of seeking salvation through the subjugated other. This impetus informed Primitivism as modern artists turned towards the 'tribal' in search of authenticity and re-invigoration, while Europe, ostensibly, sought to save the 'savage' through the professed civilizing effect of the colonial encounter. Acknowledging Spivak's caution that any attempts to speak for the subaltern invariably co-opt the subaltern in ways comparable to the colonizer, Mendoza quizzes the claimed alliance between peasants and intellectuals, artists and critics as presented, for example, in *On Decoloniality* by Mignolo and his co-author, Catherine E. Walsh, who envisage the decolonial project as a united front "from the Zapatistas and Peasant Way to intellectuals, artists, and people in general reinventing organizations".²¹

She points out that Mignolo, Walsh, and others from the modernity / coloniality group co-founded by Mignolo, from which the most prominent thinkers on decoloniality have emerged, are all of European descent; a fact which they, crucially, do not acknowledge.²² She states that "[i]nterestingly, European descendants and *mestizo-criollo* folks appear in this narrative not as internal colonizers, but as 'natural' allies of Indigenous peoples", adding the important point that "[b]y making no distinctions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, decolonial [...] thinkers would appear not only as co-authors but also as rescuers of

London: Duke University Press, 3.

²¹ Mignolo, Walter. (2018). The Decolonial Option. In W. Mignolo and C. Walsh (Eds.), *On Decoloniality* (103-244). Durham: Duke University Press, 223.

²² Mendoza, Can the Subaltern Save Us?, 115, n. 7.

a lost knowledge”.²³

As she notes, neither the acknowledgements by members of this group that “as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day”,²⁴ nor their professed concern with the “habits modernity / coloniality implanted in all of us”²⁵ reference their historic complicity through their ancestry, nor do such statements address their relative position of power vis-à-vis the subalterns for whom they profess to speak.

Mendoza also problematizes the use of Indigenous knowledges as models for a decolonial pluriverse, that is a “*world where many worlds fit* [italics in the original]”²⁶, as the Zapatistas put it, and likens such references to “alter concepts” extracted “from the perceived radical alterity of the indigenes”²⁷ and thus to a colonial repeat. She suggests that what is at play in decoloniality as forwarded by these high-profile and high-flying proponents, is the familiar tango of salvage/appropriation, where “in an attempt to change the paradigm [...] decolonials (*mestizo-criollos*)” seek to “recover the voice of the subalterns/Indigenous by attributing an alterity to Indigenous peoples/subalterns that can work like a wonder drug to the ailments of modernity”.²⁸ She suggests that such decolonial propositions evidence a disavowal of the “historical complicity in the destruction of Indigenous worlds”,²⁹ a stance which has

²³ Mendoza, *Can the Subaltern Save Us?*, 115.

²⁴ Maldonado-Torres quoted Mignolo, Walter and Walsh, Catherine. (2018). *On Decoloniality*. Durham: Duke University Press, 23.

²⁵ Walsh, Catherine E. and Mignolo, Walter D. (2018). Introduction. In W. Mignolo and C. Walsh (Eds.), *On Decoloniality* (1-12). Durham: Duke University Press, 4.

²⁶ Escobar, Arturo. (2018). *Designs for the Pluriverse. Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, xvi.

²⁷ Mendoza, *Can the Subaltern Save Us?*, 117.

²⁸ Mendoza, *Can the Subaltern Save Us?*, 119.

²⁹ Mendoza, *Can the Subaltern Save Us?*, 119.

also been referred to as a “settler moves to innocence”.³⁰

Mendoza thus problematizes the notion of the Indigenous employed in this work. She points out that that such references posit the Indigenous as unquestionably good, which constitutes a pre-condition for the potentiality of redemption indigeneity offers in the cultural imaginary of the Global North. She warns of taking Indigenous knowledge at face value and as beyond critique, pointing to the trenchant masculinism it can entail,³¹ and underscores that Indigenous peoples have intermingled albeit asymmetrically with modern epistemologies for five hundred years. Suggestions of ‘pure’ or ‘unadulterated indigeneity’ therefore reference essentialized conceptions of indigeneity representative of coloniality.

She also poses the question whether it is “possible to think outside of modernity, relying on archetypes of Indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies”,³² a question that is of crucial importance for this discussion of Monkman’s work and underscores the need to explore his negotiation not only of notions of indigeneity but also of Indigenous epistemologies.

In *Empathy for the Less Fortunate* (2011) (Fig. 8), Monkman has, for example, re-envisaged Albert Bierstadt’s *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California* (1868) as a sanctuary for the ‘butchered’ female nudes of Picasso’s *Desmoiselles*. Miss Chief is shown in a white quasi celebrity nurse outfit and high heels, lovingly braiding the hair of one of

³⁰ Tuck, Eve, and Yang, Wayne K. (2012). Decolonization is Not a Metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society*, 1(1), 1-40, 1.

³¹ Mendoza, Can the Subaltern Save Us?, 119.

³² Mendoza, Can the Subaltern Save Us?, 119.



[Fig. 8]. Kent Monkman, *Empathy for the Less Fortunate*, 2011. Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

the nudes. But is the figure standing for Indigenous women, the female nude in Western art or, indeed, painting itself? In other words, to whom is Miss Chief bringing the solace of Indigenous knowing, being and spirituality that she has made it her mission to deliver? And how is she negotiating the prevalent saviourism/appropriation tango inherent in coloniality?

Indigenous Epistemologies

As Walsh and Mignolo contend, the project of decoloniality goes beyond a “new paradigm or mode of critical thought”.³³ It aims to “engender liberations with respect to thinking, being, knowing, understanding, and living”,³⁴ encourages re-existence and revolves around a “decolonial

³³ Walsh, Catherine E. and Mignolo, Walter D. (2018). Introduction. In W. Mignolo and C. Walsh (Eds.), *On Decoloniality* (1-12). Durham: Duke University Press, 5.

³⁴ Walsh and Mignolo, Introduction, 4.

otherwise”³⁵ that seeks to leave behind the structural binaries that characterise the modern.

In order to do so, Walsh and Mignolo orient towards the different kind of knowing which Indigenous epistemologies entail and identify the re-framing of the colonial theory/praxis hierarchy that separates mental from supposedly “mere manual” spheres as key for a decolonial praxis. They thus declare that the delinking from “the modern concept of *theory versus praxis*” constitutes a rebellious act of “disobeying the long-held belief that you first theorize and then apply”³⁶ [emphasis in the original]. Proclaiming that “we locate our thinking/doing in a different terrain”,³⁷ they state that they engage in the “thinking-doing and doing-thinking of decoloniality”.³⁸ In evidence of this approach they offer a reflection on the structure of *On Decoloniality*, informing the reader that the book was originally envisaged to start “with the analytic of coloniality of power through conceptual elucidation” in order to “establish a conceptual foundation” for the discussion of the “processes, practices, and praxis of decoloniality” in its second part.³⁹ They, however, rethought this plan and opted to begin with “doing-thinking”, that is “with people, collectives, and communities that enact decoloniality”.⁴⁰

In Part I of *On Decoloniality*, Walsh thus reports on projects and activisms that range from Andean “walking of words”, to issues of gender and the Zapatista movement while discussing what a decolonial praxis of “otherwise” might entail. Reflecting on the question “how [...] decolo-

³⁵ Walsh, Catherine E. (2018). Decoloniality in/as Praxis. In W. Mignolo and C. E. Walsh (Eds.). *On Decoloniality* (15-32). Durham and London: Duke University Press, 21.

³⁶ Walsh and Mignolo, Introduction, 7.

³⁷ Walsh and Mignolo, Introduction, 7.

³⁸ Walsh and Mignolo, Introduction, 9.

³⁹ Walsh and Mignolo, Introduction, 9.

⁴⁰ Walsh and Mignolo, Introduction, 9.

niality [is] signified and constructed in and through praxis”,⁴¹ she suggests that the task is “not to write about, nor [...] to develop a narrative by simply citing a plethora of authors, contexts, and texts”.⁴² The challenge rather is “to think *from* and *with* standpoints, struggles, and practices”.⁴³ As Walsh elucidates, the key question is “how to write (produce) without being inscribed (reproduced) in the dominant white structure and how to write without reinscribing and reproducing what we rebel against”.⁴⁴ She suggests that “praxis enables us to transcend the linear precepts, binary-based suppositions, and outcome-oriented views of Western knowledge, research, and thought.”⁴⁵ She moreover conveys that the “challenge is not to look for theory first”⁴⁶ and warns of the traps “of disembodied, abstract discourse, the risk of logocentrism, and the limitations of academic-intellectual reflection”.⁴⁷

While Walsh undoubtedly raises important issues with regard to how decolonial writing and thinking might be conceived, one can but wonder whether she is aware of feminist approaches in the Global North that have long emphasized the need for scholars to situate themselves and their work. Nor does she reference the textual experiments in anthropology from the late 1980s that counter the fiction of objective authorship. She also does not acknowledge Deleuze and Guattari’s work nor approaches rooted in New Materialism and Posthumanism that take Western logocentrism to task from within Western traditions of theory and thought. This disavowal, moreover, facilitates the positioning of herself and of the decolonial collective as torch-bearing Southern

⁴¹ Walsh, *Decoloniality in/as Praxis*, 19.

⁴² Walsh, *Decoloniality in/as Praxis*, 20.

⁴³ Walsh, *Decoloniality in/as Praxis*, 20.

⁴⁴ Walsh, *Decoloniality in/as Praxis*, 20-21.

⁴⁵ Walsh, *Decoloniality in/as Praxis*, 50.

⁴⁶ Walsh, *Decoloniality in/as Praxis*, 21.

⁴⁷ Walsh, *Decoloniality in/as Praxis*, 27.

critic(s) 'on the outside' and as singular guardians of veracity and moral rectitude. Furthermore, she reports on the praxis of Indigenous others in ways that bear all the hallmarks of 'speaking for' which Spivak warned about.

The Aymara sociologist and oral historian Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, for example, is fiercely critical of the modernity/coloniality group and accuses Mignolo of appropriating her ideas in ways she characterizes as extractivism in the realm of ideas.⁴⁸ She is hardly more complimentary about Walsh, who directs the programme of cultural studies in the Universidad Andina Simon Bolivar in Quito, which Rivera Cusicanqui critiques as "based in the logocentric and nominalist version of decolonization".⁴⁹ This view is shared by other critics, such as the North American cultural theorist Joe Parker, who holds that "Mignolo begins his half of the volume by identifying decolonization not as a broad-based project but as the work of a specific collective in South America", adding more crushingly perhaps that "their logics and social science evidence-based mode of argumentation come straight out of modern Europe and do little to challenge the 'Western' science they claim to oppose".⁵⁰ Has the colonial salvage/appropriation tango, therefore, swung into the next round, led by the group at the forefront of the decolonial internationally, with Indigenous ways yet again in the crosshairs of appropriation? That is, thinking through the lens of Monkman's images, are Mignolo and Walsh perhaps driving the car that is speeding away in *Death of the Female*, or should we envisage them joining the young Indigenous men

⁴⁸ Rivera Cusicanqui, S. (2012). Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 111(1), 95-109, 102, and 104.

⁴⁹ Rivera Cusicanqui, Ch'ixinakax utxiwa, 102.

⁵⁰ Parker, Joe. (2020). Epistemology and Decolonial Politics. Retrieved from: <https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/epistemology-and-decolonial-politics>, n.p.

who are coming to her rescue? Might Monkman place them with the buckskin-clad natives, as cardboard cut-out trope of a colonial settler, envisaging a decolonial museum of the future? And if Miss Chief made an appearance, would Mignolo be clutching *On Decoloniality* in an effort to ward off her blinding appearance or would she cast him as Doctor of Decolonial art? And what would be the role of the Indigenous women Miss Chief so lovingly tends to in *Empathy for the Less Fortunate*?

Re- and Decolonization

In her paper “*Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization*”, Rivera Cusicanqui draws attention to the prevalence of recolonization by Europeanized elites in the Andean region, a context that barely features in *On Decoloniality*, which situates the threat of coloniality for the most part ‘on the outside’, that is, the Global North.⁵¹

Rivera Cusicanqui also emphasizes the existence of an Indigenous modernity, a topic not broached in *On Decoloniality*. She points out that the denial of Indigenous peoples’ participation in modernity has the effect of “ensnaring them in indigenist stereotypes of the noble savage and as guardians of nature”,⁵² and contrasts the binary of the modern and the Indigenous with the notion of an Indigenous version of the modern, which she characterises as “simultaneously an arena of resistance and conflict, a site for the development of sweeping counterhegemonic strategies, and a space for the creation of new Indigenous languages and projects of modernity”.⁵³ Countering the way

⁵¹ Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa*, 95.

⁵² Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa*, 99.

⁵³ Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa*, 95.

the project of decoloniality is presented by members of the modernity / coloniality collective, she states that for Indigenous peoples “[d]ecolonizing one’s self is to stop being Indian and to become people”.⁵⁴

She moreover suggests a decolonial practice based on the Aymara notion of *ch’ixi* which “reflects the Aymara idea of something that is and is not at the same time” and reflects “the logic of the included third”, which she claims for herself due to her “double origin”, that is of being “Aymara and European”.⁵⁵ She elucidates that *ch’ixi* refers to “[t]he potential of undifferentiation [that] joins opposites”, and that it “combines the Indian world and its opposite without ever mixing them”.⁵⁶ She further describes *ch’ixi*’s “motley” model of mixing as an expression of “the parallel coexistence of multiple cultural differences that do not extinguish but instead antagonize and complement each other”,⁵⁷ qualifying that “[e]ach one reproduces itself from the depths of the past and relates to others in a contentious way”.⁵⁸ She crucially stresses that this model of difference enables “discussions as equals with other centers of thought and currents in the academies of our region and [...] the world”.⁵⁹ And she explains that, moreover, it constitutes the basis for “modes of coexistence based in reciprocity” and “new forms of community and mixed identities”, which create the conditions for “a creative dialogue in a process of exchanging knowledges, aesthetics, and ethics” and constitute an “Indian commitment to modernity”.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Rivera Cusicanqui quoted in Gago, Verónica. (2016). Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui: Against Internal Colonialism. *Viewpoint Magazine*, 1-8. Retrieved from: <https://viewpointmag.com/2016/10/25/silvia-rivera-cusicanqui-against-internal-colonialism/>, 4.

⁵⁵ Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch’ixinakax utxiwa*, 105.

⁵⁶ Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch’ixinakax utxiwa*, 105.

⁵⁷ Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch’ixinakax utxiwa*, 105.

⁵⁸ Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch’ixinakax utxiwa*, 106.

⁵⁹ Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch’ixinakax utxiwa*, 106.

⁶⁰ Rivera Cusicanqui, *Ch’ixinakax utxiwa*, 106.

For Rivera Cusicanqui, the decolonizing practice of *ch'ixi* is thus distinct from “academic or institutional discourses [and] academic jargon, and generalized theories written from a desk and disconnected from experiences of everyday injustices”.⁶¹ Reflecting this perspective, she prefers to communicate her work orally, since “orality prevents the stabilization of language”⁶² and implies “a way of thinking by modifications, in which thoughts are constantly amended, reworked and completed through journeys, political alliances, by walking with others, separating and then coming back together”.⁶³ Rivera Cusicanqui’s approach, moreover, is based on the understanding that the colonial legacy can be subverted “by observing from uncertainty in order to see possibilities that are hidden by established ways of thinking and observing”, and she suggests that one should not be afraid of incongruity because “the greatest inconsistency lies in knowing without living”.⁶⁴

Method as the Medium of the Message

What emerges in Rivera Cusicanqui’s work is the proposition of a decolonial practice that is rooted in the very attitude Walsh de-, if not pre-, scribes in *On Decoloniality* as a relational stance rather than the objectifying “about”, which Walsh rightly states, but arguably does so in a manner that professes distance and certainty.

The Cree educationist Cash Ahenakew, who describes himself as producing work that “addresses the complexities at the interface

⁶¹ Furlong, Kathryn; Roca-Servat, Denise; Acevedo-Guerrero, Tatiana; and Botero-Mesa, Maria. (2019). Everyday Practices, Everyday Water: From Foucault to Rivera-Cusicanqui (with a Few Stops In-between). *Water*, 11, 1-17, 11.

⁶² Furlong *et al*, Everyday Practices, Everyday Water, 11.

⁶³ Rivera Cusicanqui quoted in Furlong *et al*, Everyday Practices, Everyday Water, 11.

⁶⁴ Rivera Cusicanqui quoted in Furlong *et al*, Everyday Practices, Everyday Water, 11.

between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges, education, methodology and ceremony”,⁶⁵ for example, warns that “grafting Indigenous knowledges into non-Indigenous ways of knowing” instrumentalizes the former, and disavows the “uneven environments shaped by historical circumstances where the grafting/hybridizing does not happen as a mutual exercise but as assimilation”.⁶⁶ He also acknowledges that such a grafting is inevitable in academic contexts, and that strategies that mediate its impact are therefore essential, with “[m]aking grafting visible”,⁶⁷ a crucial first step. Echoing Rivera Cusicanqui, he explains that such an approach entails “resisting the temptation for certainty, totality, and instrumentalization in Western reasoning by keeping your claims contingent, contextual, tentative, and incomplete”.⁶⁸ He further suggests the need “to make what is absent *present*, by using devices that redirect reading from a prosaic to a poetic orientation, or from the rational to the metaphorical mind”.⁶⁹ He elucidates that “[t]he prosaic and rational readings that modernity has socialized us into try to capture the world in a monorational logic lodged in a mind separated from the body”.⁷⁰ As he explains, “the task of poetic and metaphoric writing is to invite other senses to take part in the reading process”⁷¹ in order to circumvent the “onto-epistemological grammar of modernity”⁷² and its linear logic, which is “averse to paradoxes, complexities and contradictions”.⁷³ In other words, the

⁶⁵ Ahenakew, Cash. Bio. Retrieved from: <https://blogs.ubc.ca/ahenakewcrc/>.

⁶⁶ Ahenakew, Cash. (2016). Grafting Indigenous Ways of Knowing Onto Non-Indigenous Ways of Being. The (Underestimated) Challenges of a Decolonial Imagination. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 9(3), 323–340, 324.

⁶⁷ Ahenakew, Grafting Indigenous Ways of Knowing, 333.

⁶⁸ Ahenakew, Grafting Indigenous Ways of Knowing, 333.

⁶⁹ Ahenakew, Grafting Indigenous Ways of Knowing, 333.

⁷⁰ Ahenakew, Grafting Indigenous Ways of Knowing, 333.

⁷¹ Ahenakew, Grafting Indigenous Ways of Knowing, 333.

⁷² Ahenakew, Grafting Indigenous Ways of Knowing, 334.

⁷³ Ahenakew, Grafting Indigenous Ways of Knowing, 335.

stance that underpins the chosen mode of enunciation and the manner of speaking are key indicators for where the message falls on the spectrum of coloniality/decoloniality.

Reflecting these propositions, Ahenakew, for example, includes poems in his text, while Rivera Cusicanqui, as discussed, emphasises the need to remain open to life's inconsistencies and paradoxes, and professes a preference for orality, yet adopts a "regular" academic mode when she does write, as does Mendoza.

The Artist as Postindian Warrior

Monkman is committed to representing the disavowed histories of Indigenous peoples. Professing a "deep love of art history",⁷⁴ he commonly chooses the canons of art as his arena for counter-colonial re-storying, asserting Indigenous perspectives in playful, parodic and immensely powerful ways that foreclose the stance of victimhood or "victimry", as Vizenor has put it.⁷⁵ Miss Chief's rampaging through historical periods, moreover, subverts linear notions of time, such as when she "reminisces" about her friends Ingres and Manet and their elevation of the female nude to stardom, or grafts Picasso into North American settler art, thus spelling out the communalities between colonial and aesthetic appropriation.

Monkman's work, moreover, exceeds familiar notions of critique by means of re-envisioning canonical works of art in ways that draw on the "pleasure of trickster stories".⁷⁶ In *Casualties of Modernity*, the tables have thus turned, modern art is in intensive care and Miss Chief adopts

⁷⁴ Monkman, *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, 52.

⁷⁵ Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 15.

⁷⁶ Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, 8.

the colonial pose of saviour of culture(s) while also presenting the part of the “Primitive”, thus subverting colonial structures with wit, humour, parody and acuity. The duality of savourism and appropriation is thus upended by Miss Chief in her Lady Di impersonation, who, replete with high heels, ostentatious bling and heavy lashes of mascara, lays claim to an Indigenous modernity. The piece thus suggests a sea change, which re-imagines the cartography of the modern in ways that replace what the Portuguese sociologist de Sousa Santos calls the violent “axiology of progress” with an “axiology of care”.⁷⁷

Monkman’s adoption of a postindian stance, moreover, suggests a differenced model of artistic creation that subverts the notion of the rule-breaking, masculinist, supposedly heroic avant-garde artist-genius who thrives on being several cuts above the rest and readily appropriates from Indigenous cultures; a stance that is deeply premised on ‘othering’, a key signature of the structures of modernity/coloniality that declares huge swathes of people as ‘less than’ human, male, European etc. Monkman’s differencing is thus premised on what Vizenor has called the ‘natural reason’ of Indigenous cultures in contrast to colonial reason. He states that:

Science, translation, and the discoveries of otherness in tribal cultures are the histories of racialism and the metanarratives of dominance. The foundational theories of the social sciences have denied natural reason, tribal memories and the coherence of heard stories.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ de Sousa Santos, Boaventura (2014). *Epistemologies of the Global South. Justice against Epistemicide*. London: Routledge, 184.

⁷⁸ Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, 67.

Echoing Rivera Cusicanqui's propositions, Vizenor couches the disparity between Indigenous ways of knowing and their mode of enunciation in terms of the divergence between orality and visuality, stating that "[t]he shadows and tribal experiences that are *heard* in stories, and variations on natural reason, are transformed in publications that are *seen* as cultural representations [*italics in the original*]".⁷⁹

For Vizenor, what "has been published and seen is not what is heard or remembered in oral stories".⁸⁰ He considers it the task of postindian narratives, which operate by means of "narrative recreations",⁸¹ to counter the misrepresentations which have become established as authentic portrayals of Native American Indians and have informed the thinking and politics of "presidents, journalists, college teachers, and publishers, for several centuries".⁸² Moreover, he suggests that such stories reflect the tradition of native language games, replace representational consistency with the constancy of shifting meaning presented in "manifold turns of scenes, the brush of natural reason, characters that liberate the mind and never reach closure in stories",⁸³ and are coupled with the "shimmer of humour".⁸⁴

Furthermore, Vizenor performs his understanding. He puts postindian storying into practice in his extensive literary oeuvre and does so to great acclaim. His poems and novels bristle with "shape-shifting" trickster figures "pledged always to upsetting the cultural fixed seams and binaries by which Natives have been defined".⁸⁵ His work thus "walks the

⁷⁹ Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, 69.

⁸⁰ Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, 70.

⁸¹ Carlson, *Trickster Hermeneutics and the Postindian Reader*, 23.

⁸² Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, 24.

⁸³ Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, 15 and 17.

⁸⁴ Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, 15 and 17.

⁸⁵ Lee, *Gerald Vizenor: Postindian Gamester*, 506.

talk” and enacts the mobility of concepts and the performative nature of words, as meaning slides, shifts and slithers, presenting a “progressive play of ideas and examples”.⁸⁶ Miss Chief’s rampaging through the pages of time and the canons of art history thus has a literary parallel in Vizenor’s texts. These performances also display the characteristics of postindian warriors who, according to Vizenor, “encounter their enemies with the same courage in literature as their ancestors once evinced on horses”,⁸⁷ and who “hover [...] over the ruins of tribal representations, and surmount the scriptures of manifest manners with new stories”,⁸⁸ propositions that have led to the apt suggestion that Monkman’s work heralds the rise of the artist as postindian warrior,⁸⁹ which, as I would like to suggest, constitutes a new paradigm of decoloniality in the arts.

Conclusion

I would argue that Monkman’s approach is path-breaking, not only because he creates a compelling body of work that is visually stunning as well as politically and art historically astute, but also because he develops a postindian approach in the visual arts which offers playful, witty, audacious, and poignant critiques in ways that avoid counter-appropriation, abyssal reversals, and cognitive closure. He thus shifts the frameworks of discussion in the arts around decoloniality in radical ways that usher in the conception of the artist as postindian warrior, thus breaking with the traditions of the singular, white, male heroic artist-genius in ways that fundamentally shift the field of art history.

⁸⁶ Carlson, *Trickster, Hermeneutics and the Postindian Reader*, 14 and 21.

⁸⁷ Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, 5.

⁸⁸ Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, 5.

⁸⁹ McIntosh, *Kent Monkman’s Postindian Diva Warrior*, 14.

The astute critiques of representation entailed in the notion of the postindian warrior, moreover, open up the field of knowledge production and articulation in ways that neither fall into the trap of representation nor its 'manners'. Monkman's work thus offers new possibilities for artistic practice and criticality alike, which broach "decolonial horizons of liberation"⁹⁰ and present a model for a delinking from the coloniality of representation. It confirms the potentiality of the paradigm of the artist as postindian warrior for the project of decoloniality in the visual field, that is for differencing the canons of art history in ways that baffle, disarm, outwit and obviate the structural binaries of coloniality and draw out the discipline's complicity through its historiographic lineages, thus opening up ways to walk at differenced talk.

Monkman's approach, moreover, tallies with the notion of *ch'ixi* presented by Rivera Cusicanqui and the suggestions made by Ahenakew, in that it chimes with their emphasis on indeterminacy and active provocation of conceptual closure and clear cut definitions that pin down ideas like the proverbial butterflies in the natural historian's display case.

Gazing through the lens of Monkman's work, the question arises whether the Picassoesque female nudes recuperating in the pristine waters Monkman has wrested from Bierstadt's brush are the seeds of a future to come. In contrast to Rivera Cusicanqui, Monkman's work does not offer females of strength and ingenuity, apart from the formidable and flamboyant Miss Chief. Yet it is Indigenous women who bear the double burden of difference in the regime of coloniality and who, in Rivera

⁹⁰ Mignolo, *The Decolonial Option*, 125.

Cusicanqui's Bolivian context, are the creators of the "motley relations and complex and mixed languages" that characterize the *ch'ixi* areas of Indigenous modernity. Will Indigenous women thus rise in Monkman's future work, salvaged through Miss Chief's care and readiness to "give love for a minute, for half an hour, or for a month"?

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