

DOCUMENT IN PROGRESS

CENTRE FOR POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES, GOLDSMITHS  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON & MATADERO MADRID

# Decolonizing knowledge and aesthetics

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OF CRITICISM IN A  
CHANGING WORLD

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## INTRODUCTION

Matadero Madrid and the Centre for Postcolonial Studies at Goldsmiths University of London promote a new project of investigation that aims to join together a theoretical framework of Postcolonial analysis with Art practice today. A transdisciplinary and international venture in which the University and the Contemporary Art Centre join together in constructing an investigation group that can analyze the world from a new critical perspective and whose members can put this approach into practice in their artistic routine.

We are looking for individuals related to the local Madrilenian artistic community who are interested in the links between Social Sciences and Art, and who are willing to compromise in a group of investigation throughout two years. In exchange, we offer a solid theoretical approach supported by different professionals of the Centre of Postcolonial Studies at Goldsmiths University of London, with the opportunity of participating in their lectures in Madrid as well as taking part of a future exchange programme in London. We also offer the occasion of building a platform of collective learning with the possibility of doing a public presentation of the outcomes of this acquired knowledge throughout a series of open lectures, symposiums or exhibitions taking place in Matadero Madrid.

This investigation group is part of a wider programme of collective investigation and learning promoted and / or hosted by Matadero and working in fields such as Urbanism, Live Arts, Education and Public Art. These groups will have access to a shared investigation space of 155 sq. metres, the possibility of using Matadero's residency programme to invite other investigators and El Ranchito's working spaces, and access to an online publication. Goldsmiths University also offers to this group access to its resources like publications, a residency programme and working studios.

The programme will take part in three phases. **1.** A series of lectures taking place in Matadero Madrid, between the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October and the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 2012. **2.** The building of the group and its investigation with the use of the tools offered by Matadero Madrid and Goldsmiths University, between November 2012 and January 2014. **3.** A public presentation in February- March 2014.

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

Our programme has been devised with three ends in view:

A) Research Objectives: our aim is to place human and social scientific knowledge production on the same level as artistic research and practice. We want to develop a form of work in which each of these two elements inform and draw inspiration from the other. To this end, we have devised a programme of events that facilitates theoretical encounters between scholars of the human sciences, with an overlapping set of discussions with artists, policy makers and cultural entrepreneurs, and, that also generates art works and events. The aim is to require the participants to engage in unfamiliar settings, with the idea that they bring their own disciplinary tools to the situation, applying them to novel contexts of research and interaction. In that sense it is crucial to the success of this project that the different practitioners are taken out of their comfort zones and made to traverse across different disciplinary boundaries.

B) Young Researchers: the aim is to involve younger researchers and to foster knowledge transfer. Built into our project is the promotion of academic exchanges between postgraduate students and young researchers, and senior scholars and art practitioners. Our two host institutions (Goldsmiths, University of London and Matadero Madrid) are particularly well set up for interaction of this nature.

C) Dissemination of research: we plan to disseminate the fruits of our research through four media: 1) publications 2) web-based content distribution and 3) exhibitions and 4) catalogue that reflect the preoccupations of our research agenda, in partnership with institutions from both Spain and the United Kingdom.

In summary we seek to a) create a community of researchers engaged in collaboration and conversation b) foster a new generation of artists and scholars that in the future will advance (and modify) the goals set for this project, and c) to reach out to a wider community, including those in charge of cultural policy and cultural industries.

The project is proposed initially in two phases, one theoretical and one practical. The theoretical part is to provide an overview of recent postcolonial theory and its relationship with different disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. It is about encouraging the creation of working groups in different areas that have to do with

programming and the spirit of Matadero Madrid as a centre of contemporary culture. This project touches on the relationship between aesthetics and politics, studies of the city, and most current art practices in relation to postcolonial practices.

In its practical aspect, both institutions encourage artists, theorists and cultural practitioners to translate into specific research projects arising from the working groups. These projects can take the form of publications, lectures, public meetings, residency programmes or exhibitions that will be defined after the theoretical part is completed.

## **POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

We live in a world marked by cross-cultural interaction and integration. Our era is one in which (legal and informal) markets are operating with a worldwide reach, increasingly oblivious to national and regional boundaries. Moreover, it is a time of constant traveling, substantial migratory fluxes, and widespread interdependency. From the clothes we wear to the films we watch, through to the people we Skype, the lives we live are global, fast and unfamiliar. Moreover, the growth of interlinked digitalized financial markets, of cultural products that in a few days achieve transnational following, and of brands with worldwide recognition, are closely linked to new or transformed forms of class, religious and cultural tensions, that sometimes erupt into open conflicts.

This landscape should be contextualized within a world-historical shift in economic gravity, with the emergence of the Global South as an economic and political force to be reckoned with in the international arena. All of these factors have proven to be challenging and disconcerting. For the West, this shift in the tectonic plates of society has resulted not only in a transformation of the international scene but also in a changing academy. New concepts have taken center stage (globalization, cosmopolitanism, hybridity, etc); new disciplines established (Media and Communications, Cultural Studies, Visual Cultures, etc); new approaches to

knowledge developed (deconstruction, postcolonialism, Actor-Network theory, second order cybernetics, emergence and complexity theories etc); new efforts to define our epoch in relation to unsettling historical events (postmodernity, hypermodernity, altermodernity, transmodernity) and the attempts to attune ideas with long historical traditions (universalism, enlightenment, rule of law, civil society, the common) to novel situations. With these philosophical frameworks and epistemological tools, the humanities and social sciences attempt to understand and steer this brave new world of ours.

Herein lies the paradox that we want to tackle throughout this two-year project. Even as the world becomes more global, and the axis of economic and political power shifts (unevenly) from north America and Europe to parts of Asia and Latin America, the knowledge through which we seek to understand and sometimes direct these changes, and seek to understand the emerging historical configurations is a knowledge produced within the modern human sciences- sciences that were born in Europe. That is, the

knowledges through which we seek to apprehend changes that are characterized by their global scope and reach are nonetheless knowledges that derive from, and were produced in a specifically European setting.

Of course, we are accustomed to thinking that despite their European 'provenance', the human sciences are 'universal' (Wallerstein et al,1996). The great sociologist Max Weber once wrote that explanations in the social sciences aimed to be acknowledged as correct 'even by a Chinese'. For a long historical period, that claim was not seriously contested, not even by the anti-colonial movements which sought to overthrow Western rule; for the most part, these movements sought the knowledge which they presumed to be the source of Western power and prosperity for their own nations and peoples, and they fought under the banners of liberty, equality, fraternity, the right to self-determination, democracy and socialism. Furthermore, they sought to understand their own societies and their own struggles in and through terms and concepts borrowed from the modern human sciences. Thus Mao Zedong studied China through the lenses of Marxism, a philosophy borne in and of the capitalist West; B.R. Ambedkar, the great untouchable leader and author of independent India's constitution, studied at Columbia University in New York and applied the sociology he learnt to understand the causes and cure for the institutions of caste and untouchability. In the last two decades of the 20th century, the leaders in charge of guiding Latin American into a democratic era were usually trained in neoclassical macroeconomics in American and British universities, and tried to square the regulatory and productive modes of their own countries into the model learnt abroad. Where the categories of the modern human sciences did not 'fit' the realities of their societies, these figures and many others creatively adapted them to the societies to which they were being applied, but from whose history they did not derive. The knowledge formalized in the human sciences thus became increasingly global, ironically, in part through the efforts of anti-colonial movements, and later postcolonial states. The autochthonous knowledges of the non-western world were devalued, and only survive in the quotidian, where they are often subject to the finger-wagging strictures of the postcolonial state, and of elites who scold their fellow citizens for their 'backward' and 'superstitious' views- scold them for not becoming fully 'modern'. Thus today, the only knowledge, which counts as 'respectable' or 'scientific', whether the site of its production is London or Madrid, Berlin, Beijing or

Mexico City, Delhi or Tokyo, is the knowledge produced within the modern human sciences.

It would seem then, that any embarrassment that may have been warranted by the paradox described above is unnecessary. What may once have been 'European' knowledge today is endorsed and used by (at the very least) the elites of all countries. The claims of the human sciences to universality have been vindicated by the fact they have been globalized.

But... just at the moment of the victory of the free market, democracy and the West turned out to be closely followed by economic crises with unpredictable consequences, by sustained challenges to free-market orthodoxies, and by the rise to prominence of non-Western countries. In other words, at the very moment when the universality of the human sciences seemed almost self-evident, doubts and self-questioning have emerged and become recurring themes today. Many have pointed out that the human sciences have dealt with the difference of the non-West through exclusion, or else through assimilation and homogenization. An example of the former is that non-Western intellectual traditions are often simply effaced, as in the tradition of political theory that runs from 'Plato to NATO', without any reference to non-Western intellectual traditions. An example of the latter is that, in attempting to 'include' non-Western traditions, they are assumed to be different variants of Western phenomenon- thus alongside Plato there is a Confucius, with the assumption that Confucianism will reveal itself in a mode that is similarly 'reasoned' textually and philosophically. The first move assumes that the Western intellectual tradition is all that needs to be attended to; the second assumes that non-Western traditions are variations on a western theme, thus homogenizing radically different cosmologies with disregard for their specific conditions of emergence, operation, and way of being.

In short, in recent times the assumption of the universality of the human sciences has come under sustained questioning. Some have traced the European (and often, Christian) genealogy of the core categories of the modern human sciences and wondered whether they do in fact transcend the historical and cultural circumstances of their emergence- whether they are in fact 'universal'. Chakrabarty, for instance, has suggested that the very concepts through which explanations in the human sciences are fashioned have genealogies "which go deep into the intellectual and even

theological traditions of Europe” (Chakrabarty, 2000, 4), and that while this does not in and of itself mean that they are ‘merely’ European and provincial, it does mean that the analytical categories which the social sciences presume to be universal (including capital, state, individual, civil society and so on) may not in fact transcend the European history from which they originate. Others have argued that knowledge is connected to power, and that the triumph (and global reach) of the modern social sciences is a consequence, not of their intellectual superiority, but of the force of arms; modern knowledge superseded the indigenous knowledges of the non-West not because it was superior, but because it was allied with colonialism. The current dominance of this knowledge, it has been observed, is thus also an exercise of power, one that maintains the power of the First world (or ‘core’ countries) over the Third world (or the countries of the periphery), and of the elites in the latter over their own people (Gonzalez Casanova, 2004; Quijano, 2002). Others still, have suggested the need to experiment with the ‘preservation’ and invigoration of indigenous knowledges that hitherto had usually been condemned as mythic, superstitious, and more generally, untrue.

Interestingly enough, the realm of art is in the midst of a rather similar situation. A profound self-questioning is starting to shake artistic practice and theory. The sustained pressures to reconcile the obligation of being contemporary in relation to homogenizing artistic discourses, and the aim of asserting regional difference, have obliged artists and art theorists to question the very foundations on which they operate. In other words: an aesthetic that until fairly recently seemed to rest on self-evident principles is starting to be seriously put into question. There is growing awareness that the canons of perception that regulate the increasingly global art world (production, criticism, exhibition, commercialization...) had its “point of origination” in Europe, and that it was from there that it was disseminated to the rest of the world. Walter Mignolo, for example, traces a genealogy that distinguished “aesthesia” as a concept that revolves around ideas like “sensation”, “process of perception”, “sensibility and taste”, and which in the 18th Century was appropriated by modern European thought and actualized as “aesthetics”. From that point onwards the concept was restricted and would come to signify a “sense of the beautiful and sublime”. Mignolo argues that in this way aesthetics was born as philosophy of art, critical judgment and artistic practice, but above all as a set of regulations defining what is considered art according to a canon sanctioned by

western institutions and practices: “The mutation of the aiesthesis into aesthetics laid the foundation for the construction of its own history, and for the devaluation of all aesthetic experience that had not been conceptualized in the terms that Europe conceptualized its own and regional sensorial experience.” (Mignolo, 2010: 14)

For many artists coming from the South, and for diasporic communities in Europe and north America, it is imperative to question this concept of the ‘aesthetic’ and to return to ‘aiesthesis’, that is to say to the artistic production that creates and motivates subjectivities, without limiting aesthetics to only the beautiful and the sublime. Perhaps more importantly, this position asserts that instead of talking about one accepted notion of aesthetics, we should talk about aesthetics in the plural, recognizing that artistic practices come from different histories and respond to different impulses and sensibilities.

It is at this juncture that we seek to intervene. The project we propose is one that will include a theoretical and philosophical reflection on the adequacy of the European-born human sciences and artistic practices in an age of globalization. What we are calling for here is not a form of nativism: it is important to emphasize that in seeking to ‘problematize’ the modern human sciences’ and equivalent Western aesthetic understandings, we do not seek to replace it with a Chinese human science, an Indian human science or African or South American art, and so on, for at least two reasons: the globalization of the western human sciences and western artistic practices are too advanced for there to be a recoverable ‘outside’; and in any case, the participants in this project are not Hindu pundits or authors of eight-legged essays, but scholars trained within the human sciences and the history of western aesthetic precepts. How then, to pose critical questions of this knowledge, if ‘stepping outside’ of it is not possible? Part of the answer is to be reflexive about this knowledge in a systematic way, via a theoretical reflection on the possibilities and limits to the human sciences and artistic practices when they are applied to the non-West. The second part of the answer lies in recognizing that the distinction between ‘knowledge’ and ‘the aesthetic’ is internal to western knowledge; it is out of the separation between knowledge of the natural world, the moral world (or the domain of human freedom), and the subjective realm of aesthetic expression that the distinctions between the natural, human and aesthetic sciences were born (as embodied, for instance, in Kant’s three critiques). Such a sharp separation between knowledge and art, between the ‘objective’ and the ‘subjective’, is

not a feature of all non-western knowledges. Bringing human sciences which seek knowledge 'of' the world into conversation with aesthetic practices and products is thus already to start to problematize the ways in which the human sciences (and aesthetics) are separated into two separate domains, and to question the universality of the human sciences and of aesthetic products and practices.

The individuals in the network we have assembled to this end have been participants and contributors to the debates alluded to in the above paragraph. Working hitherto, for the most part, individually, they now seek to work collaboratively and in so doing, to establish a research community engaged in similar or overlapping enquiries, such that through systematic collaboration and exchange of views, the impact of the network will be more than the sum of its individual parts. The network includes scholars from diverse disciplines in the human sciences who have specialized knowledge of non-Western countries (eg. Seth on India, Carballo on Latin America, Dutton on China, Pandey on Japan). Rather than being simply non-Western area specialists, they use their specialist knowledge to ask broader philosophical questions about the possibilities and difficulties of using the human sciences and the idea of 'aesthetics' to understand the non-Western world and its active relation with the west. It also includes scholars and artists who have made the relation between the non-Western and the western world, and the separation between the aesthetic and knowledges 'of' the world, central to their reflections and their art practice. Most of the scholars and artists are based in the UK or Spain, two countries which have made more than their share of contributions to the human sciences and the arts, both of which were formerly colonial powers, and are today indelibly marked by diasporic populations which are seeking to engage in processes of recognition and dialogue through knowledge production and artistic and cultural expression.

## **References**

Wallerstein, Immanuel, et al., *Open the Social Sciences* [Report of the Gulbenkian Commission], Stanford University Press, 1996.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press, 2000.

Mignolo, Walter, "Aiesthesis Decolonial", Calle 14 Vol. 4 No. 4 2010.

Gonzalez Casanova, Las Nuevas Ciencias y las Humanidades: de la Academia a la Política. Anthropos Editorial-IIS UNAM, 2004.

Quijano, Anibal, "El regreso al futuro y las cuestiones del conocimiento" in Catherine Walsh, Freya Schiwy and Santiago Castro Gomez (editors), Indisciplinar las ciencias sociales: Geopolíticas del conocimiento y colonialidad del poder (Perspectivas desde lo andino). Quito: Abya-Yala-Universidad Andina Simon Bolivar, 2002.

## **MATADERO MADRID. SUSTAINABLE ART PRACTICES**

Matadero Madrid is a Contemporary Art Centre situated in the South of Spain's capital city, in the margins of the River Manzanares. What used to be a slaughterhouse is now part of a big city park that has grown where, only four years ago, there was a four rail motorway. What can be understood as a City of Arts of 80.000 sq. metres is composed of different institutions and devoted to disciplines such as Cinema, Literature, Live Arts, Music, Design and Visual Arts. The collaboration between Goldsmiths University and Matadero Madrid, takes place within the Visual Arts Department. An initiative that is hosted in a 5.000 sq. metre hall and inside a 800 sq. metre space devoted to site-specific interventions.

We believe that Art and Culture is nowadays inserted in a double context of rapid change. The first motivated by the profound socio-economical crisis, and the second, accelerated by globalization and digitalization. Both changes are originating new ways in which art is produced and exhibited.

Within this context, the main interest of a public institution like Matadero is to tackle these challenges and reflect on the role that Art and Culture has in today's society being more responsible, consistent and sustainable. Sustainability understood as restating our hypothesis in the light of the new social condition. To attempt the new problems we must seek innovative solutions, and for this reason, we must not be afraid of experimentation, of the trial and error method or of failure, like in the Social Sciences.

Sustainability and experimentation are, at the end, contained in a third main interest of Matadero: context specificity. And it is the relationship with our context what makes our institution go round.

For the Ancient Greeks, crisis (*krisis*) is *the power of distinguishing*, of making decisions. And it is within this epistemology that we want to understand the radical changes we are living: as the perfect context to take innovative elections.

It is within this framework that we believe Art must go hand in hand with Social Sciences: in order to envision more sustainable and context specific ways of producing and exhibiting art. To share an interpretation of what is happening in the light of a decolonial perspective is one of the main motivations for this collaboration.

It would seem that nowadays it is more important for the cultural institution to employ its resources in thinking and reflecting than in producing a standard programme. But contrary to the traditional individual production of knowledge that takes place within the curatorial realm, we believe that the reflections produced within a public institution, must be made public.

We are recently seeing different initiatives within the Art world that deal with these issues: 13 Documenta in Kassel, the 2012 Berlin Biennale or the Wide Open School at the Hayward Gallery in London, just to mention three examples. Nevertheless, we believe that citizenry, science and even the business world, is ahead of Art in dealing with these new challenges.

This is why we are seeking new methodologies to work within the institution. One of them is the birth of a series of working teams, or investigation groups researching in different topics: Architecture and the construction of the city, Live Arts in the local context, Disruptive and regenerating educational tools and Decolonial Aesthetics. These groups are developing their own theoretical framework which can be participated by the public through lectures, publications, discussions, workshops and exhibitions. And they are inserted in the everyday programme of the cultural centre. Theory and Practice are put together and made public. Of course, the Department of Postcolonial Studies of Goldsmiths University is our perfect ally.

We believe that these methodologies impose an innovative and sustainable model for both the public institution and society. This methodology is based on the idea of exchange of resources more than in the payment of a fee. Exchange of institutional resources for collective knowledge or exchange between Theory –of and Academic environment- and Practice –of the Cultural Institution-. We believe that the public will learn from this research group as much as the two institutions taking part on this venture.

## **THE FIRST THEORETICAL ENCOUNTERS**

### **Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> October: 5 to 6.30 pm**

-Welcome and introduction to the project

**Mrs. Dolores Galindo** (Visiting Researcher at the Centre of Postcolonial Studies, Goldsmiths University of London)

**Mrs. Manuela Villa** (Art Programme Director, Matadero Madrid)

### **Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> October: 4 to 8 pm**

- Once I was Blind but now I can See: Modernity and the Social Sciences

**Professor Sanjay Seth** (<http://www.gold.ac.uk/politics/staff/seth/>)

- Reading Japan Through Manga and Anime

**Dr Rajyashree Pandey** (<http://www.gold.ac.uk/politics/staff/pandey/>)

### **Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> November: 4 to 8 pm**

- Visceral Cosmopolitanism: from Alterity to Mere Difference

**Professor Emeritus Mica Nava** (<http://www.uel.ac.uk/adi/staff/micanava/>)

- Decolonizing Othello: Challenging the Canon, Changing the Conversation

**Mr Patrice Naiambana** (<http://www.tribalsoularts.com/our-people>)

### **Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> November \*: 4 to 8 pm**

- Rethinking Latin America: Power, Politics and Ideas

**Mr. Francisco Carballo** ([\*biography included in Apendix 1.Abstracts\*](#))

- Latin America's Epistemic Break: Towards a Decolonial Aesthetics

**Mrs. Dolores Galindo** (<http://doloresgalindo.wordpress.com/>)

### **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> November: 4 to 8 pm**

- Colonial Spaces/Postcolonial Encounters: Maps and Counter-Map

**Dr David L. Martin** (<http://www.gold.ac.uk/politics/staff/davidlmartin/>)

- Curious, serendipitous and paradoxical: The many sided lives of the Mexican silver dollar

**Professor Michael Dutton** (<http://www.gold.ac.uk/politics/staff/dutton/>)

\* All lectures will be in English, except for the ones on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November, which will be delivered in Spanish.

PLEASE, FIND THE ABSTRACTS OF THE LECTURES IN THE APPENDIX. A READING BOOK WILL BE AVAILABLE AT MATADERO FROM THE 15<sup>TH</sup> OF SEPTEMBER.

## APPENDIX 1. ABSTRACTS

### **Once I was Blind but now I can see: Modernity and the Social Sciences**

Sanjay Seth

Where does our knowledge - the knowledge with which we 'do' science and social science, produce art, and interact with each other - come from? Like all knowledges, it has an origin in a particular time and place. The place is Europe. The time is the early modern period, when "a conceptual and epistemic revolution took place which was coterminous with the formation of the political and technological practices that we have come to associate with the world of modernity." As modern knowledge emerged and came to be defined through a critique of scholastic, other medieval, and Renaissance knowledges, all of these were condemned for confusing humans with their world- for attributing to the world a meaning and purpose which in fact belongs to us, and which we have projected onto it. One of the defining features of modern knowledge, then, was that it presumed a sharp distinction between subject and object, knower and known. It further assumed that the world was divided between a disenchanted nature, which was to be understood in terms of laws and regularities, and a newly discovered object called society, which was a realm of meanings, purposes and ends. It also reversed the order between god(s) and men, presuming that gods were to be explained in terms of men, rather than men in terms of gods.

These presuppositions or "a priori decisions about how we understand the social world to be constituted," were once novel, and were contested. But they have long since been naturalised, and have come to be conceived not as the presumptions necessary to a particular mode of thinking, but as necessary to thinking *tout court*. Moreover, this knowledge is global- it has not only superseded the pre-modern knowledges of Europe, but also the autochthonous knowledges of the non-western world. Once novel and engaged in battle with other knowledges, this knowledge today has triumphantly swept away all before it. Other knowledges have been devalued and survive, where they survive- as in the case of the examples with which I began- in the quotidian, where they

are often subject to the finger-wagging strictures of the postcolonial state which scolds its citizens for their 'backward' views.

My questions I would like to pursue in this paper/seminar are very direct, if not simple, ones: how and why is it that we assume that modern knowledge is universal, despite its European genealogy and its historically recent provenance? And, what warrant do we have for considering this superior to the pre-modern knowledges of the West, and the autochthonous knowledges of the non-West? Are we, in short, right to assume that modern Western knowledge transcends the circumstances of its historical and geographical emergence and thus that the social sciences are 'true' for everyone- even though to do so is to privilege the modern and the western, over the pre-modern and the non-Western?

### **Readings**

Sanjay Seth, "Crítica de la razón (moderna, Occidental) impure", *Tabula Rasa*, No. 14 (2011), 31-54.

Sanjay Seth, "Historical Sociology and Postcolonial Theory: Two Strategies for Challenging Eurocentrism", *International Political Sociology*, 3:3 (September 2009), 334-38.

Sanjay Seth, "Reason or Reasoning? Clio or Siva?" *Social Text*, No. 78 (2004), pp. 85-101.

Stuart Hall, "When Was 'The Post-Colonial': Thinking at the Limit", in I. Chambers and L. Curti (eds), *The Post-Colonial Question* (Routledge 1996),

Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press 2000.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts", *Postcolonial Studies*, 1:1 (1998), 15-29.

Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, University of Michigan Press, 2 edition 2003

## **Imagi(ni)ng the Political in Japanese manga and anime**

Dr Rajyashree Pandey

Japanese manga (“comic books”) and animation (anime), many of which are inspired by manga, form the perfect site for an exploration of the politics of postcolonialism and gender, and Japan’s purported postmodern condition. This is what this presentation seeks to explore.

Japan has a particularly complex history, that of a country, which was at once subject to the forces of colonialism (albeit indirectly) whilst at the same time embracing the role of aggressive coloniser. The absence of any serious engagement in conventional political discourse with this Janus faced identity of Japan does not mean, however, that this issue has no place in popular consciousness. For, it is in the fictive and often apocalyptic visions of manga and anime, that we find the resurfacing of politics, which has otherwise seemingly been excised from the national imagination.

Likewise, whilst feminism and the debates it has generated in the West have a relatively muted presence in Japanese public discourse, it is in the fictional world of manga and anime that we find narratives, which challenge the gender alignments that are central to heteronormativity. For these texts reveal a highly imaginative reconfiguration of what it means to be male and female, presenting us with genres in which, for example, young girls are presented as desiring subjects, who turn their gaze on to young androgynous males engaged in romantic liaisons with each other. It is through the focus on the body as performance that these texts produce ‘queering’ effects, thereby challenging sex and gender as fixed and immutable categories.

Another aspect of manga and anime is the way in which they have been read as emblematic of Japan’s postmodern condition. Such a reading is in part enabled by Japan’s religious tradition, and it is by examining that history that we can see how a different way of seeing the self, the body, the animal world, death and so dovetails with our contemporary postmodern moment. Japan has had a long tradition of monochrome graphic art, which was an important accompaniment to humorous, erotic, grotesque or supernatural tales. Manga draw freely on formalistic elements from traditional Japanese art. But it is not only the formal elements from the past, but also traditional

ways of making sense of the world that resurface in these works, where the past is always part of the present and the future. These are the themes that are at the heart of this paper.

**Readings (those in asterix to be included in coursepack)**

Frederik Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*, Berkeley, California : Stonebridge Press, 1996.

\*Rajyashree Pandey, “Medieval Genealogies of Manga Horror”, in Mark MacWilliams ed., *Japanese Visual Culture*, M.E Sharpe, 2008, pp. 219-237.

Hiroshi Yamanaka, “The Utopian ‘Power to Live’ : The Miyazaki Phenomenon”, in Mark MacWilliams ed., *Japanese Visual Culture*, M.E Sharpe, 2008, pp. 237-256.

\*Mark McLelland, “ ‘The beautiful boy’ in Japanese girls’ manga, in Toni Johnson-Woods ed., *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, New York: Continuum, 2010.

\*Nicola Liscutin, “Surfing the Neo- Nationalist Wave: A Case Study of Manga Kenkanryu”, in Chris Berry, Nicola Liscutin, and Jonathan D. Mackintosh eds., *Cultural Studies and Cultural Industries in Northeast Asia: What a Difference a Region Makes*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009, 171-195.

## **Visceral Cosmopolitanism: from Alterity to Mere Difference**

Prof. Mica Nava

Mica Nava will discuss some of the conceptual and historical issues raised in her book *Visceral Cosmopolitanism: Gender, Culture and the Normalisation of Difference* and in the shorter readings listed below. This focuses mainly on the UK twentieth century metropolitan experience and is concerned with cosmopolitanism as a 'structure of feeling' -- as an empathetic, inclusive and sometimes eroticised range of feelings and attitudes towards others, otherness and the foreign -- which finds expression in vernacular and domestic forms as well as in commerce, social science and the arts.

The paper will track changes in this cosmopolitan mood from a counter culture of modernity a century ago to part of quotidian life today -- hence the shift from 'alterity' to 'mere' difference, to the normalisation of difference, in contemporary urban UK culture. In the process the paper will draw attention to the crucial part played by women in the historical formation of the present. Similarly it will highlight the unexpected influence of twentieth century British class relations on the relative diminution in the significance of epidermal difference. The paper will also look at the geopolitical and historical specificity of the meanings of race and difference in UK and contrast these with other similar contexts in Europe and the Americas.

### **References:**

Nava, Mica (2002) 'Cosmopolitan Modernity: Everyday Imaginaries and the Register of Difference', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 19 (1-2): 81-99.

Nava, Mica (2010) 'Domestic Cosmopolitanism and Structures of Feeling: The Specificity of London' in *English and Portuguese (as 'Cosmopolitismo Doméstico e Estruturas Afetivas: a Especificidade de Londres')*, Tradução Fábio Abreu de Queiroz) in *V!RUS*, São Carlos, n.4, dez. 2010, Brazil:

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## **Rethinking Latin America: Power, Politics and Ideas**

Francisco Carballo

The aim of this seminar is to provide participants with an understanding of the processes, actors and ideas that are shaping political practices and debates in today's Latin America. The last twenty years have seen significant changes in the region, and in this course students examine these:

Latin America has seen severe crisis as well as robust economic expansion in recent times. Some countries in the area are starting to be significant players in the global stage.

Strong democratic movements have run parallel to renewed authoritarian tendencies.

A fast paced modernization has been accompanied by a persistent questioning of the foundations that legitimize the project of modernity.

The expansion of productive forces is often accompanied by strong suspicions about the costs of economic and social development.

Political events of decisively anti-systemic character ended up feeding innovative legal frameworks and helped to foster the consolidation of state institutions.

The scope of political actors has widened to include groups that up until recently were excluded from the political arena. Among these new protagonists we should mention: indigenous people, afro-descendants, women and a vast array of religious based collectives that put into question long standing ideas of racial equality, gender roles, cultural heritage and knowledge.

This seminar is designed to address all of these issues, paying particular attention to ideas and practices that contested what in the early 1990's seemed to be the unsurpassable horizon of neoliberalism. We will analyze the rediscovery of colonialism for contemporary political language. We will chart the most common arguments used to question the paradigms of modernity and development. We will investigate the different

groups that are carving a niche for themselves in the Latin American political landscape.

**Readings:**

Coronil, Fernando . 2007 "El Estado de América Latina y sus Estados", NUEVA SOCIEDAD, No 210, julio-agosto

Duara, Prasenjit. 2003. Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then. Rewriting Histories. London: Routledge.

Escobar, Arturo. "Beyond the Third World: Imperial Globality, Global Coloniality and Anti-Globalisation Social Movements." *Third World Quarterly* 25.1 (2004): 207–230.

Tapia, Luis. 2008. Política Salvaje. CLACSO Coediciones La Paz: CLACSO, Muela del Diablo, Comunas, Diciembre.

**Biography (*in Spanish*):**

Francisco Carballo, sociólogo mexicano. Es investigador del Centro de Estudios Poscoloniales de Goldsmiths, University of London, profesor invitado en Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México y asesor cultural del Museo del Chopo de la misma universidad. Entre sus investigaciones recientes destaca su trabajo en el barrio de Tepito en la Ciudad de México y la coordinación de un proyecto colectivo sobre la escena Punk y Heavy Metal en el México de los años setentas y ochentas del siglo XX. Entre sus publicaciones recientes destaca un volumen conmemorativo del treinta aniversario de *Todo lo sólido se desvanece en el aire* de Marshall Berman. Con Walter Dignolo prepara un par de títulos que se publicarán en Argentina y México, respectivamente, en el otoño del 2012.

## **Latin America's Epistemic Break: Towards a Decolonial Aesthetics**

Dolores Galindo

Until recent decades, non-Western contemporary art referred to as 'peripheral art' was destined for ethnographic and historical museums, as if the contemporary and postmodern project limited all that that was foreign to a restricted and exclusive field. In its eagerness to classify, the labels of 'primitivism' and 'naivety' placed by the West on aesthetics that were foreign to the modernizing progress, seemed to condemn the countries considered Third World to be forgotten, underestimating their cultural creation and their creators, with the exception of very few names, generally formed of the European canons, who returned to their countries of origin to develop their work. Therefore, the grand archetypes of modern art appeared to exclude the representation of societies that, according to the continental rules, they were located in the caboose of the train of modernity. They were busy reconstructing their identity, an identity negated and ignored by the continued colonial impositions, since despite the status of independence that had been achieved by the ex-colonies, the hegemonic practices seemed to continue.

The aesthetic theories of the 20th and 21st Centuries appear to be characterized by their dialogue with politics and the dominant critical thought. While the West discusses the surmounting of Postmodernity and the birth of a 'Altermodern' new aesthetic, the decolonial critique reaffirms the existence of an aesthetic of its own, named 'Decolonial Aesthetics'. This new artistic expressions would be the answer of the different countries that today suffer the legacy of a colonial past. The 'Decolonial Option' challenges the dominant Euro-American discourses in order to signal the imposition of its procedures. The development of this option, coming from the Latin American school, has been debated firstly in academic fields as distinct as anthropology, semiology and sociology, culminating in the recognition of a new aesthetic, characterized as exploring the confusion created by historical colonialism and its continuities, as well as reflecting the multiple forms of imposition and exclusion inflicted by colonisers.

The intention of this paper is to analyse the most significant concepts of the 'Decolonial Option' put forward by Walter Dignolo, as well as its application in the arena of aesthetics, to appreciate the relevance of the emergent 'Decolonial Aesthetics'.

**Readings:**

– Castro-Gómez, S. and Grosfoguel, R. 2007. *El Giro Decolonial*.

*Reflexiones para una Diversidad Epistémica más allá del Capitalismo*. 10-21. Bogotá: Instituto-Pensar-Siglo del Hombre Editores. Available from:

<http://olverquijanov.jimdo.com/documentos-materiales-postgrado/>

- Mignolo, W. 2008. La Opción Descolonial. *Letral. Electronic Journal of Transatlantic Studies*. N. 1, 4-22. Available from:

[http://www.proyectoletral.es/revista/autores\\_eng.php#void](http://www.proyectoletral.es/revista/autores_eng.php#void)

- Mignolo, W. 2010. Aesthesis Decolonial. In: *Calle 14*. Vol.4, N.4. Available from: <http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=3231040>

– Villamizar, G. 2011. Debate Altermodernidad - Colonialidad. In: *Esfera Pública Magazine*. 30 July. Available from:

<http://esferapublica.org/nfblog/?p=18027>

## **Colonial Spaces/Postcolonial Encounters: maps and counter-maps**

Dr David L Martin

To this day maps hold unusual fascination: part scientific, part artistic they represent a unique interface between the everyday utility of colonial domination and its more creative expressions. In fact, it has been suggested that maps represent the moment in which western art not only falls prey to colonial ambition, but also the moment when the advancement of western linear perspective becomes itself an expression of power and domination, as perspective spills out from the gilt frames of Renaissance panel paintings to colonise everyday notions of space in its wake.

To this day Spain has been associated with one of the most ambitious and widespread scientific efforts to unify space and time into a global economy with the construction of the Padron Real in the 16th Century. Designed to map the extent of the empire in a single unified spatial representation, the Padron Realis itself a living reminder of the ways in which cartography should be seen not so much as a science of whose end point isthe generation of notions of space; but rather of their opposite - the erasure of indigenous notions of space.

This seminar will explore the unique interface of science and aesthetics as they appear in European cartography, and will seek to lay the groundwork for how we might envisage those notions of indigenous spatiality that were erased by map-making during the colonial encounter. In the end, we will explore the possibility of overcoming this originary wound produced by European aesthetics in the form of the 'counter-map'

### **Readings:**

Mignolo, Walter D. *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995.

Padrón, Ricardo. "Mapping Plus Ultra: Cartography, Space and Hispanic Modernity." *Representations* 79 (2002): 28–60.

De Certeau, Michel. "Spatial Stories" in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, pp. 92-111.

## **Curious, serendipitous and paradoxical: The many sided lives of the Mexican silver dollar**

Prof. Michael Dutton

“In China, the Mexican silver dollar was popularly referred to as the eagle or ying [鷹] coin and in the history of world finance it is legendary.” So says the Chinese numismatist, Zhang Ning (2003, 23) as he explains how the eagle (ying 鷹) on the surface of the coin led to its new Chinese name. Born of Spanish territorial conquest of the New World, and minted from the silver extracted from Mexican, Bolivian and Peruvian mines, this ying or eagle coin was the harbinger of a deterritorialized new world yet to come. In the first half of the 19th century, it became the monetary lingua franca of East Asia, and, with 80% of Mexican mint production being exported it was arguably also the first stirrings of what would later come to be called, globalization.

Buoyed by a passion for silver in East Asia and valorized by the silver standard, the eagle or ying coin was said to be directly responsible for the establishment of the Chinese financial sector and speculation about this coin on Shanghai’s currency markets was said to have been the precursor to our contemporary global futures market.

This so-called ying (鷹) coin is also homonymically linked to the ying of another colonial invasion: yingguo (英国) or Britain. And as one moves from one ying (Eagle 鷹) to another (yingguo 英国 Britain) one moves from the accumulation of silver to the means by which it could be drained away: opium. Yet despite all the varied and curious, serendipitous and paradoxical roles, it would play in its earliest journeys throughout the East, it was its later journey into politics, and the act of defacement that would enable this other journey, that forms the basis of this story.

The eagle coin, stamped with the word ‘worker’ or gong (工) on its left wing, is said to have been the first ever currency minted by the fledgling Soviet base camp of the Chinese Communist Party. This is where the story of the coin takes the passion for

silver into the passions of politics. It is in tracing this movement from one passion to another, that the now forgotten value of the coin as a technology of political worlding is revealed.

**Readings:**

Zhang Ning (2003), The Chinese circulation of the Mexican Silver Dollar, Chinese Money, Number 83, pp 26-30

Li Zengwen (2007), Paying homage at the relics of the Red Army mint, Hebei Finances, 8, 66-7

Michael Dutton (2004) Mango Mao: Infections of the Sacred” Public Culture, Vol. 16, Number 2, 161-186.