Nasheli Jiménez del Val, Anna Maria Guasch

Art, Globalization, Interculturality, Universitat de Barcelona
Barcelona, Spain

INDIGENISM(S)/INDIGENEITY: TOWARDS A VISUAL SOVEREIGNTY

Indigenous situated knowledges are increasingly being recognized as an urgent voice in global debates on natural resources, sustainability, heritage, governance, representation, and social justice. This is also particularly true of the global art scene, where the recent 58th Venice Biennale (2019) and Documenta 14 (2017) have included contemporary Indigenous artists in a bid to "challenge existing habits of thought"[1] and locate "the connections between coloniality and expression, place and power".[2] Do these attempts on the part of contemporary art institutions

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[1] Rugoff, Ralph. (2019). *Biennale Arte 2019. May You Live in Interesting Times*. La Biennale di Venezia. Retrieved from: https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2019/58th-exhibition.

[2] Latimer, Quinn and Szymczyk, Adam. (2017). Editors' Letter. *South as a State of Mind*, 4, n.p. Retrieved from: https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/25211_editors_letter.

to assert "Indigenous worldviews" effectively act as a counterbalance to the flattening processes of globalization?[3] Or can they be questioned as the latest in modern/colonial forms of epistemological, cultural, and aesthetic extractivism?

This themed issue of REG|AC, entitled "Indigenous Epistemologies and Artistic Imagination", aims to address the recent inclusion of "Indigenous thought" in the global art world by seeking to create links between non-Western knowledges, Indigenous epistemologies and the artistic imagination, as well as alliances amongst its respective agents. Given the current world situation, in which migration, poverty, discrimination, and other social forces are compounded by natural disasters and anthropogenic climate change, Indigenous epistemologies have become an alternative for re-thinking what Arjun Appadurai has termed an "emancipatory policy" that could address the asymmetries in the distribution of resources, capital, and power under neoliberal, neocolonial global capitalism.

To this aim, we have developed a set of guiding questions that have informed both this issue and its preceding International Conference (Barcelona, October 2019) of the same name: How may a position of marginality become a space of power in our contemporary world, a possibility that seems even more relevant today as we contemplate the broad resurgence of Indigenous societies in multiple regions and forums? How do Indigenous claims to self-representation and cultural production challenge current Western-hegemonic ways of belonging and looking at the world? How can we negotiate the paradoxical confluence

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[3] Rickard, Jolene. (2007). Absorbing or Obscuring the Absence of a Critical Space in the Americas for Indigeneity: The Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 52, 85-92, 87.

that tenses a certain fagocitation of "other" epistemologies by (Western) academia and the will—or need—of marginalized communities to gain ground in the social sphere in order to make their demands visible? What methodological and political alliances do we need to sustain in order to co-create robust conceptual and experimental terminologies that may be adequate to the complexity of our times?[4]

Seen through the lens of an as-yet unfinished process of decolonization in which "the Indigenous" is now being activated and understood through different social, political, and aesthetic platforms, we maintain that contemporary Indigenous artistic agents and activists share complex and often conflicting agendas that signal potential points of tension and resistance in the current global scenario. In this sense, we echo Tuscarora scholar Jolene Rickard's assertion that there is an urgent need to take into account Indigenous knowledges in global art, art history, and visual culture studies[5] in order to exercise an intervention on modernity / coloniality and its framing of Native cultures within a metanarrative of the West.[6]

Posthumanism

Within the framework of a critical humanities that can address our current posthuman landscape, philosopher Rosi Braidotti and curator Maria Hlavajova pose a series of concerns that inform our aim to link post/de-colonial theories, environmental humanities, and indigenous epistemologies. As they have argued, "the posthuman" is a transdisci-

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[4] Braidotti, Rosi and Hlavajova, Maria. (2018). Introduction. In Braidotti, Rosi and Hlavajova, Maria (Eds.). *Posthuman Glossary* (1-14). London and New York: Bloomsbury, 11.
[5] Rickard, Jolene. (2017). Diversifying Sovereignty and the Reception of Indigenous Art. *Art Journal*, 76(2), 81-84, 81.
[6] Rickard, Absorbing or Obscuring, 88.

plinary discourse that traverses post-humanism (understood as the critique of the humanist ideal of "Man" as the universal representative of the human) and post-anthropocentrism (which criticizes species hierarchy and advances bio-centred egalitarianism).[7]

Crucially, a posthuman focus brings into question the category of the "non-human" as residual to humanism. For these authors, humanism has based itself on defining "the human" in opposition to "depreciated naturalized 'others' whose existence has been cast outside the realm of anthropocentric thought and confined within non-human life (*zoe*)".[8] Hence, the modern form of reason upon which humanism has sustained itself is based on the division of the world into two distinct epistemic and moral orders:

> The first consists of privileged beings considered sovereignly rational and so subject to fullblown ethical concern as 'human persons'; the remainder consists of nonhumans (animals and non-sentient life) or lesser-humans (women, effeminate men, colonised peoples, children, the aged and infirm…), considered deficient in (objective/independent/instrumental) reason and so having diminished agency and moral worth.[9]

With crucial markers such as gender and sexual difference, race and ethnicity, class and education, health and able-bodiedness operating as gatekeepers to acceptable humanity, the de-humanizing effects of the non-human category impact entire sections of the human population.[10]

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[7] Braidotti and Hlavajova, Introduction, 1.
[8] Braidotti and Hlavajova, Introduction, 2.
[9] Bignall, Simone; Hemming, Steve; and Rigney, Daryle. (2016). Three Ecosophies for the Anthropocene: Environmental Governance, Continental Posthumanism and Indigenous Expressivism. *Deleuze Studies*, 10(4), 455-478, 455.
[10] Braidotti and Hlavajova, Introduction, 2.

Counter to this conceptualization of the human (and non-human), Braidotti suggests a critical posthumanities that recuperates "non-Western indigenous humanism" or "indigenous knowledge systems" in order to imagine a "missing peoples' Humanities […that might actualize] minority-driven knowledges through transversal alliances".[11] However, as Simone Bignall *et al* suggest, this exercise towards a critical posthumanities must not simply seek to incorporate "Indigenous philosophies of existential interconnectivity […] into the Western 'post'-humanism that they in fact precede by millennia".[12] Rather, these knowledge systems "contribute fresh material for a more cosmopolitan or globally ecosophical (and therefore less Eurocentric), nonhumanist conceptualisation of humanity".[13]

Indigenous Epistemologies

Bignall *et al* further argue that Félix Guattari's theory of individuation, based on the axes of relationality and transversality, is reflected in Indigenous knowledge systems. In these authors' reading of Guattari, a complex structure comes into being through mobile networks of constitutive relations, such that social ecologies themselves participate in natural and cultural interrelations that inflect their societal character, resulting in ever more complex social and natural systems. In addition to this dynamics of relationality, transversality operates as a principle of active organization based on mutuality. For Bignall *et al*, the principle of transversality permits "self-organising through non-hierarchichal relations and openness to reconfigure established order".[14] Similarly, Indi-

[11] Braidotti, Rosi. A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 36(6), 31-61, 49-51.
[12] Bignall *et al*, Three Ecosophies, 461.
[13] Bignall *et al*, Three Ecosophies, 461.
[14] Bignall *et al*, Three Ecosophies, 463.

genous knowledge systems operate on the basis of relationality and transversality, where indigeneity is considered inseparable from constitutive connections to the natural world. It is a type of knowledge based on "laws of interdependence that emerge from native science",[15] rendering knowledge "perspectival and affective (rather than individual and representative of an independent reality); value-laden and inherently political (rather than neutral and objective)".[16]

What is more, Indigenous knowledge—relational and transversal—can be a rich social resource for any justice-related attempt to bring about social change.[17] For academics Ladislaus Semali and Joe Kincheloe, knowledge studies would thus be crucial to facilitate "indigenous peoples' struggle against the ravages of colonialism, especially its neo-colonialist articulation in the domains of the political, economic, and pedagogical".[18] Yet, they warn, it is important to avoid the essentialistic tendency to lump together all Indigenous knowledges and cultures as one; approaches to Indigenous knowledge systems must consider processes of knowledge production and truth claims in relation to "the historical setting, cultural situatedness, and moral needs of the reality they confront".[19]

Indigenism(s)/Indigeneity

In order to avoid falling into the essentialistic trap of transforming Indigenous commonalities into generalizing theorizations of Indigenous knowledge systems, we propose a conceptual distinction between

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[15] Bignall *et al*, Three Ecosophies, 471.
[16] Bignall *et al*, Three Ecosophies, 466.
[17] Bignall *et al*, Three Ecosophies, 461.
[18] Semali, Ladislaus M. and Kincheloe, Joe L. (Eds.). (1999). *What Is Indigenous Knowledge? Voices from the Academy*. New York and London: Taylor & Francis, 19.
[19] Semali, and Kincheloe, *What Is Indigenous Knowledge?*, 19.

"indigenism" or "Indianness" and "indigeneity". We understand indigenism or "Indianness"[20] as part and parcel of the discourse of modernity and as the discursive condition of possibility for the material and institutional manifestation of modern/colonial modalities of power. The discourse of indigenism or "Indianness" has, for Jodi Byrd, produced peoples othered and abjected from the nation-state's origins on the basis of moral claims that "deflect progressive and transformative activism from dismantling the ongoing conditions of colonialism".[21] For this Chicasaw scholar, indigenism is the *a priori* to national myths on origin, history, freedom, constraint, difference and, as such, it is "vital to understanding how power and domination have been articulated and practiced by empire".[22]

We argue here that indigeneity, in contrast to indigenism, might be conceptualized as a form of subjectivity configured along two axes: the coloniality of power in modernity/coloniality and the potentiality of agency beyond this marginalization. Hence, indigeneity-as-subject-position makes visible the intrinsic asymmetrical power relations born of historical processes of settlement, colonization, and marginalization

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[20] Byrd, Jodi. (2011). *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, xvii.

[21] Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, xvii.

[22] Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, xvii-xx. In its Mexican variant, *indigenismo* has been a state strategy from the post-revolutionary period that attempts to "integrate" indigenous ethnic groups to the modern state. For Norma Klahn, this has been a discursive integration more than a tangible exercise, with a sole emphasis on the archaelogical inclusion of Indigenous peoples in discourses on *mestizaje* but exclusion at the level of lived realities. Part of a contradictory ideology, *indigenismo* laudes the heroic Indigenous past as the foundation for national pride while simultaneously stigmatizing its surviving populations. See Klahn, Norma. (2012). El indigenismo desde la indigeneidad. *Nuevo Texto Crítico*, 24-25(47-48), 165-186, 165.

of native peoples[23] resulting from the coloniality of power.[24] In making visible this historical and continuing power differential, it also highlights the criticality of indigeneity as agency or continuous resistance to the ongoing condition of coloniality.[25] In short, we understand indigeneity as a densely sedimented subject position where the continuing colonial condition of being non-humanized is disarticulated through strategies of relationality and transversality. Our aim for this issue has been to operate on the level of building alliances between ingideneities, all the while avoiding falling into the traps of indigenism.

Visual Sovereignty

For Quandamooka academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson, the two main epistemic drivers for Indigenous knowledge systems are indigeneity and sovereignty, where indigeneity encompasses culture, place, and philosophy, while sovereignty includes history and law.[26] Moreton-Robinson argues that it is precisely the disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty that has authorized White possession as a mode of rationality functioning within disciplinary knowledges and regulatory mechanisms that have defined and circumscribed Indigenous sovereignty in particular ways.[27] Consequently, for Rickard our under-standing of sovereignty must be disconnected from its Western legal roots as the "application of governance or unlimited executive power

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[23] Merlan, Francesca. (2009). Indigeneity: Global and Local. *Current Anthropology*, 50(3), 303-333, 304.
[24] Quijano, Aníbal. (2008). Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification. In Moraña, M., Dussel, E. and Jáuregui, C. (Eds.). *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* (181-224). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
[25] Mignolo, Walter. (2000). *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
[26] Moreton-Robinson, Aileen. (2015). *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, xiv.
[27] Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, 126.

exercised by heads of state",[28] as in Giorgio Agamben's theorization of the sovereign. Rather, to paraphrase Lenape scholar Joanne Barker, it is impossible to stabilize what sovereignty means outside of specific historical and cultural conditions of the Indigenous peoples who evoke the term.[29] As with Indigenous epistemologies, sovereignty is embedded in specific social relations, where it is invoked and given meaning. As Bignall *et al* note, Aboriginal understandings of sovereignty reside in its power to negotiate relational conduct, whereby "agreed principles of rightful entitlement and action emerge *in situ* from justly negotiated practices of political coexistence".[30] Hence, the "the best defence of sovereignty is its practical exercise".[31] In this sense, Rickard is succinct; for her, sovereignty is action.[32]

If sovereignty is action—a practical exercise—, then for Rickard visual sovereignty is "one of the most dominant expressions of self-determination".[33] If, as Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith has argued, "Indigenous communities have struggled since colonization to be able to exercise what is a fundamental right, that is, to represent ourselves",[34] then Rickard proposes an intellectual, cultural, artistic and visual expansion of the concept of sovereignty.[35] For her, arts practice, art criticism, and visual theory can facilitate intersectionality across indigeneity, colonization and decolonization, and sovereignty towards an emancipatory policy that resituates traditional subjects from a frozen past to a dynamic present. As a central strategy for decolonization, visual

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[28] Rickard, Diversifying Sovereignty, 81-82.
[29] Cited in Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*, xxii.
[30] Bignall et al, Three Ecosophies, 469.
[31] Cornell and Kalt (2007: 30) cited in Bignall et al, Three Ecosophies, 469.
[32] Rickard, Diversifying Sovereignty, 81.
[33] Rickard, Diversifying Sovereignty, 82.
[34] Cited in Rickard, Diversifying Sovereignty, 83.
[35] Rickard, Diversifying Sovereignty, 82.

sovereignty "would serve as an overarching concept for interpreting Indigeneity, the interconnected space of the colonial gaze, and deconstruction of the colonizing image or text".[36]

As non-Indigenous academics in the field of global art history, we hope to have eschewed the "blind romanticism with indigenous knowledge [or] the poisonous paternalism characterized by a form of 'charitable racism'" that Donald Macedo warns us of.[37] Rather, it is our intent to have contributed, through this issue and the international conference on indigenous epistemologies and the artistic imagination, to a "greater appreciation by non-Indigenous society of Indigenous knowledge as a valuable contribution to world knowledge [that] can lead to productive cross-cultural philosophical alliances".[38] In this sense, it is our hope that this volume will contribute to the formation of strategic alliances among subject positions "in shared resistance to the damaging effects of capitalist anthropocentrism". [39]

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[36] Rickard, Diversifying Sovereignty, 83.
[37] Macedo, Donald. (1999). Preface: Decolonizing Indigenous Knowledge. In Semali, Ladislaus M. and Kincheloe, Joe L. (Eds.). *What Is Indigenous Knowledge? Voices from the Academy* (xi-xvi). New York and London: Taylor & Francis, xi.
[38] Bignall *et al*, Three Ecosophies, 474.
[39] Bignall *et al*, Three Ecosophies, 457.

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