Becoming artivists: Artivist Inter-Actions Toward Creative Re-Existence

by

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Abstract

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Artivism is a creative and youthful way of being, thinking, doing and seeing in the world that hinges on an explicit commitment to intervening in personal and collective circumstances toward change. Artivists respond to injustices in our own lives by engaging any, and often multiple, artistic means in a shared effort to *create for a better world*.

But what are the challenges of belonging to a community of artivists while also seeking to become part of an academic community by pursuing a doctoral degree? What does it mean to be an artivist in an academic context premised on individual achievement and dominated by textual modes of expression? And how might artivism be enhanced by the kind of deep and sustained reflection made possible by the privilege of academic study? This dissertation aims to create a conceptual inter-space for the coming together of two worlds apart, that of artivism and academia.

By bringing scholarship to artivism and artivism to scholarship I address two main questions: (1) how can artivism mobilize and legitimize under-represented youth responses to the asymmetrical global conditions that shape our everyday lives? And, (2) how can artivist modes of inter-action and expression offer new responses to the asymmetrical global conditions that shape University life?

When I began my doctoral degree I had recently completed co-research with youth in Uganda. Together we co-designed a series of community murals in response to youth identified concerns including HIV/AIDS and prostitution. My final master of design thesis and accompanying gallery show were well received by my examining committee and the public, yet for me, the

work was unfinished. I had become part of a group of youth interested in creating a sustainable space of resistance. The community has come to be known as *artivists 4 life* and as it turns out, our work is never finished. Thus, I was driven to pursue a doctoral degree through a desire to continue supporting the collective's shared efforts of "creating for a better world" (*artivists 4 life* motto). Yet, through my experiences as a doctoral student I began observing many barriers to engaging in artistic, youth-driven co-research situated in Africa, particularly via the existing framework of graduate study prescribed by the Western University system. Through the observation that certain knowledges and ways of knowing are undermined in the academy, including the artistic, collaborative, youthful and Ugandan/African, my initial objective of doing co-research with *artivits 4 life* was no longer enough. I became obligated to simultaneously re-politicize creative co-research to respond more adequately to the conditions of global coloniality and the unequal power relations it manifests in the academy—across knowledge systems, race, culture, class, gender and other differences.

This co-research is guided by decolonial perspectives including the understanding that our current world order is co-constituted by a colonial logic that serves to divide human beings and societies into *less-than* and *more-than* derivatives through the subjugation of knowledges and subjectivities in relation to their proximity to the hetero-Euro-centric norm. For decolonial thinkers, hope for an egalitarian pluriversal society lies in the struggles of the marginalized, the acceptance of their agency, and the willingness to be guided by their perspectives.

All the pieces of this dissertation embody an artivist consciousness that allows for constant re-adaptation to the broader questions of decolonial struggle that shape the realities of those with whom I collaborate. Circumstances addressed include youth unemployment, sexual exploitation, epistemic racism and the increasing corporatization of academia, particularly as these precarious

conditions impact upon members of *artivists 4 life*, myself inclusive. Artivist inter-actions engage multiple forms of enunciation in the making of murals, comics, performances, workshops, creative writing, and any other creative means necessary to break from the pervasive wiring of global coloniality and the wounds it inflicts upon us. These interventions work to re-conceptualize aesthetics, authorship and knowledge creation/dissemination in order to shift power.

Throughout this dissertation fixed relations prescribed by modernity/coloniality—including the researcher-researched and the student-teacher—are re-imagined through the reconnection of creative practices to collective action. Through creative co-research with Ugandan youth and in one instance with fellow graduate students, I engaged with communities to unveil the mechanisms that sustain asymmetrical relations produced by modernity/coloniality in the places We/I dwell. Focusing on the structures of societal control serve to open new imaginaries for transcending power differentials by moving away from cultural mimicry toward the co-creation of new social formations not yet in existence. I hasten to add that emergent artivist epistemes and actions for such transformation require adjacent spaces to the academic project in order to support the co-creation of more adequate modes of inter-human contact premised on community self-determination. Overall, this dissertation enacts tactics for undoing disciplinary norms and other intellectually colonizing tendencies by allowing creative reflection and artistic action to flourish through an ethical commitment to making visible the invisible.

Preface

The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, for "Artivist Inter-Actions Across Youth Cultures", ID:Pro00019620., November 22, 2012.

Piece 1 of this dissertation, "Youth Artivism in Uganda: Co-Creators of Our Own Becoming" was co-authored with the *artivists 4 life* collective and artivist ally Dr. Carolina Cambre and published as a book chapter in *African Youth Cultures in a Globalized World: Challenges, Agency and Resistance* edited by Ugor and Mawuko-Yevugah (2015). An earlier version of this piece was published by the same authors under the title "Co-Creating with Youth artivists in Uganda: Authors of Our Own Becoming" in a special edition of *Postcolonial Text* edited by Ugor (2013) entitled *Late-Modernity and Agency: Contemporary Youth Cultures in Africa.*

Artivists 4 life, as first authors of this paper, guide a necessary departure from traditional academic writing, creating space for the voices of youth authors. While *artivists 4 life* co-author this piece as leaders and co-founders of the collective using it as an opportunity for creative and critical reflections on their own praxis, I, as project co-founder and advocator, provided coordination support and contributed theoretical frameworks for the writing. Cambre, ally and honorary member of *artivists 4 life*, partnered through ongoing collaboration to build points of theory for her own research on art and social change. The ordering and composing of the manuscript was undertaken by Cambre and I with approval from *artivists 4 life.*

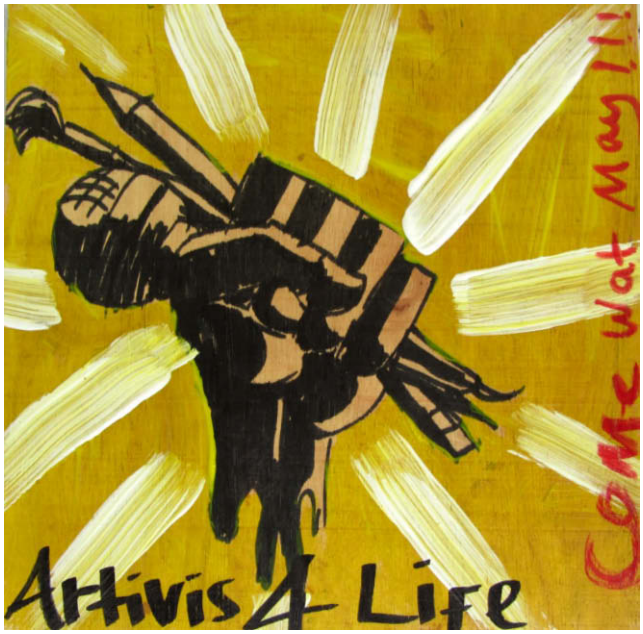
Piece 4, "Aesthetic Disobedience and Other artivist Tactics for Creative and Communal Re-Existence" is co-authored, in a conceptual sense, with *artivists 4 life*. I brought scholarly insights, while *artivists 4 life* contributed as partners in knowledge-making and creative

processes. Our co-authorship brought together *artivists 4 life* creations and knowledges with academic writing through a commitment to collaborative expression that is no longer authorial, but shared and distributed.

Piece 5, "Phenomenological Passports: Youth and Experiences of Place, Mobility and Globalization" was co-authored with fellow *artivists 4 life* members Cathy Mashakalugo and Andrew Jackson Obol and artivist ally Dr. Carolina Cambre. This pieces was published as a chapter in the book *Phenomenology of Youth Cultures and Globalization: Lifeworlds and Surplus Meanings in Changing Times* edited by Poyntz and Kennelly (2015). We four authors engaged through an approach to authorship aimed at de-colonizing our sense-making through a commitment to creative writing where "youth" co-author a collaborative meaning-making process. Mashakalugo and Obol, both Ugandans in their mid-twenties, contributed as partners in knowledge-making and creative processes. Cambre and I, both Canadians over thirty, contributed as students/researchers. This article embodies a commitment to co-authorship as counter-narrative for authorizing youth (and scholars) to think and act otherwise.

I collected data for Piece 6, "Toward Experiencing Academic Mentorship", while taking the course EDSE 611: Phenomenological Research & Writing instructed by Dr. Catherine Adams. This course had course-based ethics approval for working with human participants, under which I collected the lived experience descriptions used in this piece. This piece is forthcoming in the journal *Phenomenology & Practice* (accepted April 28, 2015).

To all artivists to come …



I thank all of you with whom I have shared these experiences living artivist/academic life. Joining me on this journey you let me into your lives, sharing your wisdom, creativity and courage, giving generously of yourselves. Indeed these pages are lined with traces of you. Becoming a part of me, I owe who I am becoming, to you.

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Introduction to all the Pieces-in-the-Making

Leslie Robinson

I am where I think and do.

—Mignolo, 2011a

I am because we are.

—Teffo, 1998, Ubuntu proverb, pp. 3–4

> Artivism … it was a new word but when we learnt that it's just a combination of two words—"art" and "activism"—it was clear that this is something we had been doing for some time. Drawn together by our shared desire to "create for a better world" and attuned to the fact this is something one has to do each day of their life, we came up with the name artivists 4 life. (Conference presentation, Nalubowa, May 30, 2014)

> The artivist merges commitment to freedom and justice with the pen, the lens, the brush, the voice, the body, and the imagination. The artivist knows that to make an observation is to have an obligation. (Asante, 2008, p. 203)

To take up any political stance *obligates*. The *obligation* becomes particularly acute when the position is driven by an artistic synergy and a collective consciousness in a place of dwelling that is inherently adverse to collaboration and equally fraught with fear of anything *too* creative. This dissertation is a collection of *pieces-in-the-making* that together wage a "war of position" (Giroux, 2001, p. 8) to re-politicize artistic research/pedagogy to respond more adequately to the conditions of *global coloniality* (Grosfoguel, 2002; Mignolo, 2000, 2002; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b). The observations are made in and through the process(es) of *our* own becoming(s) vis–à–vis both personal and collective experiences in and around the *artivists 4 life*[1] community of practice in Uganda *and* in relation to university life as it informs the collaborative research. The observations include symptoms of systematic oppression and domination including circumstances of sexual exploitation, epistemic racism and the increasing corporatization of academia, particularly as these precarious conditions impact upon the collective and its members,

[1] *Kampala:* Aturinda A., Kabanda J., Nalubowa A., Namulondo D., Obol A. J, Robinson L., *Kayunga*: Batenga D., Bogere M., Kamoga R., Kayemba A., Kiryagana J., Likicho H., Lubega B., Mashakalugo C., Nanteza E., Nsamba E., Sendege I., Ssebunya I., Ssenkindu J., Ssetimba F., Teopista P., *Mukono:* Jjita M., Kaddu K., Kakome P., Kalungi J., Kisitu J., Kizito J., Kizza H., Mukasa V., Musisi C. N., Muwanga J. J., Najjuko E., Nampanga M.

myself there within. It is through creative and collaborative processes that We/I[2] contend with the reproduction of conditions of oppression and subordination and their impact on our daily lives. Employing a *pluriversity*[3] of forms of enunciation, We/I engage *the pen, the lens, the brush, the voice, the body, and the imagination in* the doing/making of murals, comics, performances, workshops, phenomenological writing, and any other creative means necessary to break from the pervasive wiring of coloniality and the wounds it inflicts upon us. It is in this way that all the pieces of this thesis are enactments of the attitude, the identity, the lens, the stance, the—dare I say—method, that We/I call artivism.

Moving with artivism

This introduction acts as a guide for reading the six main pieces of this doctoral dissertation, which are stand-alone articles. They are numbered to facilitate navigation, however, they are not intended to present a linear or sequential narrative. In this way one could move through the pieces in any order.

I begin this preamble with an elaboration of "The artivist Way", the beating heart of this dissertation. Artivism is variously described in other pieces as well (see pieces 1, 3 and 4). This is necessary because artivism, while fiercely committed to change, is like a sponge: It soaks up new insights and engages new processes in each and every encounter. Artivism is thus introduced in this preamble and re-articulated and re-enacted in other pieces because it is always contingent upon the specific circumstances that call it into action. Indeed artivism is mobile,

[2] I introduce the signifier "We/I" to problematize the contradiction of writing a thesis which is *mine* yet only made possible through my becoming a member of *our* artivist community. I discuss this incommensurable contradiction in detail in Piece 4, "Aesthetic Disobedience and Other artivist Tactics for Creative and Communal Re-Existence".

[3] I use this term in the sense that Mignolo (2011a) does, to point beyond the idea of diversity, toward the possibility of a world where any and all modes of enunciation could interact.

always adapting, always *becoming*. As artivists engage with immanent social issues and the various modes of enunciation they require, artivism re-makes itself. It is for this reason that this dissertation is comprised of pieces-in-the-making: The artivist is always on the move, and the artivist's work it is never finished.

In the second section "Artivism into Academia/Academia into artivism," I expound my positionality—that is, my *being* artivist and academic—from two intersecting yet distinct places of becoming. From the places *I am* and from the understanding that *I am because we are* I situate my contribution to community engaged creative scholarship as an artivist intervention guided by decolonial perspectives. In the third section, "Toward an artivist Research Question," I work to unsettle the academic convention of beginning with and proceeding from a static research question through a preselected methodology. I move toward articulating a thesis question, however, it is only from retrospect—having *already* engaged through processes of *observing* for questions/problems with communities—that I do so. Here, I make explicit the aim of the questioning, which is twofold: to engage in theory-building for guiding more just and equitable ways of living together while advancing the *artivists 4 life* project through concrete manifestations thereof. Finally, in the last section "The-Pieces-in-the-Making" I situate each piece relative to the overarching thesis question.

The artivist Way

Artivism is embodied art that acts in the everyday struggle against oppression (Asante, 2008). A transdisciplinary approach that subverts the division of knowledges into exclusionary domains (Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Sandoval, 2000) artivism moves between multiple perspectives utilizing any available medium to respond to the circumstances that call it into action. In our

current politico-economic moment it may take its point of departure in cases of corruption, social stratification, labor abuse or sexual exploitation, among any other scenario of injustice. In this way artivists re-politicize art through the reconnection of creativity to action. Artivism is variously described as socially/politically conscious art: what remains consistent is the understanding that artivism is art that takes action in the realm of the political. The way Ugandan "bboy Felix" takes it up, offers us one example of artivism's particular bent: "[it] explores, details, and unfolds several vices that make human lives unbearable in the societies that have bred us. It is more like a revelation of the slipshod part of the world we live in—the modern society and its evil peculiarities" (Lutakome, 2012). Rather than succumbing to the hand that society deals us, the artivist clenches hold of reality and resists by reflecting critically, creatively and often collectively on circumstances in order to transform both individual and social circumstances. It is in this sense that the starting point is not a "blank canvas" but some deficit or glut in the world—one that that calls to the artivist, to make something else of it.

Becoming an artivist, an identity formation that is never complete, only in the making, requires a constant engagement with the world along with an ongoing consideration of one's own role there within. Indeed it is through one's attentive being-with-the-world that she engages in this approach to art-making, or doing of art, that sets itself apart (or de-links) from "Art"[4]. For the artivist, "art" is a political act and any art emptied of political content is equally political in its outright refusal to engage politically (Asante, 2008; Preziosi & Farago, 2012). Where a "good" student of canonical modern art might buy into the fallacy of *art for art's sake* and aspire to the

[4] I use the signifiers "Art" and "art" to distinguish lower-case artivism from ideas that circulate around ideas about Art via the modern Art system. See Piece 2, "Artivism-Into-Modernity: Exposing Coloniality in High Art and Higher Education" for an elaboration of this distinction.

ranks of the artist-genius/hero, the artivist may offer her life's work to the task of achieving decolonial justice. In a presentation at the 2014 John Douglas Taylor Conference: Contemporary Orientations in African Cultural Studies in Hamilton, Ugandan artivist Nalubowa (May 30, 2014) articulated this stance:

> If I showed you an art piece now, most of us would comment about how beautiful it is, its colors, the style and other things in that line. For artivists 4 life, however, it's more about the use of art than its beauty. And the one importance we stick to is social change and justice.

In this way artivism operates through contingency: the art/action manifests through creative/critical action/reflection upon the world. The artivist's work then cannot be conceived of or theorized as an action in and of itself, nor as a stand-alone artifact. Rather, it only comes to be through artistic and *intentful* interventions into the power-differentiated circumstances that beg it to act. It is in the moment of creative action/reflection—confronting psychically intrusive forms of marginalization[5]—that the artivist *comes to be*. Embodying a critical consciousness artivists intervene in *dominator culture*[6] by re-imagining and transforming the art encounter, defying in each new creative enactment what art is *supposed to be*[7].

[5] Here I am pointing toward realities of being in the social world that are shaped by such material circumstances as unemployment or poverty and made manifest in psychological conditions such as the distortion of cultural memory, alienation of one's sense of self, or feelings of stagnation in one's academic journey. Both Piece 5 and Piece 6 explore these scenarios in detail through phenomenological texts.

[6] I borrow hooks' (2010) term to point to our current societal structure and the way it differentiates subjectivities relative to their proximity to maleness and whiteness as the cultural norm.

[7] And what *is* it supposed to be? Art is variously defined, often claimed to defy definition, but one thing most of us can agree upon is its current status as some form of commodity or commodifiable experience to serve the market (Preziosi & Farago, 2012).

Artivism into Scholarship/Scholarship into artivism

An artivist/scholar I dwell in two places. I think and do as a member of *artivists 4 life*—a collective that works to de-link from dominant (modern) discourses and practices around both art and education. The goal of de-linking propels from the understanding that the status-quo is dangerously insufficient and that our art must necessarily begin from an interventionist stance to gain traction toward the kind of *inter-action*[8] across differences that artivism stands for. In this community, as a creative committed to the communal, I *belong*[9].

Simultaneously, I think and do within a competitive and standardized space of "higher learning" governed by modernity and its underlying logic[10]. Here, I am epistemically and ontologically misfit: I am out of *my proper place* in any conventional academic milieu. In what follows I expound the intersecting of these lifeworlds and my entanglements at the crossroads. This is necessary because my artivist/academic work (which speaks to, from and beyond a collective project) is precisely about dwelling in the borders—from either side of the colonial divide—and sensing the power differentials.

Through the guidance of decolonial thinkers I have come to see how academia as a project—with its discourses, disciplines and institutions—relies on a pervasive ideology of *divide and*

[8] I use the signifier inter-action throughout this dissertation to place emphasis on the goal of engagement across inter-cultural, inter-epistemic and inter-disciplinary similarities and differences and to accentuate artivism's commitment to action.

[9] To be clear, by belonging I mean feeling at home, at one, with a community of people—somehow brought together by some larger purpose. As a member of *artivists 4 life* I feel part of a creative/collective synergy where all members are welcome/welcoming, accepted/accepting, and respected/respecting. Arriving at (and sustaining) this kind of relationality—particularly because of the power differentials (across race, class, gender and other differences)—has been (and continues to be) difficult and complex. I elaborate this further in the section "Re-Searching the Co-Researcher Relationality" in Piece 7.

[10] I describe this underlying logic in detail in Piece 2, "Artivism-Into-Modernity: Exposing Coloniality in High Art and Higher Education"

conquer. Increasingly surrogated to a market agenda, we academics are increasingly locked down by rules, protocols and quotas among other organizing and categorizing mechanisms common to all Western disciplines (Aoki, 2010). Maldonado-Torres' (2012) notion of *neoapartheid* reveals how academia's investment in the maintenance of age-old disciplines works to assure that ideas, however new and unprecedented, remain bound to the same organizing principles brought forth and upheld over a modern/colonial legacy of over 500 years. *Epistemic racism* (Mignolo, 2011a) discerns how ways of knowing are categorized according to modernity's self-fabricated measuring scale, effectively reproducing academic life (and life in general) in its own hetero-bio-ethno-centric modern image. The underlying logic of *intellectual coloniality* (Sandoval, 2000) assures modern epistemology and its self-sustainment as normative or "universal". European and North American scholars, disciplined by the University's modern code, do not have to bother to intellectualize through *other* lenses such as those of artivists, queers, feminists, Indigenous thinkers, Africanists and so on. Any of the later—those of us epistemically misfit by our geo- and body politics—cannot avoid modern epistemology. Our thinking "has to be articulated, always, in relation to European categories of thought, whether conservative or progressive, whether from the Right of from the Left" (Mignolo, 2011a, p. 240). The decolonial perspective I have adopted has thus helped me, for example, to see how certain ways of collecting information, of analysis, of understanding, are steeped in Western epistemology. For example, specific standards for writing and presentation styles, computer-based systems designed to sanction research on human subjects, and requirements for formatting a doctoral dissertation serve to channel what goes in and what comes out of research projects.

Adopting a decolonial lens has allowed me to re-examine and challenge taken for granted assumptions about the academic world where I dwell and its impact upon the artivist practice

that I live. This has begged the question: how does the structure of university life actually affect the lives of those it claims to serve and those doing the serving? By way of problematizing academia's operating principles, alongside the larger guise of academic freedom marketed by universities, I am not suggesting that they all simply be completely rejected. I am making the point, however, that such ordering logic is indeed just one possible way. The artivist project I am advancing is among the plethora of alternatives.

There are alternatives. Indeed I have come to see that the tendency of academia to reproduce dominant culture is prevalent, though not monolithic. While universities mirror and reproduce political, social, cultural and economic structures in wider society, they also have the potential to critique and challenge dominant ideologies and gain traction toward institutional transformation (Aronowitz, 2000; Sandoval, 2000). Whereas some academics are parasites of a system that protects them, there are some that succeed in delinking from its trajectory. Indeed what motivates my intervention is my belief that scholars have agency, and can choose to work in ways counter or adjacent to the University's position, which is increasingly assimilated into market logic, including the current push away from the intellectual toward training. Certainly,
if I am to succeed in challenging this stance, rather than imitating it, this event will show that the University is flexible as an institution. Real "success" for me, however, following Mignolo (2014), is not to *beg to be recognized and to belong* but to delink from the normalized academic path. Rather, it means joining the global community of individuals and collectives engaged in decolonial projects where the aim is to succeed "because we delinked, not because we have been recognized and 'accepted' in a house we are not interested in inhabiting" (p. 205). Thus, my aim is not to confine my work to the expectations of a doctoral thesis, such as an overemphasis on written accounts of the research, and thus, in the case of co-research, a de-emphasis on the actual

relationships that make the writing possible. Rather, I aspire to contribute to the building of decolonial sensibilities, subjectivities and sociabilities. To do this I rely on the transgressive potential that artivism offers.

The dissidence and fearlessness that artivism demands is scarce within "disciplined" scholarship, yet artivism has its own vulnerabilities. For us there are no artivist institutions, research funds, and there are certainly no guarantees. Epistemically and aesthetically disobedient, we do the bulk of our work outside galleries, universities and museums—in streets and basements on makeshift stages. Following renowned Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2012a), artivism is a form of *poor theory*: It is a relentless effort to make the most out of minimal resources by "being extremely creative and experimental in order to survive" (p. 3). Poor theory does not refer to poverty, it accords "dignity to the poor as they fight poverty, including, dare [we] say, poverty of theory" (Thiong'o, 2012a, p. 2). Artivists, out there in our various locales, react to the social inequities that undermine our own existence through the kind of action that presupposes theory. When it comes to materials, artivists make do with what is available. The same holds true for theory, we begin with poor theory.

It is through thinking and doing—becoming an artivist—on the margins of Western educational institutions, in the fringes of the dominant art paradigm, and from within a collective of Ugandan youth artivists, that I strive to become a decolonial thinker/doer. Moving between these sites I am "self-consciously seeking affective libratory stances in relation to the dominant order" (Sandoval, 2000, p. 43). Subjectively, I experience the colonial wound from either side of the divide. From my place of privilege as a white Canadian scholar I live the shame of apprehending my own entrapment in the modernity/coloniality construct and my complacency in perpetuating

it. This obligates ongoing self-reflection on my encounters with members of *artivists 4 life* (among others with whom I interact in this world), which helps me to suppress the *potential oppressor within me* (Freire, 1970), but does not make me immune to its resurgence. My position in academia as a female, ideologically misfit, graduate student, below my academic superiors, and beneath the ideological weight of the University (each with powers I have already described), has also positioned me on the side of the *oppressed*. Taken together, these lived experiences, from various positions on the colonial matrix[11], have led me to experience the slow pain of coming to work in the borders, at the entanglements of power differentials (Mignolo, 2011a). It is in this sense that I have experienced the "violent shattering of a unitary sense of self as the skill that allows a mobile identity to form takes hold" (Sandoval, 2000, p. 197, footnote).

I have come to choose decolonial options (through an approach to artivism that chooses decoloniality from among other different and coexisting trajectories on the political spectrum) "not to become a new savior but to twist the politics of knowledge" through which I was educated as an imperial and modern subject (Mignolo, 2011a, p. 114). I join the decolonial struggle and follow the guidance of such thinkers as Asante, Fanon, Gordon, Maldonado-Torres, Mignolo, Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Quijano, Sandoval, Thiong'o, Wynter and many ordinary people whose ways of living life have impressed on me. Whether registered in academic discourse as thinkers or not, I am ultimately guided by individuals and collectives who "engage, politically and epistemically, to advance projects of epistemic and subjective decolonization and in building communal futures" (Mignolo, 2011a, p. xxviii).

[11] I further expound this mobile positionality relative to the specific contexts of each artivist intervention (see all other pieces, with the exception of Piece 1, which lays the theoretical groundwork for the need to do so).

Thinking and doing through an artivism informed by decolonial perspectives permits me to dehabituate from academic discourses subsumed and normalized by colonial logic and the forms of social and psychological inequity it naturalizes. In this way I am acquiring a differential mode of consciousness for "functioning within, yet beyond, the demands of dominant ideology" (Sandoval, 2000, p. 44).[12] From this in-between space I imagine and enact alternatives for re-becoming through the exploration of alternative modes of living with the aim of shifting power relations and opening up possibilities for restoring generous inter-human contact (Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Mignolo, 2011a).

Bringing scholarship to artivism, contributes to points of theory building for sharing and validating artistic, youthful, communal and otherwise undermined perspectives[13]. The inverse of this shift, bringing artivism into the realm of scholarship is a tactic for intervening into the apartheid of knowledges (in the realms of art and education and in academia at large) by re-imaging alternatives from an outside perspective that sees differently[14]. *Through the inter-connected pieces of this dissertation I endeavor to bring artivism to scholarship and scholarship to artivism through a dual process of translation through which academic discourse is re-appropriated by artivist epistemology, re-made and re-turned.*

[12] Piece 1, "Youth Artivism in Uganda: Co-Creators of Our Own Becoming", describes this principled point of reference in detail, which is key to our artivist response to modernity/coloniality, and thus to the issues of agency and subjectivity.

[13] Piece 4, "Aesthetic Disobedience and Other artivist Tactics for Creative and Communal Re-existence" enacts this notion by bringing scholarly insights to articulate and discuss specific interventions with *artivists 4 life*.

[14]Piece 6, "Toward Experiencing Academic Mentorship" presents my attempt to do this.

Toward an artivist Research Question

In choosing decolonial options the questions and the answers have to be epistemically disobedient, that is, they must tease out and betray certain principles of "epistemically correct" (p. 189) reasoning and interpretation: Otherwise decolonial thinking cannot change the terms of the conversation (Mignolo, 2011a). I take up decolonial options to confront "the imperial privileges of imperial/global linear thinking", asking questions through an artivist lens "not to resist but to re-exist in building decolonial futures" (Mignolo, 2011a, pp. 90–91). When it comes to articulating a research question I draw on various approaches and theoretical insights as they become necessary. Rather than questioning through a predetermined methodological framework, from a particular discipline, my questioning arises from a shared desire to extend the practices and theories of *artivists 4 life*, a community *already* engaging in decolonizing projects[15]. Simultaneously, I *use* the spaces for inter-action and the theoretical lenses that academia offers as grounds for critical reflection and idea generation toward inspiring and informing other decolonial interventions.

The exercise of posing a research question—and the kind of research trajectory that it serves to advance—has been imparted to me through the University and its long tradition of modern intellectual thought. In accepting this task I recall artivist/scholar Asante's (2008) assertion that "the artivist must not be afraid to learn a new language in order to inspire and empower new people—by any medium necessary" (p. 209). Learning new languages, whether linguistic,

[15] See Piece 1, "Youth Artivism in Uganda: Co-Creators of Our Own Becoming" for a detailed description of the *artivists 4 life* collective, our processes and projects. Also, see Piece 3, "Re-Living artivist Encounters: Inter-cultural Spaces and the Double Process of Translation" for examples of artivist inter-actions across the colonial divide with counterparts in Edmonton.

visual, or otherwise, can help to dehabituate oneself from colonial modes of enunciation. This is especially so when one engages to challenge dominant theories through "demonstration by failure" (Gordon, 1996, p. 76). The *new language* I am learning—that of academic writing—has been constituted by the very epistemology I struggle to *unlearn in order to relearn* (Mignolo, 2011a). While learning to enunciate academically is helping me to bring into view and validate artivist existence, while presumably advancing my own position on the colonial matrix, it has also forced me to de-emphasize other modes of enunciation such as visual expression, or public performance, when it comes to demonstrating what artivism is and does to an academic audience. Indeed as I turn to academic writing to show how artivism actually does its work, it seems words are never enough. Yet, when I return to other modes of enunciation, I seem to lose the investment of an academic audience. For example, through my practice with *artivists 4 life* I engage in numerous public interventions, such as exhibitions and performances, yet when I invite academics to these events, they rarely attend. Indeed it appears to me that the distanciation between artivism and academia might only ever be overcome in part, and any movement toward intersection requires receptivity, from both perspectives[16].

Oscillating between languages of expression, I confront and challenge institutionalized modes of enunciation in order to open up to new expressive potentials that respond more adequately to conditions of subordination. In this way I re-appropriate conventional approaches to academic writing (and the kind of thinking and doing that inform the tradition) through an understanding that ways of writing form and inform ways of being, knowing and relating. I believe that in order to liberate life new forms of enunciation must be created. My engagement toward re-existence, in

[16] In Piece 3, "Re-Living artivist Encounters: Inter-Cultural Spaces and the Double Process of Translation", I engage this possibility further through a discussion of the "messyness" of working across epistemic and cultural boundaries.

this way, is grounded in an ethical commitment to a shared project "for the outcasts and by the outcasts" (Fanon, 1963/1968, p. 205). I am aware that this is a monumental task, for it challenges academia's cultural investment and adherence to an attitude of "I think therefore I write". Implied by this statement, my appropriation of Descarte's well-known dictum, is the idea that those who do not write do not think. My response is to move between enunciatory forms—*using* certain academic writing conventions, not instead of, but in addition to, artistic forms of expression. In doing so I follow Asante (2008) and take *two sets of notes;*

> one set to ace the test
> and
> one set I call the truth,
> and when I find historical contradictions
> I use the first set as proof—
> proof that black youths'
> minds are being—
> polluted,
> convoluted,
> diluted,
> not culturally rooted.
> (pp. 192–193)

In my case, I follow certain academic conventions in order to achieve my degree while finding my *truth* in living by our artivist manifesto. It is through this dual process that the question for my dissertation came to be. As a series of artivist interventions for observing the world and confronting it took form I considered how to re-frame these obligations to "fit" the kind of linear trajectory that is expected of a doctoral thesis. Thus the necessary "thesis question" arose in the tension between *acing the test* and seeking *the truth*. In other words, the question emerged through engagement with *artivists 4 life* and in concert with reflection around what it means to

collaborate/create via the modern University. It is in this *way* that the question could not have come before the engagement. Articulating the question was not a linear process, but rather an oscillation: it was necessary to move just slightly ahead in order to look back on artivist interventions and the specific desires for both personal and collective change that they disclose. Drawing from my *two sets of notes* allowed me to expound the collaborative research process in such a way that *wages a war of position* for the re-politicizing of artistic research/pedagogy.

In this way, my research question has become:

> How can artivism (as a lens, an attitude, a political stance, an embodied practice, …) guide community engaged pedagogy and research to respond to the manifestations of modern/colonial conditions in our everyday lives?

I will turn now to an encapsulated description of the six pieces that come together, collectively, to respond to this obligation.

The Pieces-in-the-Making

Figure 0.1. In Bloom (Obol, 2013a)

With roots in a dynamic past we are the seeds of Africa's future. (Obol, 2013b)

The attached six pieces are packaged together in what might appear as a set of completed works, they are, however, more like seeds. I see the opportunity to pursue a doctoral degree not as a means to an end but rather an opening out of which ongoing projects (and the relationships that make them possible) can be rethought and new ones can begin. Even the published pieces (Piece 2 and Piece 5) represent the beginning of a co-publication process. Similarly, Piece 6, "Toward Experiencing Academic Mentorship", marks the emergence of an artivism *re-made and re-turned* to academia. In this way, all pieces-in-the-making come from various places of

(re)becoming. In what follows I provide an overview of the overall thesis project consisting of six main pieces.

Piece 1, "Youth Artivism in Uganda: Co-Creators of Our Own Becoming", was co-authored with fellow *artivists 4 life* and artivist ally Dr. Carolina Cambre. In this article we as artists, activists and scholars build on Asante's (2008) notion of artivism and Sandoval's (2000) differential consciousness to examine identity and change processes within the *artivists 4 life* collective. Drawing on the *artivists 4 life* manifesto, constitution and process for developing community messages, we showcase a transformative pedagogical practice where collective action and artistic reflection come together as an artivist critical consciousness takes form. Through the sharing of artivist subjectivities and sociabilities we demonstrate how *artivists 4 life* members are overcoming personal and collective circumstances and taking on responsibilities as proactive agents of communal change.

A first publication for *artivists 4 life* and myself, this piece represents a collective willfulness to twist the *terms* of the scholarly conversation. *Artivists 4 life*, as first authors of this paper, guide a necessary departure from traditional academic writing, creating space for the voices of youth authors through a variety of means. This article embodies a commitment to an ethics where process takes precedence over outcome: Collaborative writing becomes counter-narrative that authorizes youth (and scholars) to think and act otherwise.

In Piece 2, "Artivism-Into-Modernity: Exposing Coloniality in High Art and Higher Education", I draw from the work of decolonial scholars to visualize the construct of modernity/coloniality. Illustrating the analytics of the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo, 2011a) and the art matrix (Preziosi & Farago, 2012) I identify and discuss some of the problematics and contradictions

of existing as an artivist/scholar in the realms of Art and Education—within a larger world fabricated according to a colonial logic produced and sustained by modernity. Through the recognition that we must grapple to understand the inner workings of our social fabric, this piece is an effort to unveil how the everyday problems of our present era are rooted in deeper historical structures. It appeals to fellow artists/activists/scholars to address *historic amnesia* (Maldonado-Torres, 2004) in order to see how our art and educational systems are framed by old patterns of domination that still serve to under/over-represent bodies along two axes of colonial power, patriarchy and racism. By analyzing the mechanisms that render humans invisible, characterized by epistemic racism and intellectual colonialism, this piece works to denaturalize dominant ideology, creating a counterpoise for imagining alternatives to modernity from the places We/I dwell. In this way, this Piece 1 acts as the backdrop against which all other components of this thesis propel.

Piece 3, "Re-Living artivist Encounters: Inter-Cultural Spaces and the Double Process of Translation", discusses a collaborative study, or artivist intervention, co-designed and co-facilitated with members of *artivists 4 life.* Students and youth in Canada (Edmonton) who previously engaged with *artivists 4 life* across cultures were invited to take part in focus groups/workshops guided by creative and participatory processes. These activities, led by the principles and processes of artivism, created an adjacent space for reflecting on and discussing the pedagogical potential of taking part in artivist encounters. These inter-cultural learning spaces (Lockward et al., 2011)—across non-Western and Western cosmologies—created opportunities to celebrate diverse identities while exploring local, regional and global youth issues. Emphasis for this study was placed on creating a decolonizing learning space where all

participants were invited to exchange stories and issues, responding to each others' questions as epistemic partners in knowledge-making and creative processes (Papastergiadis, 2011).

Drawing on excerpts from a personal letter to members of *artivists 4 life* in concert with content analysis of artworks, written statements and recorded discussions, I draw from the insights of decolonial scholars to discuss the double process of translation between artivist practice and academic inquiry. By guiding artivism into scholarship and scholarship into artivism an inter-cultural and inter-epistemological conceptual space emerges for re-imagining together what it means to do co-research.

Piece 4, "Aesthetic Disobedience and Other artivist Tactics for Creative and Communal Re-Existence", is co-authored, in a conceptual sense, by *artivists 4 life* and myself. It draws on Fanon's vision of a new humanism to respond to Walter Mignolo's (2009; 2011a; 2011b) call to change the terms of academic conversation through acts of epistemic and aesthetic disobedience. This piece discusses the Ugandan/African context and the mechanisms of global coloniality that continue to impose Euro-American epistemology on African subjectivities, including Ugandan youth. Shifting between scholarship on African youth and literature specific to the Ugandan context, the harsh contemporary predicaments facing Ugandan youth are described, including a nod to traditional discourses that fixate on a serious of *lacks* that serve to maintain understandings of African youth as a lost generation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b; O'Brien, 1996). The under-acknowledged capacities of African youth to resist global colonial forces despite the precarity they are faced with is noted. Indeed it is this very potential that this piece aims to advance as We/I work to bring youthful and artistic enunciation to scholarship by partnering in knowledge-making and creative processes. Avenues for liberating subjectivities and forms of

relationality are explored through a coalitional consciousness and a relational ethic that privileges Ugandan youth perspectives, local knowledge and a shared commitment to decolonial futures. *Artivists 4 life* graphic characters and their stories, based on lived experiences of the collective, act as conceptual envoys bringing artivism into the realm of scholarship. A multi-modal art project recovering and visualizing Baganda proverbs is shared: It performs a set of artivist counter-narratives to the discourses that identify African (Ugandan) youth as idle, helpless and otherwise lacking. Creations and knowledges of artivist members, merged with scholarly insights, reveal a creative agency that is no longer authorial, but shared and distributed. Taken together, the artivist characters and their narratives perform creative re-enactments of *artivists 4 life* enunciation processes while unfolding a conceptual lens for politicized community engaged creative scholarship.

Piece 5, "Phenomenological Passports: Youth and Experiences of Place, Mobility and Globalization", is another experiment in co-authorship, this time in a more literal sense. It was co-authored with fellow *artivists 4 life* members Cathy Mashakalugo and Andrew Jackson Obol and artivist ally Dr. Carolina Cambre. The impetus for this chapter was a trip to Paris in July 2012 where us four authors had come together to co-present at a cultural studies conference. For artivists Mashakalugo and Obol, this was a first travel experience outside of Uganda. For Cambre and I, both scholars and experienced travelers, this trip was *like* seeing Paris (and globalization) through the eyes of another.

By placing emphasis on the agency of Ugandan youth perspectives and their entry into engaged scholarship we open up expressive potentials though phenomenological explorations where "youth" co-author a collaborative meaning-making process. To do so we improvise an emergent and comparative phenomenological stance by drawing on intersecting experiences in and around

our trip as a crystallizing event. We engage hermeneutic phenomenology in conversation with Africana phenomenology to reflect on the context of asymmetrical globalization. The re-living of memories of our trip to Paris trigger us to question the very notion of globality—and the conundrum of its impossibility—if it is meant to include everyone, if everyone can include a pluriversity of ways of knowing, doing and being.

We explore how someone without preconceived notions of the Eiffel tower experiences it and consider which subjectivities are (dis)allowed to make claims about the human condition. In the spirit of de-colonizing our sense-making we work to improvise a relational ethics for knowledge generation and sharing in the context of Western globalization and its modern/colonial structure. Experiences of standardized asymmetrical travel, (mis)represented and (mis)placed identities, and pain and betrayal prompt further reflection. Through phenomenological writing and reflection we offer points of departure for reimagining the relationships between place, mobility and globalization.

Piece 6, "Toward Experiencing Academic Mentorship", could be read as somehow excessive—a tangent to the thread of artivism that weaves in and out of all the pieces. This would, however, be a misreading of my intention. Bringing scholarship to artivism—through the articulation of a certain *artivist* way—is having a double impact. In becoming a scholar I am embodying the spirit of artivism co-created for and by the *artivists 4 life* collective. This is (re)positioning me to (re)frame artivism in order to respond to everyday circumstances of my life becoming an academic. This piece is a case in point: Phenomenology became the necessary "medium" for an artivist response to a set of observation*s* around graduate student mentorship that obligated me. I was called, out of deep concern, to the phenomenon of graduate student mentorship, which led

me to ask what is it actually like to receive mentorship (or not). I wondered how lived experiences of academic mentorship might differ from the idea of mentorship that seems to be perpetuated in dominant academic discourses. Through an engaged writing process with fellow graduate students I asked if there is something about the experience of mentorship that sets it apart from other phenomena such as parenting, coaching, teaching or supervision. Drawing on concrete descriptions and phenomenological reflection I attended to graduate students' actual experiences of mentorship (and not mentorship) to uncover aspects of the mentee experience for what it is rather than how it is claimed to be.

Through a commitment to Asante's understanding about *learning a new language to inspire new people* I chose phenomenology as a medium of enunciation in order to bring academics to a sense of wonder about the possibility of mentorship. In many ways phenomenology is about how people go about understanding the worlds in which they live (van Manen, 1997; 2014). As a way of being/seeing it aims to create a text that invites readers to resonate with the phenomenon being explored. Whereas a mural might serve to reach a certain community of youth with a particular message, it has been my hope that phenomenology might resonate with those who have a stake in what mentorship could be like, or could become, particularly in our current era of academic restructuring. Through my sustained wandering with this phenomenon, graduate students' experiences revealed ways that mentoring moments variously escape us as somehow deficient or in excess of what we expect them to be. From a vantage that attends specifically to the mentee experience, I present points of reflection for reimagining what the mentorship experience could become.

In the "conclusion" of this dissertation*, "*Artivism 4 Life: Between the Lines and in the Excesses of an Academic Project," I offer provocations for rethinking implicated scholarship that shares

the goal of communal re-existence through an invitation to learn from the struggles and agency of enunciators and enunciatory practices undermined by modernity. In a section called "Re-Searching the Co-Researcher Relationality," I move us closer to discerning artivist subjectivity/relationality through two inter-connected experiences of becoming artivists/ academics together. I then discuss the limitations to/of artivism. Finally, I offer a set of artivist observations and corresponding tactics for shifting academic desire away from the hegemonic domain of scholarship toward creative new ethics and forms of social relations premised on the creation of affinities with those from below. Here I make the call to scholars to consider adjacent spaces in the excesses of academia so that it becomes possible to discern the imposed limits of colonial logic from an outside perspective that sees differently.

Taken together, these pieces are *becomings,* conceived to provoke a conversation hospitable to a pluriversity of enunciators and enunciations. Artivism, not an action in and of itself, must necessarily de- and re-centre itself as new observations and circumstances enter its periphery. Particular events, experiences and contexts have provoked *obligations* from the places *I am and we are*. My own work in this sense is not an attempt to represent some artivist world *out there*, but rather to enunciate through a shared artivist consciousness. In this sense my contribution to scholarship, only made possible by our contribution, is constantly being re-invented and re-enacted in each and every artivist intervention. The artivist and the artivist's work then, "is thus made by the ideological intervention that she is also making: the only predictable final outcome is transformation itself" (Sandoval, 2000, p. 157).

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Youth Artivism in Uganda: Co-Creators of Our Own Becoming

Artivists 4 life,[1] Leslie Robinson and Maria-Carolina Cambre

> The artivists 4 life project emphasizes the use of art, drama and dance to inform, sensitize and empower our communities on issues that affect them. … As artivists 4 life we seek to create for a better world.
>
> —artivists 4 life constitution, 2012

> I hope to encourage [policy-makers] to make youths feel they are part of the society and even involve them in their policy making. I want them to know that Ugandan youths are too ambitious and ready to learn … that our biggest challenge is that we lack support as people don't trust us, leaving us behind … we youth artivists in Uganda are examples of what youth can achieve if given chances.
>
> —Mashakalugo, interview, 17 February, 2012

[1] *Kampala*: A. Aturinda, J. Kabanda, A. Nalubowa, D. Namulondo, A.J. Obol, L. Robinson; *Kayunga*: D. Batenga, M. Bogere, R. Kamoga, A. Kayemba, J. Kiryagana, H. Likicho, B. Lubega, C. Mashakalugo, E. Nanteza, E. Nsamba, I. Sendege, I. Ssebunya, J. Ssenkindu, F. Ssetimba, P. Teopista; *Mukono*: M. Jjita, K. Kaddu, P. Kakome, J. Kalungi, J. Kisitu, J. Kizito, H. Kizza, V. Mukasa, C.N. Musisi, J.J. Muwanga, E. Najjuko, M. Nampanga.

These youths range in age, the majority between 20 and 25 years, with a handful slightly below or above that range. When names are used in the body of the chapter they are the names of the 33 *artivists 4 life* members listed here.

In *The Human Condition* (1959) Hannah Arendt expresses her belief that political activity is not just about coming to a consensus about what is good in society, rather it is what allows individuals agency and the power to develop their own capacities. We hold that agency can only be recognized by its effects, that is, only when someone acts as an agent can he/she actually become an agent and not before. Thus, agents become such when they "disturb the causal milieu in such a way as can only be attributed to their agency" (Gell, 1998, p. 20). Thus both political activity and agency are performative in the sense that they do not pre-exist the moment of their manifestation. In essence, they only come to *be in the doing*.

To elaborate the notion of action, again following Arendt (1959), as a kind of articulation of human relationality: "Action, moreover, no matter what its specific content, always establishes relationships and therefore has an inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries" (p. 170). Her epigraph from *Dante Allighieri* takes us one step further,

> For in every action what is primarily intended by the doer, whether he acts from natural necessity or out of free will, is the disclosure of his own image. Hence it comes about that every doer, in so far as he does, takes delight in doing; since everything that is desired is its own being, and since in action the being of the doer is somehow intensified, delight necessarily follows. Thus, nothing acts unless [by acting] it makes patent its latent self. (p. 155)

Both action and agent are mutually formed and informed in the manifested moment of becoming.[2] In this sense subjectivity formation and agency are inseparable. The question then becomes, how do we locate or discern such a fluid and intangible (yet known through its effects

[2] While it is not our focus, we acknowledge the notion of becoming we operate with is similar to what Deleuze and Guattari describe at various points in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) and *What Is Philosophy?* (1994) as a zone of indetermination and indiscernibility where all involved bodies whether concrete or virtual both form and inform one another.

vis-à-vis the context) phenomenon? In recognition of its mobility we do not attempt to fasten meaning to any so-called "change" rather we shift the focus to points of traction where we can understand there is a becom*ing* in progress as revealed through expressions of individual and collective awareness in coping with the precarious circumstances facing youth in Uganda today.

Enacting Differential Consciousness to Respond to Postcolonial/Modern Circumstances

We rely on Chela Sandoval's (2000) notion of *differential consciousness* as a principled point of reference key to our artivism, and thus our response to the issues of agency and subjectivity. Differential consciousness entails confronting psychically intrusive forms of domination and subordination. As speaking coherently regarding non-static conditions demands that we also develop a mobile way of understanding, we stress a differential consciousness is one that is always already thinking about the production and maintenance of ideologies. Thus, it works to create an interior gap, distinction or discrepancy, to better provide a space for a response allowing oneself to manage his or her image and somewhat reduce the level or intensity of the dominant ideology over his or her actions, words and even thoughts.

Figuratively, we are working at a metabolic level in the social body, the work is invisible but its effects are tangible. The terrain is overtly ideological and is embodied in the signs of text, actions and images, both as enunciations as well as in the manner enunciated. Sandoval's (2000) technologies become a compass to help citizen-subjects move through social and cultural territories *conscious* of how they are doing so, and thus "transfigur[ing] subordination into resistance" (p. 55) or passivity into protagonism.

The key to understanding how a differential consciousness operates is to remember that one simultaneously sees from the perspective of the dominant viewpoint as well as one's own

shifting place, and then renegotiates and re-navigates all possibilities. Thus by coming to a differential consciousness we can "recognize dominant social reality as an *interested* construction, composed of peculiar symptoms that make up a specifically raced and cultured milieu" and then we can read forms of domination as artifacts of that particular neo-colonialism (Sandoval, 2000, p. 86, emphasis added).

We can also "voluntarily focus on the very moves of consciousness that ideology demands of its host" (Sandoval, 2000, p. 104) by tuning in to ideology's work on perception and consciousness, and then replay those moments in order to interrupt their discursive strategies. The dominant ideology is thus denaturalized. For Sandoval (2000) then, being rooted in a differential consciousness creates space for an ever-tactical differential movement. The ability of the Ugandan youth expressed in this chapter to live both within and under a certain postcolonial ideology that promotes suffering, but at the same time work to create a gap to position their own subjectivities and enable them to interrupt this dominant narrative is in many ways a concrete demonstration of the possibilities of a differential consciousness.

Only in that moment of action addressing a specific situation does the differential consciousness manifest and gain traction. Simultaneously, our relationship to social reality changes because it is a "kind of dual action on an object and on oneself" (Sandoval, 2000, p. 155). Thus movement permits ways to maintain both an active disinterestedness while allowing us to develop a "new kind of coalitional consciousness" (p. 182) that binds scholars, artists, youth and community into one proactive social collective.

Thus, the creative aesthetic activity and commitment to modeling the ideas being developed in the *artivists 4 life* working manifesto reveal critical moments where a differential consciousness

has made possible certain subjectivities and actions. Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) guides our understanding of a pedagogical practice that grapples with power imbalances in order to shift them. Finally, artistic approaches guided by artivism embody an implicated praxis that is explicitly change-oriented, driven by the desire to communicate, inspire awareness or change with an identified audience or social group (Asante, 2008; Fuad-Luke, 2009).

First, we discuss the collective's history and aesthetic processes, tools, principles and the results of ongoing projects. In the second part, we discuss some of the statements made by *artivists 4 life* members with an eye to elaborating themes that arise both indigenously from the citations and those that we understand through the lenses provided by Sandoval's theoretical constructs. But before proceeding we will comment briefly on how we define art and how it comprises a central part of both subjectivity and agency as these youth articulate it here.

Embodying a Shared Artistic Consciousness

In a recent plenary, African writer and philosopher Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2012, June 25) describes the artistic consciousness as "driven by a force, an irresistible desire to give to the inner impulses, the material form of sound, colour and word. This desire cannot be held back by laws, tradition, or religious restrictions" (para. 3). He makes the link between art and consciousness forcefully explicit. For Thiong'o (2012, June 25):

> Art particularly in its prophetic tradition embodies the conscience of the nation. In that sense Art and the freedom of expression are essential to culture for culture is not the same thing as a particular tradition. Culture reflects a community in motion. Culture is to the community what the flower is to a plant. A flower is very beautiful to behold. But it is the result of the roots, the trunk, the branches and the leaves. But the flower is special

> because it contains the seeds, which are the tomorrow of that plant. A product of a dynamic past, it is pregnant with a tomorrow. (para. 4)

Ugandan youth in *artivists 4 life* are culture creators defining their own futures through the development of new sociabilities as a result of the actions of the collective. As the increasing asymmetry resulting from neo-liberal state policies takes hold, counter movements are manifesting themselves. If art is "a system of action, intended to change the world" (Gell, 1998, p. 6) then the emphasis of art for *artivists 4 life* youths is clearly on "*agency, intention, causation, result* and *transformation*" (Gell, 1998, p. 6, emphases in original) rather than mere symbolic communication. Art thus becomes a powerful social tool rather than a mere cultural product to be seen off-handedly and momentarily cherished. This chapter offers a case in point by showcasing the agentic possibilities created by the members of the collective in response to some of the conditions being imposed by our current political-economic moment.

Finally we acknowledge our positionality in that while *artivists 4 life* co-author this essay as leaders and co-founders of the collective using it as an opportunity for creative and critical reflections on their own praxis, Robinson, as project co-founder and advocator, provides coordination support and studies the use of artistic processes in social contexts as part of her ongoing collaborative research. And Cambre, ally and honorary member of *artivists 4 life* since the inception of the project, teams up through ongoing collaboration and develops points of theory building for her own work on art and the social. As decolonializing scholars, artists and activists, collaborative work is not outcomes driven, but rather part of a process of human challenges to hierarchies of power from wherever they are acting. While responding to particular

challenges, we are also part of a larger struggle to engage in processes of conscientisation[3] (Freire, 1970) enabling critiques and challenges to relations of power predicated upon the status quo, and engaged in building relationships constituting a solidarity which is fluid and porous enough to reflect our different social locations but from which we can clearly enunciate radical alternatives.

Background: *Artivists 4 Life* Youth Collective

Co-founded in 2011 by a handful of Ugandan youth artists and activists along with Robinson, the collective evolved out of a three-year history of collaborations. A shared desire for a collaborative and sustainable creative space of resistance was a driving force and today *artivists 4 life* include 33 registered members in Kampala, Kayunga and Mukono.

As a grassroots collective, the sources of income are largely provided by annual contracts to develop community arts programming including the co-creation of community messages. Through international and local educational exchanges *artivists 4 life* have also built a network of partners. In terms of support for local members, *artivists 4 life* have grown to provide part-time modest employment to youth facilitators and other youth leaders within the group and some transport refunds to workshop attendees. This kind of structure presents a possibility for self-sustainability.

Artivists 4 life fuse art and activism through consciousness-raising activities and artistic interventions. As described in the collective's 2012 working constitution, "We are a youth

[3]A process whereby participants nourish critical thinking skills through dialogue to take action against oppressive circumstances.

oriented non-profit making project that brings all arts together … Our group engages fellow youths and other community members through educative art activities in rural Kayunga, semi-urban Mukono and the Kampala capital." When it comes to resolving major social issues affecting Ugandan youth such as unemployment, drug abuse and HIV/AIDS, policy-makers and implementers often overlook youth as protagonists. Ugandan youth, like young people elsewhere in Africa, are viewed as destructive, ignorant or otherwise problematic (Best & Kellner, 2003; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2005). Revealing an acute awareness of this problematic rhetoric about African youth, Nalubowa desires inclusion saying, "I wish youths were given a chance to share ideas, to not be sidelined in policy making, to not be overshadowed by these older people, to not be looked at as troublesome and chaotic" (archival document, 29 March, 2012). Nalubowa's comment expresses not only a strong desire for social inclusion, but also a deep longing by youth to be part of key socio-cultural and political processes that shape and define their experiences in both rural and urban spaces in Africa.

Led by a talented team of youth facilitators with various art and/or counseling skills, *artivists 4 life* co-identify local youth issues and respond by creating, assessing and disseminating messages and interventions with and for their communities. Members create illustrated teaching tools and other resources so that their processes can be shared with incoming members, community partners and any other practitioners seeking to engage youth to be "creating for a better world" (*artivists 4 life* motto). Obol's artwork in Figure 1.1 depicts how they work together to arrive at messages about identified issues.

Figure 1.1. Artivists 4 life message development process created by *artivists 4 life,* 2012

Obol describes the overall message development techniques:

> I want the outside world to know … We start by introductions then icebreakers which are very interesting we do funny gym stuff to warm up for discussions starting with brainstorming on problem identification. Once the problems are decided upon we start to develop messages. Me personally, I am engaged through illustration. Other youths take part through acting so I can get dramatic poses to illustrate. From message development we go ahead to test in the communities, test if the locals get it. Once it's all good we go ahead to photography using our own youth and other people from the community.
> We take it to design, add in text, when all is done and approved we put it on billboards, t-shirts, murals, whatever media is good. Using that message we put all the arts together to spread it so the community gets it. (Interview, 30 March, 2012)

Following Obol, above, these seven processes (Figure 1.2) comprise the activities that make up the development of messages for *artivists 4 life*.

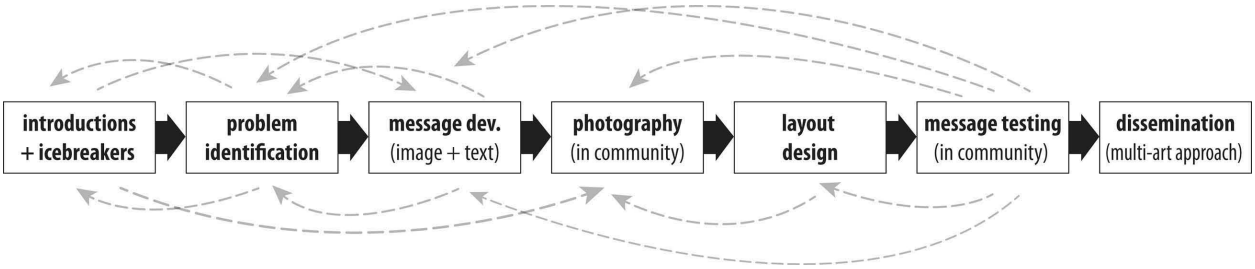

Figure 1.2. Artivists 4 life problem identification and response process

Deliberate problem identification techniques serve to ground action, politicize thinking and lead to carefully and contextually situated work. Kakome, for example, relates his experience taking part in these processes for the topic of condom use; "it has helped me to know the value of my life than before. It has helped me to know the correct ways of using a condom … it has helped me to educate the community about condom use" (questionnaire, 24 July, 2012).

Messages (text and images) are shared with community groups such as teachers, "boda boda [moto-taxi] guys" and restaurant workers to elicit responses as Figure 1.3 shows. Improvements on the art pieces continue until community members and project partners approve the message often requiring multiple visits to various community sites.

Figure 1.3. Artivists 4 life message testing process created by *artivists 4 life*, 2012

When photographs are required *artivists 4 life* and other community members are invited to be models (with written consent). The message testing process is revisited as needed. Then final messages are reproduced on a variety of media and serve as teaching tools when *artivists 4 life* do community outreach. Messages are disseminated to the community through dance, drama and visual presentations alongside other interventions such as condom distribution.

What needs to be recognized is that youth are already influential inventors of popular culture in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa—using diverse media to respond to their realities and re-create their own identities (Honwana & De Boeck 2005a). Performing as creative and generative forces, actively taking part in community initiatives, Mashakalugo observes that *artivists 4 life* are developing sustainable youth-led Ugandan pedagogical arts because so "many youths are so talented in different ways" (interview, 17 February, 2012). The collective is a living example of creative agency manifested through collaborative engagements for critically re-imagining shared circumstances. Nalubowa observes that, "[youth] have brilliant up to date ideas and solutions to current challenges. … The youths in *artivists 4 life* are definitely changing lives and will continue to do so. That's something all youths anywhere in the World can do if given a chance" (archival document, 29 March, 2012).

Artivists 4 Life **Process Principles**

> We are process driven. (2011 working manifesto)

Artivism has been defined by African American scholar and hip-hop enthusiast M.K. Asante (2008) as the fusion of art and activism in the struggle for social justice. Thus the "term *artivism* is a hybrid neologism that signifies work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism" (Sandoval & Latorre, 2008, p. 82, emphasis in original). The idea of

artivism can be traced back to Chicana artist Judy Baca's collaborative work with youth since 1996. Additionally, comparable concepts exist including the practices of the *griots* in West Africa (Asante, 2008) and through the Latin American idea of *Artivismo* (Melo, 2010). Artivist practices existed prior to the term through those who used "artistic talents to fight and struggle against injustice and oppression by any medium necessary" (Asante, 2008, p. 203). Although artivism can be found across Africa in diverse contexts and under various names such as theatre for development (see, for example, Kamlongera (1982)), "break-dance for positive social change" ("Breakdance Project Uganda's Blurbs", 2012) or "graffiti for a cause" ("Spray It Uganda", 2012), it emerges more as a youth attitude than as points on a historical continuum. Consistently, artivism manifests through the mobilization of minoritarian perspectives as a re-politicized art practice that adopts an understanding of art that is concerned with what art can do rather than what it means (jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013).

Taking up the notion of artivism, *artivists 4 life* explicitly commit to intervening with collaborators to change power relations through artistic acts of resistance and renewal. Recognizing that circumstances are constructed by greater socio-political forces, artivism demands that practitioners ethically invent new ways of knowing and communicating to re-position themselves socially through any media available. For *artivists 4 life* art processes are never simply decorative add-ons for illustrating educational research. Instead, following Asante (2008), "we cannot afford, nor could we ever, to make art just to be makin' it … the idea of art for art's sake … has been a luxury that all of those who seek to fight oppression simply do not have" (p. 207).

Additionally, artivism resists being slotted into a particular discipline. As a transdisciplinary approach, it inherently resists the *academic apartheid* that Sandoval (2000) decries as a

segregation of knowledges into disciplines or subjects, resulting in a "prohibitive and restricted flow of exchange … that insists on difference" (p. 70). Thus artivism offers alternatives as practitioners take on multiple roles as social catalysts, facilitators, authors, co-creators, activist-academics and "happeners" (Asante, 2008; Fuad-Luke, 2009).

The sophisticated artivism practiced by *artivists 4 life* draws on various methods sharing a common social justice perspective and collaborative focus. In many ways, Sandoval's (2000) "set of processes, procedures, and technologies for decolonizing the imagination" (p. 69) describes the overall approach. This particular artivism then, remains open and adaptive in order to respond to the fluctuating needs, desires and realities of the various communities. Artistic methods and participatory design, critical and engaged pedagogies[4] and participatory approaches, described in what follows, are the key approaches informing the processes as lived within and around the *artivists 4 life* collective.

Artistic methods, when paired with the understanding that all art is political (Asante, 2008; Preziosi & Farago, 2012), synergize artistic ways of thinking and doing such that they become synonymous. Artistic inquiry in this way acknowledges that working creatively always already *includes* the cognitive modalities and the capacities to create and critique knowledge and understanding. Meaning-making takes place as an "embodied encounter constituted through visual and textual *understandings and experiences* rather than mere visual and textual *representations*" (Springgay, 2005, p. 902). In this way artistic methods help us come to understanding through creating. What sets apart the artistic methods that inform artivism from popular arts-based research is an explicit commitment to intervening with collaborators to

[4] Although most *artivists 4 life* members do not use these terms, the ways critical and engaged pedagogies are described in literature accurately describe the actual approaches members take.

transform power relations through artistic acts of resistance and re-existence. Artistic methods that inform artivism then must be considered only in relation to the circumstances that call them into action.

Participatory design (Frascara, 2004) best describes the artistic approaches used by *artivists 4 life* for message creation with and for the community. Combining any art processes including dance, drama, visual art and music with educational approaches *artivists 4 life* embody Asante's (2008) understanding that the "artivist must not be afraid to learn a new language in order to inspire and empower new people" (p. 209). Participatory design from the lens of artivism transgresses disciplinary boundaries such as those of art, design, education and youth studies and is a useful framework for those working with egalitarian social movements in creating possibilities for effecting differential social movement through creative and critical intervention in communication systems.

Embracing critical and engaged pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1994, 1997; hooks, 1994, 2003, 2010; McLaren, 1995) as reflected in the 2011 working manifesto's "we are all learners and teachers", *artivists 4 life* guide a de-colonizing educational practice that aims to reinstate participants' will to reflect on self and world, nurturing processes of critical thinking. More specifically the group draws on Freire's (1970) notion of "problem-posing education" (p. 71), which posits creative stimulation of "true reflection and action upon reality" (p. 71) towards a fuller awareness of reality and of one's self. Such conscientisation feeds the development of artivist messages and interventions.

This unique creative process helps *artivists 4 life* members understand how their lives are continually shaped by the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality (Mignolo, 2011a).

Coming to understand in this way allows them to relocate blame from individual failures to the systemic structures of power relations. Facilitators encourage members to identify openly and discuss problems in their lives and intervene through artistic reflection and collective action.

Thus youth, fellow community members and activist-scholars join in a shared struggle to transform colonial and hegemonic power relations that define and shape their lives in indignifying ways. This pedagogy is grounded in an understanding that knowledge and ways of knowing are always partial, interested and potentially oppressive. In this transdisciplinary and shared space artistic processes help to activate inner feelings, ideas and narratives, bringing them together in relation to outside others, events, histories and so on reforming both self and other and relations in between (Ellsworth, 2005). Relative to conventional and dominant evaluation-driven, discipline-focused educational practices that represent "knowledge as a thing already made" (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 29), pedagogical spaces for *artivism* take shape on the outer fringes of education's radar; in cracks and crevices where the alternative, artistic and experimental options can flourish. Without a predetermined curriculum or exams to pass, *artivists 4 life* were free to define their motto as "creating for a better world" and they share the understanding that "when we are free to let our minds roam it is far more likely that our imaginations will provide the creative energy that will lead us to new thought and more engaging ways of knowing" (hooks, 2010, p. 62). As the 2011 working manifesto underlines "we are all active collaborators: co-creators, co-researchers, co-learners and co-educators working toward shared goals in a collective project".

Participatory action research's (PAR) call for situated, self-critical and explicit practices and values (McTaggart, 1994) is taken up by the *artivists 4 life* collective who also welcome the notion that research is something humans do together through democratic dialogue, as co-

investigators and co-subjects (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). To avoid co-opting participants' knowledge for primarily academic or institutional ends, the *artivists 4 life* collective honours the inherent potential of participants to generate knowledge through lived experiences that will benefit them through transparency of ideas and processes. Achieving *genuine* participation requires a balance of power that favours the community—one that demonstrates that they will see a benefit, an immediate return for their contribution (Frascara, 2004).

Projects and Results

This section includes a series of citations from members of *artivists 4 life*. This is a necessary departure from traditional academic writing in order to create space for the orality and voices of youth authors as they share their responses to the group-identified issues of youth unemployment, HIV/AIDS and drug abuse.

Youth Unemployment

In Mukono, a team of youth came together in 2011 with *artivists 4 life* in Kampala and Kayunga to create a sister group and engaged in participatory processes to identify their most critical concerns. In a country reported to have the youngest population in the world and the highest youth unemployment with an estimated rate of 83 per cent (World Bank Africa, 2009), it was no surprise that unemployment became a key issue among the youths. Mukono member Nampanga describes her feeling of precarity: "youth unemployment has impacted me in a way that though am educated, am still moving up and down looking for a full time job suiting my qualifications" (questionnaire, 24 July, 2012). The countrywide *GENext* Small Families' Advocacy Campaign shown in Figure 1.4 provides a snapshot of how even highly educated youth like Nampanga are portrayed as doomed ("Uganda Health Marketing Group", 2012). While the small text includes a

call for smaller families as a partial solution, the overall message communicates a feeling of hopelessness and even denigrates or demotes higher education. Messages such as the one in Figure 1.4 are highly visible through widespread billboards as well as related TV campaigns. They contribute to a climate of hopelessness and serve to perpetuate a sense of doom for youth in Uganda.

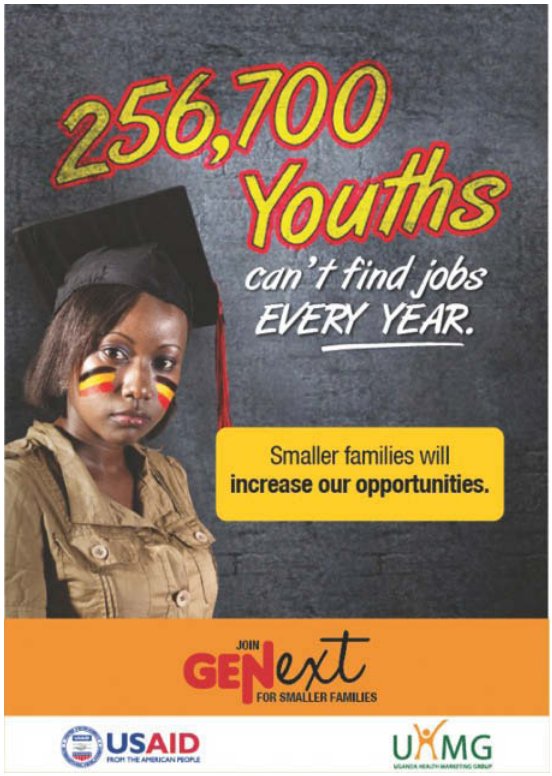

Figure 1.4. 2012 billboard message in Kampala by Uganda Health Marketing Group

The extremely high levels of youth unemployment have created a context in Mukono, like elsewhere in Uganda, of desperation and exploitation. For example, "some male bosses ask for 'carpet interviews' [sex] before giving young people jobs, and in case one refuses, the job is denied to her, hence making [such young women] unemployed for a long time". In case they accept, such women become at risk of being "infected with HIV and loss of dignity" (Nampanga, questionnaire, 24 July, 2012). Here we see how Ugandan youth are often doubly victimized by

a patriarchal order that seeks to squeeze pleasure and wealth from the sweat and dignity of young people.

The sites where *artivists 4 life* fuse art and activism are amid issues of unemployment intermingled with school dropout, sexual exploitation and HIV/AIDS among other insufferable circumstances that translate into despair. Positive peer group creation has helped members achieve a self-sustainable space of resistance and renewal: "This group brings hope among the hopeless youths that they can still be useful to the community" (feedback transcript, 27 March, 2012). Usefulness has been the result of the *artivists 4 life* "chokolo" project, an intervention that responds directly to their own unemployment. As described in the *artivists 4 life* chokolo brochure, "the project recycles bottle tops [chokolo] creatively to produce earrings and other jewelry products so the youths can have a modest source of income".

Drug Abuse

The problem of drug abuse stems from the systemic exclusion of young people from the societal structure. Constructed as youth idleness, this has immediate and long-term consequences as articulated by Mukono member Kizza, "many youths choose to take drugs just because they find their selves idle and they start forming groups which are not helpful for their lives" (questionnaire, 24 July, 2012). Nampanga elaborates on the presence of "bad groups": "it makes me fear moving at night and in lonely places since such men can easily rape me and in the end may [impregnate] me or infect me with HIV" (questionnaire, 24 July, 2012). Drug abuse keeps young people in an ongoing trap whereby they are collectively perceived as problematic as articulated by Likicho; "the community no longer trusts youths due to drug abuse" (questionnaire, 24 July, 2012).

The creation of *artivists 4 life* in Mukono as a positive peer group has resulted in profound personal transformations when it comes to drug abuse. Kizza explains her case: "I personally first used to take alcohol just because I had friends who influenced me to start taking alcohol, and reason being that I didn't have anyone to guide me in whatever I was doing" (questionnaire, 24 July, 2012). *Artivists 4 life* have responded by providing guidance through venues for discussing solutions, messages and counseling. Visual messages and plays for the community feature alterative behavior to drug abuse such as sports or other positive activities.

HIV/AIDS-Related Issues

When HIV/AIDS was first identified as a major problem in Mukono it was simply listed as "lack of information on HIV/AIDS". *Artivists 4 life* members from Kayunga, who are also HIV/AIDS counselors, were then invited to facilitate a series of workshops that resulted in the emergence of three themes—condom use, faithfulness and positive living—as chosen by Mukono members.

Figure 1.5. MUWRP (Makerere University Walter Reed Project) billboard message in Mukono created by *artivists 4 life*, 2012

For example, one of the key projects pursued by the *artivist 4 life* youth collective is the "One partner one love" campaign shown in Figure 1.5 which one of the youth members describes as a social crusade that promotes "one sexual partner only by being faithful to him or her and satisfied/contented with him or her … this is one of the major ways of how to prevent HIV infection" (Nampanga, questionnaire, 24 July, 2012). This message responds to what is locally known as the "sexual network", providing an image of an alternative relationship along with a corresponding easy to remember message. Following the popular 2011 *artivists 4 life* message "love condoms, love life" this 2012 message was designed with the hopes that community members will be "adopting the saying and putting it into action" (questionnaire, 24 July, 2012). This has been the case for Mukono member Kaddu who declares "I am not having those worries of getting HIV/AIDS because after me and my partner testing for HIV we decided to [live] one partner one love and we're living safely and faithful to each other" (questionnaire, 24 July, 2012).

As understood by Nampanga, "condom use is another way of avoiding HIV infection but it can only prevent one from HIV infection if used correctly and constantly" (questionnaire, 24 July, 2012). Batenga, who helped facilitate the message development process for condom use remarked that, "each and every member can at least teach condom use and if they can it means they can move with them" (questionnaire, 24 July, 2012). Such steps towards behavioral change are helping members, as Nampanga suggests, achieve "control in making the right choices for one's life, not just to be influenced by others" (feedback transcript, 27 March, 2012).

Discussion

In written statements prepared for this piece, feedback transcripts produced in process evaluations and in interviews and questionnaires, *artivists 4 life* reflections show prominent themes emerging through content analysis and their subsequent consideration of this piece as it took shape. Broadly, themes have been grouped into three clusters under the categories of: artivists becoming/becoming artivists; creating new sociability; and owning the change. These indigenous themes from the reflections are then interpreted through a broader set of lenses provided by sensitizing themes from the salient literature.

Artivists Becoming/Becoming artivists

New subjectivities and identities emerge, in the course of becoming an artivist as Mashakalugo notes, it "wakes up and stimulates and tunes up the talent in you". In her case this has meant gaining the confidence to "do things comfortably without shaking" (feedback transcript, 14 February, 2012). For another member, "artivists is good coz it has made me confident that I can now express myself in public … and I feel myself" (Anon, feedback transcript, 27 March, 2012). One member who "used to keep quiet in case of any danger" now breaks the silence, having become "an important youth" validated in her own eyes "who is able to decide for herself" (Anon, feedback transcript, 27 March, 2012). The artivists' actions are thus both creative and self-transformative by necessity.

Members recognize the need to extend their teachings to others in the community. Learning "to talk to people, brainstorm and come up with something good for the community" (Kakome, questionnaire, 24 July, 2012) members are positive and creative contributors. For example, Nampanga notes that "we go to different communities and perform plays to the community

members present and they pick some message from such plays" (questionnaire, 24 July, 2012). Nalubowa describes recognition and respect as an artivist in the community:

> With artivists 4 life I feel useful to society because I'm using the little I have to help someone else change their life for the better. Going out in the community, meeting these people, giving the messages and getting positive response fulfills me. To me it's more than a whole months pay working in sales or any other job. (Archival document, 29 March, 2012)

With their motto of "each one teach one", members model the process of becoming responsible with enthusiasm and a vision of radical pedagogy embodied in their understanding of knowledge and dissemination that is both visionary/future-oriented and shared/collective. Lived experiences in such ways denaturalize modern constructions of individualism as the norm and open possibilities for new subjectivity formation where the emphasis is not necessarily on the self, but on the collective interests of the whole.

In response to the group-identified issue of unemployment, the collective is teaching youth "to be job creators not seekers" (Najjuko, feedback transcript, 27 March, 2012). The chokolo income-generating project not only illustrates creative resourcefulness but has also fostered independence and functions as a catalyst for members to achieve autonomy and intervene directly into their own circumstances.

As Muwanga asserts, "the main mission of *artivists* is to train youth in day to day life and if these youth get experience they also train others in society" (feedback transcript, 5 May, 2012). His belief in the positive future and contribution of youth who gain experience is clear. In fact the desire to involve more fellow youth in the horizontal structure of the collective is repeatedly iterated. Jjita for example, states, "I hope to set up a workshop so that I can employ more youth"

(questionnaire, 24 July, 2012) while Kisitu wants to share his new skills "by teaching other youth in our community to learn how to create their own jobs as I did" (questionnaire, 24 July, 2012). Artivists are thus becoming proactive opportunity-makers: with each step and personal change they make they are envisioning stepping ahead again with another, thus epitomizing the new social subject capable of positive and transformative resistance.

Creating New Sociability

Through the autonomous creation of safe spaces and an emphasis on relationality, these artivists are creating new sociabilities thus enabling personal transformation and fostering a productive sense of belonging as a basis from which to engage in change. Guided by collectively made and governed rules and regulations *artivists 4 life* "express ourselves by creating safe spaces and rapport to enable open, honest, passionate and creative ideas" (2011 working manifesto). Safety in the collective is underlined by Kabanda, "there has been development of trust and a good relationship consequently creating a room for freely sharing personal problems and discussing possible way outs" (archival document, 29 March, 2012). Such intense conversation spaces are "where knowledge acquired stays with us, empowering us to abandon fear and insecurity and find the place of compassion and connection" (hooks, 2010, p. 46). Here pride in belonging, through newfound compassion, is evinced by repeated calls for marking membership including collective efforts to create *artivist 4 life* ID cards and t-shirts for all registered members.

Supported and supportive, members of the collective have transitioned away from former stereotypes such as "idle" or even "useless", becoming purposeful. Kakome describes a profound shift of focus and demonstrates his awareness of deeper impacts: "the project keeps my brain active since most of the time I have activities to do and to think of which is also good for my

life" (questionnaire, 24 July, 2012). In their own ways Kakome and others are practicing their abilities to get excited and synergized by ideas and possibilities and use knowledge in transformative ways. Jjita explains how members develop personal skills in various sectors of art, "Now one can't live idle you just need to implement or work on the skills given" (questionnaire, 24 July, 2012).

A sense of purpose in contributing to both the collective and the larger society is emphasized by Obol who notes not only that, "the project has been very good to me in that it keeps me busy as an artist" but also that, "I teach youth and children how to take their own ideas and communicate them visually … because I have the chance to teach them, so many have picked interest in art" (interview, 30 March, 2012). New sociability is exhibited through the realizations that "artivists 4 life has given me a chance to meet and make friends and with the great group members, I feel like I have a whole big family" (Nalubowa, feedback transcript, 29 March, 2012). *Artivists 4 life* are building themselves a community out of "love for this thing" resonating with hooks' (2010) thesis that "anytime we do the work of love we are doing the work of ending domination" (p. 176).

Owning the Change

Through active participation in message development and setting *artivists 4 life* "ground rules" members are modeling the messages and processes they develop, creating a shared ethics of social responsibility as well as a shared image of an artivist collective identity.

Obol, who led illustration development for messages responding to HIV/AIDS prevention including "love condoms, love life", and "be proud of your partner" explains how he has "fallen victim of my own messages". He describes a personal transformation: "developing

messages about condom use makes my conscious stronger … I can take care of myself and if my neighbor is HIV positive I can help" (interview, 30 March, 2012). Obol, who used to keep his personal relationships secret, is breaking the silence saying "hey this is my girlfriend" (interview, 30 March, 2012) and taking the next step towards faithfulness.

Project co-founder Mashakalugo reveals her integrity in honoring the *artivists 4 life* notion of being "examples to our society" (2011, working manifesto). She recognizes that her ethical stance, that is her commitment to embodying her words, has been noticed encouragingly in the community: "Through my involvement in this project I have managed to secure a job with MUWRP and I returned to school for a Bachelors degree … I have become a role model for many youths both in and out of school. The community now accords me respect" (archival document, 9 April, 2012). It is in everyday experiences—discussing girl/boyfriends, working on chokolo, making confessions—that differential consciousness does its work, when no one or no one act is privileged over another, and through the acknowledgement that each intervention is as potentially valuable as another.

Coming together as a collective with a shared vision to change their destinies *artivists 4 life* are fusing collective action and artistic reflection opening up imagination and creating the potential to "rupture the present with counter-narratives" (Fuad-Luke, 2009, p. xxi). Members are becoming synergetic forces determined to create in the face of doom and to encourage others to join them. So between contending ideologies, those shared by a body of social actors seeking egalitarian social relations and those of the dominant social body where we struggle, exists a shared space where both limits and possibilities arise from the same oppressive space.

In terms of limitations, the desire and processes are now in place to extend artivist practices further, but the collective lacks the resources to take on new members. Muwanga explains, "you find that in Mukono, members are meeting somewhere and the number is limited. Yet there [are] many youth in villages who would wish to join us but not given that opportunity" (questionnaire, 24 July, 2012). Similarly Obol insists,

> the project should keep going on as it's artivists 4 life. To keep youth busy and earning the project needs to be sustainable forever. In future I would like to collaborate with all sorts of people who are interested like getting people to intern and get the experience of how we do our work. I am sure that's something a student wouldn't wanna miss out on or even an 80 year old professor. (Interview, 30 March, 2012)

It will be an ongoing and collective effort to sustain *artivists 4 life.* This is a challenge that members like Nalubowa are ready to face, so that we can all "look back and be proud of ourselves when we grow old knowing the youth who will be, shall keep lifting the light of creating for a better world" (archival document, 29 March, 2012).

Conclusion

Mashakalugo's words in the opening epigraph express a desire for recognition, a wish for the concrete realization on the part of policy-makers to re-frame the way they see youth from being "at risk" to being at promise. *Artivists 4 life* are already doing the work of creatively re-positioning, re-imagining and re-constructing the social bodies of their communities beginning with their own personal change. Their engagement is deeply transformative and enables their identification of the imposed limits of the social order, which become transparent and dissolve in the creative new sociabilities of the collective. They are refusing to remain, using Aime Césaire's term, "thingified" (Ogonga, 2011, p. 234).

Effective artivism requires a continuing and transformative relationship to the social whole. In seeing this way, and in living creatively and refusing compromise, action and reflection can blend together artfully, presenting research practice itself as a ground for radical co-consideration. Both the working manifesto and the working constitution iterate a commitment to an ethics where *the end is the means* and the projects that continue on are subject to continual reformulation by communities and co-researchers.

Artivists 4 life provide a concrete and vivid response to Ogonga's (2011) recent call for "a common vision as a common people" (p. 234) while refusing the preordained "stagnant positions where relationships between the spectator and the action are confined to fixed positions as a security measure for keeping our imaginations sterile" (p. 234). Instead, the collective is not only imagining "a space for cultural rituals that create situations where catharsis may happen" (p. 235), but also resoundingly through their own actions and becomings, answering the call to create alternative spaces in the streets of their own communities "not yet in existence, for young artists to produce and present their works, engage anew with contemporary audiences and design fresh relations with their societies … to corrupt the zones of silence … to invent curiosity where none exists" (p. 235). By working in a cooperative and communal manner ("each one teach one") with/within communities and sometimes in concert with international allies, *artivists 4 life* are successfully creating "horizontal circuits that act as cultural life spaces" contributing "to pluralising culture, internationalising it in the real sense, legitimising it in their own terms, constructing new epistemes, unfolding alternative actions" (Mosquera, 2003, p. 21).

Artivism is transformative, artivists are necessarily transfigured in the midst of the process itself and it is no different in our own writing process here, or for the creative engagement in community projects. Out of this change-experience of becoming co-authors and learning

from/with each other we have begun to experience the shattering of the singular sense of self as the skill that allows mobile identities to form gathers strength. As artists/scholars/educators, developing a deep affinity and sense of belonging with fellow *artivists* allows us all to involve ourselves in processes of de-individualization. Thus our lens purposely draws from anti-oppression/social justice perspectives in alignment with the collective's implicit rejoinder to the pressure of neoliberal market globalization and its homogenizing impulses.

As we learn to teach, theorize, resist and re-exist it seems to us that there are many key questions with which we must seriously engage. And the question of how we participate in what Sandoval (2000) calls the "emancipation of consciousness" (p. 88) begs even more questions. We consciously foster awareness of our own wounded and situated subjectivities, realizing at the same time that they are necessarily always fragmented, fraught with privilege and power relations and in perpetual negotiation with the emergent challenges of an implicated scholarship. Insistently, we attend to the work of shifting academic desire away from the hegemonic domain of scholarship towards creative new ethics and forms of social relations. Artivist Kabanda concludes: "it is our responsibility as youth to think and plan with no limitations as the only way of creating a better world" (archival document, 29 March, 2012). This positive shift in consciousness is at the heart of what the *artivists 4 life* collective is doing.

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Artivism-Into-Modernity:

Exposing Coloniality in High Art and Higher Education

Leslie Robinson

If art does not challenge and confront, fight and tussle, wrestle, grapple and stand up against oppression, then our art is actually aiding that oppression.

—Asante, 2008, p. 206

In order to transform the world, one must challenge and confront the institutions that train and graduate custodians of the status quo.

—Asante, 2008, p. 55

Extending Gloria Anzaldúa's border thinking and her conception of the colonial wound as slash ("/") between the Mexico/U.S. border, Walter Mignolo (2011a) uses the construction *modernity/coloniality* to denote both unity and divide, "where modernity grates against coloniality and bleeds" (p. xxi). This understanding, grasped by all decolonial/border thinkers, reveals that modernity requires a darker colonial side for its own sustenance (Mignolo, 2011a; Quijano, 2000). The slash for Mignolo is the colonial divide, which for W.E.B. Du Bois was the *color line* (1961). Sylvia Wynter (1976) unveiled this union/division as the symbiotic relationship between the (human) Self requiring a (less-than-human) Other for its own self-description. For Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) modernity/coloniality reveals coloniality of Being, evinced first by the phenomenon of the cry, "not a word but an interjection … a call of attention to one's own existence … . And the cry points to a peculiar existential condition: that of the condemned" (p. 256).

The condemned, the oppressed, the sub-altern, the marginalized, the subordinated, the third world, the have-nots, and anyone else occupying the ranks of the less-than-human, are experiencing the cry. "First-world" citizens are increasingly entering the "emotional state of peoples whose native territories were replaced, their bodies subordinated to other dominants, their futures unclear, those colonized by race, class, sex, gender, culture, nation, and power who developed a 'schizophrenic' relation to dominant languages" (Sandoval, 2000, p. 34). Failing to comprehend the connections between our past, present and future, the strategic antagonist of our time has become our amnesic and distorted sense of self (Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Sandoval, 2000). In effect, the *structures* of social control have infiltrated us all. Indeed, if we are not crying, we are latching blindly to modernity's latest iteration without recognizing the violence it covers over.

It is easy to lay the blame on the neo-liberals, the neo-conservatives, and so on, but this is not where I wish to focus my reflections. I aim to avoid subscribing to labels and binary constructs of us and them, or the West and the rest. Instead, I prefer to think about the problems we face through an understanding of the structures that maintain modernity/coloniality as I have come to *see* them through the lens of artivism and the kind of relationality it has imparted me. To focus on the structures of our social fabric[1] and the assumptions that sustain the pervasive acceptance of, and identification with, "universal knowledge" is not to undermine forms of oppression as they manifest through individual or collective wrong doings. Instead, this attention acknowledges the complexity of subjectivity formation and the subtle, dispersed and unpredictable ways that pain (and the ambiguity of the cry) manifests in the ordinary sphere of life (Das, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2008).

In struggling with the predicaments of our modern moment we can get so caught up in our everyday/everynight creative fever that we neglect to apprehend the hidden workings of the deeper *structures* of control. Without a grasp of the inherent contingency of modernity/colonialty and the power relations it perpetuates we fall victim to what Maldonado-Torres (2004) calls *historic amnesia*. He does not mince words as he elucidates this condition that has become a constitutive feature of our times: "the forgetfulness of the damned is part of the veritable sickness of the West, a sickness that could be likened to a state of amnesia that leads to murder, destruction and epistemic will to power—with good conscience" (p. 36). This delusional state is

[1] By pointing to structures of modernity/coloniality and the logic they normalize I am challenging the overrepresentation of Western and Westernized subjectivities and knowledges through the self-defined position of objective observer and evaluator: a position that is disguised as the illusion of universal knowledge. By Westernized, I am not suggesting a racial classification, but instead pointing to the systematic process of forming post-colonial subjects born, raised, educated and/or socialized either in the West or through its rhetoric. In challenging modern epistemology's investment in the illusion of objective truth I adopt the decolonial understanding that the knowing subject is always implicated in the known (Mignolo, 2009).

maintained by the false presumptions of a European medieval tradition, claimed as humanism, yet actualized by means of racism and colonialism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

This artivist intervention takes up Maldonado-Torres' diagnosis as its point of departure by recognizing that artivists and all other practitioners seeking egalitarian social justice must grapple to understand (and not forget) how the problems we face in our everyday lives are largely construed and maintained by historically embedded ideologies of social control. By looking beyond/behind the immediately visible and back over our shared imperial/colonial histories the aim of this piece is thus to discern and expose the "reality-appearing powers of ideology" (Sandoval, 2000, p. 95), particularly as they infiltrate our inherited global Art/Education/Academic systems, their institutions and discourses—the realm where We/I[2] exist. Much is at stake as "it is our ethical responsibility to know and understand the house of modernity/coloniality (the colonial matrix of power) we all inhabit" (Mignolo, 2011a, p. 94).

By better understanding the myths that work to stifle imagination, stagnate culture and categorically inferiorize people and ideas we can begin to create an imaginary for seeing connections between past and present—the necessary groundwork for imagining decolonial futures. In what follows I hope to contribute to "a more lucid and wholesome vision of our realities" so that we can "reinvent ourselves by means of vibrant and transgressive expression" (Ogonga, 2011, p. 236). The hope is to offer concrete understandings for working toward undoing the violence inflicted upon those subjectivities (and sociabilities) whose enunciations have been and continues to be denied. Challenging modernity/coloniality's ordering logic in this way requires shifting emphasis from the known to the knower through the understanding that it

[2] I use the signifier "We/I" to acknowledge my interdependence with those with whom I struggle. I take up this construct in detail in Piece 4 "Aesthetic Disobedience and Other artivist Tactics for Creative and Communal Re-Existence".

is "a racially marked body in a geo-historical marked space that feels the urge or gets the call to speak, to articulate, in whatever semiotic system, the urge that makes of living organisms 'human' beings" (Mignolo, 2009, p. 160). Thus, from the particularity of my being—at the interstices of self/group, academia/artivism, Canada/Uganda, white/black, etc./etc.
—I am called to dance, paint, perform and write.

Overview

> In the first two sections, "Colonial Matrix of Power" (Mignolo, 2011a) and "Modern Art Matrix" (Preziosi & Farago, 2012), I discuss these two word systems, both of which have foundational roots in the sixteenth century. The visualizations of these constructs offer a way of *seeing* into the hidden workings of our inherited modern/colonial world system particularly as they manifest on subjectivities. The aim is to foster a practice of looking forward while looking back so we can be permanently awakened to the very structures

that serve to re-perpetuate the colonial encounter and effectively hold the *damné*[3] in lockdown. In the third section "Coloniality of Artistic Being/Being Academic" I discuss both ontological and epistemological considerations of coloniality in academic institutions today. In the fourth section "The Crisis in Academia Through an artivist Lens" I elucidate how the maintenance of academic disciplines (designed according to modernity/coloniality's age old logic) serves to perpetuate asymmetrical ordering practices, ultimately prescribing intellectual coloniality. Through a comparison of the current state of Universities to the corporatization of hip-hop, I offer a critique of the increasing marketization of academia. I then elaborate how the assault of colonial logic manifests in the realms of both the communal and the artistic. I conclude with a

[3] Fanon (1963/1968) described the colonized as the damné, translated as the damned or the wretched of the Earth.

call to resist the tendency to mimic the structures
of our institutions in order to think and act otherwise.

Colonial Matrix of Power

Figure 2.1 is my visualization of Mignolo's colonial matrix of power (2011a), designed with examples. Mignolo's matrix, extending earlier work by Peruvian scholar Anibal Quijano (2000) on the coloniality of power, offers an analytic tool for charting the power dynamics of our present world order. The colonial matrix has its roots in the historical expansion from the 16th century when the world shifted from polycentric and non-capitalist to Eurocentric and capitalist. It is thus constructed according to biographic descriptions/prescriptions of humanness that were conceived of over 500 years ago. In this way it effectively links racism, the control of sex, economic exploitation and the monopolization of knowledge to modern/colonial history (Mignolo, 2011a). Key to understanding this matrix is the mutually co-dependent forces of modernity/coloniality whereby "coloniality names the underlying logic of the foundation and unfolding of Western civilization from the Renaissance to today of which historical colonialisms have been a constitutive, although downplayed dimension" (2011a, p. 2). Coloniality in this sense denotes "first and foremost, the two axes of power" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243).

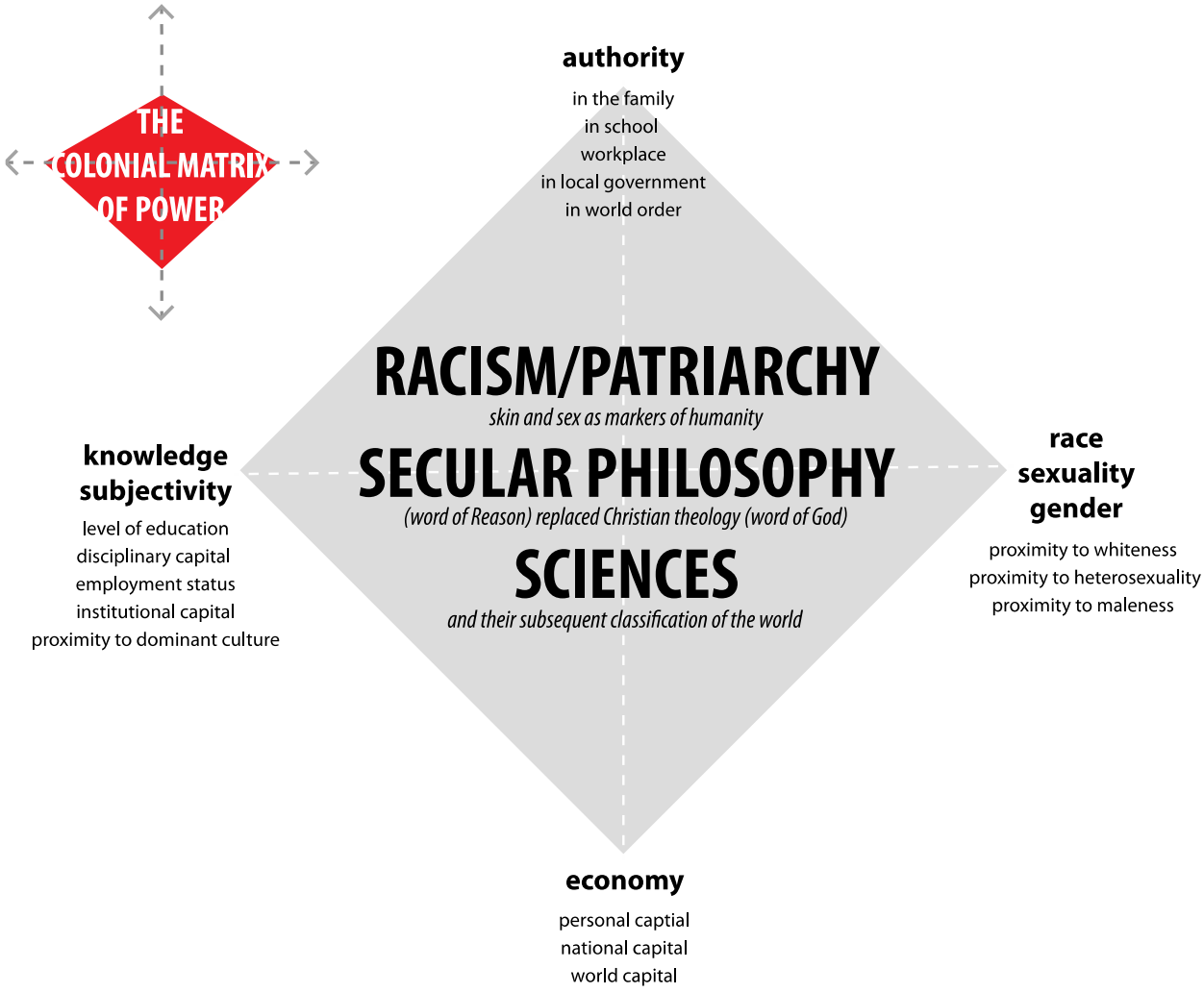

Figure 2.1. Visualization of Mignolo's colonial matrix of power (2011a) with examples

The colonial matrix is centred on racism and patriarchy as the modern conditions for constructing and controlling knowledge and subjectivity. As secular philosophy succeeded over Christian Theology by the 18th century, "blood as marker was transferred to skin" (Mignolo, 2011a, p. 9). For Sylvia Wynter (2003) the "secular slot of Otherness" that still prevails effectively replaced the "theocentric slot of Otherness in which non-European peoples had been classified in religious terms as Enemies-of-Christ" (p. 292). Secular philosophy, along with the sciences, brought forth the word of Reason to replace the word of God, hence legitimizing the world order through categorizing mechanisms (Mignolo, 2011a). This same classifying

sensibility has served to construe our present epistemological order "and its adaptive 'regime of truth' based on the biocentric disciplinary paradigms in whose terms we at present know our social reality" (Wynter, 2003, p. 330). By privileging scientific knowledge and economic progress the disciplines serve to measure humanness in direct ratio to one's mastery of bioeconomic modalities of existence (Mignolo, 2011a; Wynter, 2003). The four quadrants of the colonial matrix (authority, race/sexuality/gender, economy, knowledge/subjectivity) take the foundational principles (racism/patriarchy/secular philosophy/sciences) and further classify them onto two axes of power. This makes it possible to chart and visualize the level of (in)humanness of a given biographic description by quantifying its power in the world order.

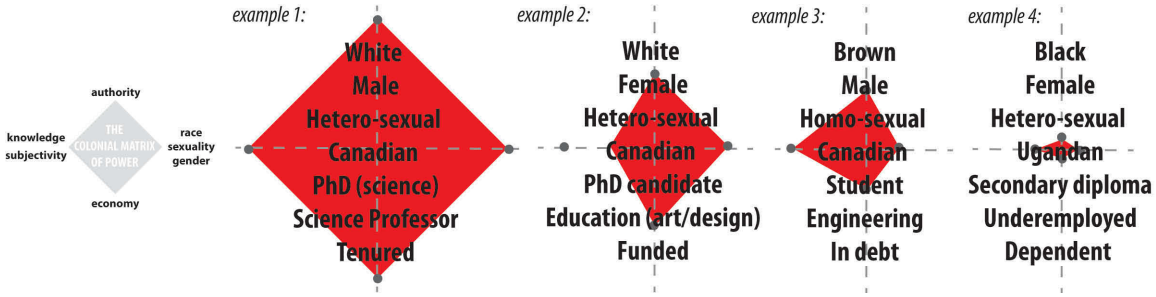

Figure 2.2. Examples of colonial matrix of power bestowed on 4 theoretical bodies

In Figure 2.2 examples of four theoretical beings are diagramed on the matrix, providing a stark visual representation of the workings of the system. For Mignolo, "(in)dignity is a feeling provoked by he who controls knowledge and is in a position to classify and rank people in the chain of humanity" (p. 218). In the examples above (in)dignity is shown by the relative size of the red area for each body according to its prescribed position on the matrix. The positions on the matrix are not fixed and represent where a given individual is *supposed to be*. The logic of coloniality, shown by quantifiable levels of humanity plotted along two axes, unveils the underlying sickness beneath the symptoms that are *obligating* artivists and other activists all over the world today.

As Fanon (1963/67) discerned, a critical component of decolonization is the "liquidation of all untruths implanted in his being by oppression" (p. 309). The colonial matrix serves a tool for visualizing the *untruths* bestowed by modernity/coloniality in order to dismantle their underlying logic. By discerning the biographic descriptions as *prescribed* along colonial/color lines—as opposed to products of a god-given or supposedly natural/universal phenomena—we can begin to imagine alternatives to modernity/coloniality. Such alternatives need to be structurally, thematically, ethically, and politically different from what currently constitutes our Western/westernized world system. Making such a shift toward decolonial futures would "place human lives and life in general first rather than making claims for the 'transformation of the disciplines'"(Mignolo, 2009, p. 20) In what follows I turn our attention to the Art matrix to help situate art discourses and inter-connected art institutions in relation to modernity/coloniality.

Modern Art Matrix

Preziosi and Farago's (2012) art matrix, like the colonial matrix, is an analytic tool for unveiling how Western knowledge systems have come to be imposed all over the world, in this case looking specifically at ideas about the function of Art[4] and its structural foundation. Taking the same starting point as the colonial matrix, the sixteenth century, the art matrix visualizes "how the Western ideal of (fine) art came to be applied to cultural productions of any origin whatsoever—and, specifically, how that now contested but no less globally disseminated product of European thought operates today" (Preziosi & Farago, 2012, p. 53).

[4] I distinguish "Art" produced in line with the modern Art system from forms of "art", such as artivism, that move in alternative directions.

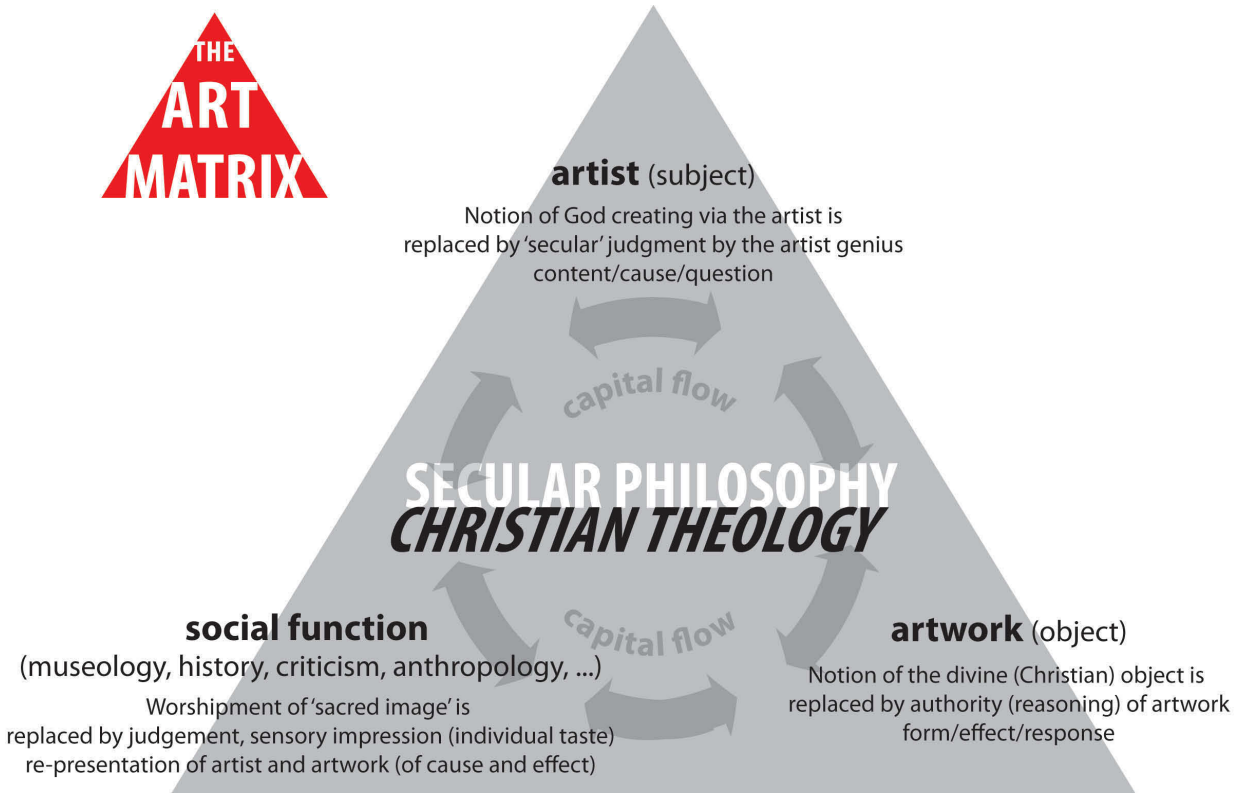

Figure 2.3. Visualization of Preziosi and Farago's art matrix (2012*)*

The above diagram (Figure 2.3)—my visualization of the art matrix—reveals an unresolved tension between secular philosophy (and its inherent relation to science as we have seen in the colonial matrix) and Christian

theology, visualized as the shadow beneath its successor. The triad of artist, artwork and social function, which underlies modern discourses that celebrate the genius of an artist/artwork, is revealed as a deeply rooted construction. As the diagram shows, this logic is construed according to earlier relationships between the same three components founded in Christian theology.

In *Art is Not What You Think it is* (2012) Preziosi and Farago explain:

> Histories of the modern secular idea of art have concentrated on the humanist tradition and treated its classical sources as secular, but "classical" ideas about artifice and artificers circulated in a culture where Christian theology made very specific demands on the concordance between the agent responsible for the image (God working through the

> artist, or the artist working through God), the appearance of that image, and the way that image functioned for its users. *This tension is at the foundation of the ground zero of modern ideas about art*. (p. 26, emphasis in original)

Whether applied to the Art system or the world system at large, ground zero, or *zero-point epistemology* in Mignolo's (2011a) terms (who draws on Santiago Castro-Gómez's *hubris of the zero point*) is premised on the idea of the knowing subject (white and male) classifying the world and its people according to his own point of view, cloaked as "universal". The knower's perspective is grounded in modern ways of knowing (rooted in the sciences and philosophy, preceded by Christian theology) and hence governed by patriarchy and racism.

Our inherited global Art system with its prevailing triad is governed by a split between the producer of an artwork (artist, curator, sponsor, etc.) and its viewer or beholder whereby the promotion and re-presentation of the artwork acts as an intermediary process. For example, this is evident in the causal relationship between artist and artwork that persists today. The idea that the artist's work, of body and mind, is an index of his/her ingenuity, spirituality and humanness is central to the modern idea of Art. From as early as the sixteenth-century "the artist's powers of conceptualization embodied in his 'scientific' process of fabrication from initial sketches to completed work of art became a way of assessing the epistemological status of the work as well as the moral character of its maker" (Preziosi & Farago, 2012, p. 38). This phenomenon today can be likened to the assumption that to know an artist's work is to know the inner truths of its producer.

The social function of the Art matrix is embedded in the same logic that serves to sever the artist/producer from the spectator. The artwork, acting as the sign of its producer's intentions, is re-presented through the various social functions including museology, art history and art criticism, the gatekeepers of the global Art system. The workings of the system, presumed to be

secular but still grounded in a vacated Christian theological framework, are no longer accounted for in discourses on art by the enabling bodies of the system. These enablers: producers, museums, art historians, art schools and so on, are instead subsumed into the model of economics whereby the entire system pays service to our global capitalist society.

The functioning of the system circulates around the promotion of the idea of the artist genius. His/her creative brainchild becomes a commodity or commodifiable experience for other stakeholders to exchange on the market. The notion of the artist as the primary agent for the creation of an artwork—positioned at the crux of the Art market—began to take hold during the sixteenth century. This role, which replaced the artist's earlier status as technician and contributor among many, coincided with the growth of mathematical sciences and their influence on art. Artists who were able to master linear perspective and other pursuits grounded in theory and reason were elevated to the highest standards of artistic merit (Preziosi & Farago, 2012). The related idea that the artist is gifted and born with innate talent (as opposed to the idea that an artistic sensibility can be learned) still holds true today to a considerable extent in art institutions and art discourses. For example, post-secondary art institutions including colleges and University departments normally recruit students according to their perceived artistic talent (weighted based on portfolio evaluations) with much less attention paid to their demonstrated abilities in other subject areas or their motivations to practice and learn about art.[5]

The relationship between non-European Art and the workings of the modern Art system has developed along the same exclusionary lines I advanced in the section about the colonial matrix of power and its two axes of power. Although I will not go in depth into the history of Western cultural discourse in relation to art history, I will describe a few ways the frame of European

[5] In my own experience in the Department of Art and Design, University of Alberta, since 1999, first studying and later instructing, this has been the case.

modernity has constructed the non-Western "other" through the idea/ideal of Art. In other words, I will show how the modern Art system serves to rationalize differences between Western and non-Western subjects with an implication of the West's racial and cultural superiority over the rest.

Through the rise of the disciplines, grounded in rational thought and the scientific, the (fine) arts developed as theoretically grounded pursuits epitomized by the renaissance arts and their reliance on mathematical perspective. The renaissance arts were "based on experience defined in terms of the direct observation of nature" providing "the standards against which non-Western cultural products continued to be measured by Europeans for hundreds of years" (Preziosi & Farago, 2012, pp. 42-43). The construction of the self in modernity required the construction of an "other" whereby the former active subject is defined in terms of modernity (i.e. newness) and the later in terms of passive primitivism or traditionalism. Such binary classifications served to perpetuate, for example, the subordination of the "other's" art, classified as imaginative/ expressive or even child-like, to the rational and poetic Art by the modern "self". In this way, non-European artists have been constructed through art history and other modern discourses as lacking or eroticized as Said (1979) suggested. For example, justification for inferiorizing such artists has been based on lack of knowledge in proportion, perspective and, in general, rational thought or the ability to control imagination (Preziosi & Farago, 2012). While there are exceptions and deviations from this constructed binary relationship, the point I hope reiterate is that "the separation of the Self and the 'other' is applied to the philosophy of modern art and its historical agency. By defining modernity only as an expression of European subjectivity, the European artist is granted the sole subject position in the realization of the historical developments of modern art and its grand narrative" (Araeen, 2011, p. 369). One of the many contributions Fanon (1953/1967; 1963/1968) made was to uncover how colonialism not only

disenfranchised people's minds and bodies in the present, but through a distorted logic, also fictionalized and destroyed their histories.

In the case of art history, for example, the critical contributions African and Asian artists in the diasporas made to modernity in the post-war era have been almost completely written out of art history. The impact today is such that "while young postmodern white/European artists carry with them the knowledge of modernism and its history, which provides them the dynamic for their present work, nonwhite artists have been denied the history of the modern achievement of their earlier generations in the West" (Araeen, 2011, p. 373). Through the contested and grandiloquent transition from modernity to postmodernity and the acceleration of globalization the Art system has accommodated a greater plurality of cultural perspectives from across the globe. This advancement has, however, "responded less to a new consciousness than to a tolerance based on paternalism, quotas, and political correctness" (Mosquera, 2003, p. 20). Artists of color, for example, are now more widely represented in the high Art scene. Too often though, such inclusion is motivated by the exotification of difference that fulfills the necessary criteria for projecting an image of multiculturalism. For Mosquera (2003), the key question we need to be asking is whether minority artists "are contributing or not in the transformation of a hegemonic and restrictive situation, into an active plurality, instead of being digested by it" (p. 23). Let us not be fooled by efforts, however well intended, to write these artists into modern Art discourses. We need to be vigilant that such inclusion occurs at the level of the enunciated, not enunciation: "other" artistic contributions are appropriated to fit modern categories still premised on partriarchy and racism.

The global Art system, as co-existing spheres (producer, artwork and social function), maintains an ideological (and sequential) separation between the process of art creation and its later

consumption or interpretation. Today, under the guise of postmodernism, those who guide the Art system's social function are still looking at the world and arranging its art forms (and experiences) according to the same modern ordering principles and around the same idea of the solitary Art genius. Remaining within their own market-driven triad the enablers of the system "innocently open up their own minds, as well as spaces, institutions and resources for artists, new contemporary art forms, ideas and discourses" (Ogonga, 2011, p. 237). This serves to ensure that artists continue to create Art, in however radically oppositional a manner, that maintains the dominant social order and its sanctioned institutions.

The philosophical and academic discourses that legitimated the superiority of the European in modernism have been discredited, however, they are still being applied through deeply-rooted forms of consciousness (and unconsciousness) that are held stagnant by the frame of the status quo. The critical question, from a decolonial and artivist perspective, is how the subjectivities of all those who partake in the art encounter (and those who are systemically excluded) are formed by this fractured framing. If postmodernism is failing to allow the "other" to re-exist as a subject what kind of interventions are necessary? Can we intervene effectively from within the existing structure or should we work to dismantle it all together? The argument I am unfolding in this piece is that in order to begin to answer such questions we need to first understand the critical and dispensable connection of our times to the history of modernism and its insidious debris.

Coloniality of Artistic Being/Being Academic

In what follows I take up the notions of coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) to discuss how the structural framings I have explored thus far serve us today. Coloniality of being points to the lived experience of sustained vertical relations between identities (premised on proximity to whiteness and maleness) through an emphasis on

enunciation. It is a response to the need to understand the impact of modernity/coloniality on colonized subjectivities through the recognition that coloniality impacts not only the mind. As Maldonado-Torres (2007) points out, Heidegger's famous philosophy of being left out how, in modernity, being has a colonial side. For the colonized, one's being is defined through the lens of the colonized. It is this aspect that sustains the colonial divide. Furthermore, the notion of coloniality of knowledge responds to how the privileging of epistemology in Western self-defined thought carries with it the implication that "others", those left out of the defining process, do not know (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2011a).

My focus will maintain a backward eye to colonial history while seeing through an artivist, thus interventionist, lens. I will discuss coloniality in relation to mental constructions (epistemology) and lived experiences (ontology) that emerge from power differentials through the understanding that these concepts are inter-related. "Since the modern distinction between theory and practice doesn't apply once you enter in the realm of border thinking and de-colonial projects" (Mignolo, 2007, p. 122) these aspects of humanness become synonymous through being, doing and thinking.

The work of Franz Fanon (1952/1967; 1963/1968) is paramount to discussions among decolonial and other border thinkers today[6]. Fanon's (1963/1968) understanding of colonialism holds true for coloniality of knowledge and coloniality of being in today's context:

> Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: "In reality who am I?" (p. 250)

[6] See Piece 4 "Aesthetic Disobedience and Other artivist Tactics for Creative and Communal Re-Existence" for a discussion of how Fanon's work informs artivism.

Fanon built on W.E.B. Du Bois' notion of *double consciousness* (1961) as lived by blacks in the United States to advance an explanation for the psychology of the colonized through his concept of *sociogeny* in *Black Skins, White Masks*. Fanon resolved that ontology "does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (1952/1967, p.10). He thus revealed that ontology must be informed by sociogeny, or the constructive powers of socio-cultural circumstances. Sylvia Wynter's decolonial project draws on Fanon's work, arguing that he contributed a radical new conception of the human by challenging the biocentric conception of Man defined on the model provided by natural science. Fanon's work, according to Wynter (2003), served to shatter the knowledge system that academic disciplines continue to perpetuate and the general structuring of our present Western-centred epistemology. What Wynter unveils, through her meditations on the ideas of both Fanon and Du Bois, is that the problem of the *color-line* (the colonial divide in Mignolo's terms) was not only the problem of the twentieth century, but the prevailing problem of our (post)modern present. Wynter, allied with other decolonial thinkers through a shared decolonial consciousness, calls for a paradigm shift, one that has been laid out by Fanon but yet to be fully actualized.

Fanon, who was working alongside social-protest and anti-colonial movements in the sixties, helped to unveil the rupture between Western-centric episteme and everyday realities of colonized subjects. Wynter (2003) describes this split as

> one projected from the perspective (and to the adaptive advantage) of our present ethnoclass genre of the human Man, and its biocentric descriptive statement, and the way our global social reality veridically is out there; that is, outside the viewpoint of ethnoclass Man—of its genre of being, of truth, of freedom—as all three are articulated in the disciplines of our present epistemological order and its biocentric disciplinary discourses. (p. 312)

For Mignolo (2011a), this same division was created in the *house of enunciation* governed by the white race and from the European continent whereby all other races and continents "were enunciated, but were denied enunciation" (p. 201). Mignolo uses the term *epistemic racism* to describe how European languages (inherently connected to the disciplines) have become the proclaimers of truth. For him, Fanon's understanding that there is a quantifiable relationship between one's mastery of the French language (or today English to an even larger extent) and his/her (in)humanness can be applied to academic categories. Mignolo argues "the anthropos will come closer to being a real human being in direct ratio to his or her mastery of disciplinary norms" (2011a, p. 127). Thus, in academia preferential treatment is espoused in relation to proximity to Western philosophy and sciences, and increasingly, business/economics.

As decolonial scholars argue, academia is interned by a relentless adherence to the same ordering and dividing principles brought forth by modernity and sustained through the disciplines and their sanctioned languages. While maintaining modernity's framing our visionary capacities for real social change remain outwardly impeded. We are masked from seeing how our global social circumstances are veraciously *out there*, not in neat categories but in schizophrenic and messy combobulations. Until we re-conceptualize and re-build this system we will remain locked down by a state of intellectual colonialism that perpetuates the delusion that major problems have been solved and all that is left to do is make adjustments (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a).

The Crisis in Academia Through an artivist Lens

Universities mirror and reproduce political, social, cultural and economic structures in wider society through an entrenched hierarchy of theoretical domains (Maldonado-Torres, 2012, 2008; Mignolo, 2011; Sandoval, 2000). Historically embedded ideological formations perpetuate patterns of inequality through the subjugation of knowledges and subjectivities in direct relation

to their proximity to the hetero-Euro-centric norm, often constructed as natural in the name of science and the rhetoric of rationality (Mignolo, 2011; Wynter, 2003). Ever-increasing pressures upon academic institutions to adhere to an ideology of market relevance serve to exaggerate this hierarchy by further undermining initiatives toward social transformation. Academic projects in the arts and humanities—those already distanciated to the bottom of disciplinary ranks—are further subordinated in direct relation to their ideological differentiation to market logic. As academia is further entrenched in dominator culture and its market ideology its relevance to the majority of global society—the underrepresented and thus underprivileged—dissolves. For those of us in academia this scenario begs the question, how can we resist imitating this position and becoming imitators of the status quo?

The willingness of academics and academic institutions to remain complacent within a modern epistemic order based on categorical exclusion (of forms of enunciation and their enunciators) is a problem that can be likened to the mainstreaming of hip-hop[7]. In *It's Bigger than Hip-Hop: The Rise of the Post-Hip-Hop Generation* (2008) Asante reveals how the emancipatory potential of hip-hop has been ruptured, ultimately misrepresenting those that it was conceived to represent—the people. My point in comparing the state of academia to mainstream hip-hop is more than cautionary. It is a call to re-consider who we, as academics, are supposed to be serving and to re-consider the extent to which we are betraying this purpose. In the chapter "A Lesson Before Dying: A Phone Interview with Hip-Hop" (2008) Asante writes, from the perspective of hip-hop as a personified historical character:

[7]Hip-hop emerged in the mid-seventies as tool for radical social intervention. The co-optation of mainstream hip-hop by neo-liberal market and media forces has masked its own history. Its assimilation into the popular music industry even serves to subordinate the *real* hip-hop social movements—in *problem-areas* and among oppressed groups of youth—outside of mainstream consumer hip-hop (Asante, 2008; Kitwana, 2008).

> The people in the ghetto don't have any political power, so if white folks who like my music want to help, they need to go back to their communities and help out … their communities need the most help because racism is so rampant there. So they need to study history … . Then they need to educate their communities. But that hasn't been happening. So, as a result, the dismal conditions that I was born into in the late seventies in the Bronx—despite all the whites that listen to my music today—haven't changed … all these frat boys banging my music as they study to maintain a racist status quo—to keep the progenitors and custodians of me oppressed. … *So whenever you don't oppose a system, then by default, by your inaction, you support it.* (p. 253, my emphasis)

Applying Asante's dictum to the crisis in academia we can see that whenever we choose not to confront disciplinary norms, through our inaction we are actually supporting epistemic racism. The disciplines function "as a language capacitated form of life" ensuring that "we, as Western and westernized intellectuals, continue to articulate, in however radically oppositional a manner, the rules of the social order and its sanctioned theories" (Wynter, 2003, pp. 170-171). Epistemic racism refers to the subordination of ways of knowing and the forms of enunciation that emerge through them. The privileging of European languages and their associated academic discourses serve to exclude alternative epistemes or relegate them to anecdotal references or appendices. For Mignolo (2011a), if we do not challenge and confront these hierarchical biases that determine who knows and who does not know we are "maintaining the terms of the conversation and trying to be 'radical thinkers' by operating only at the level of the enunciated" (p. 193). Indeed if we focus solely on striving to identify with the current system, rather opting to break away from it, our enunciations will carry the perpetual weight of external appropriation.

From an artivist lens there are two distinct (and broadly defined) forms of enunciation that are especially marginal in academia: the artistic (especially the politicized form) and the collaborative (especially when the collaboration is with those from outside the institution). These forms of enunciation are indeed admissible, however, under the condition that they

ultimately be enunciated through the available academic discourses. For example, both participatory action research (PAR) and arts-based research (ABR) have gained traction as legitimate methodologies and research paradigms (see for example Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Park et al., 1993; and Sullivan, 2010). The challenge that many practitioners employing collaborative and/or artistic approaches face is that even though we may already be doing research comparable to PAR or ABR until we re-frame our work to align with the accepted discourses our contributions remain marginal, often discounted as non-theoretical or otherwise lacking. If we are successful in "writing up" our research to fit one of the accepted research methodologies we contribute to advancing the discipline while undermining communal or creative cultural practices unique to the particular local histories of the context of our work.

The artivism I practice along with members of *artivists 4 life* offers a case in point. Our approach is informed by the local Break-dance Project Uganda (BPU)'s collaborative and creative approach to social justice education along with several other local influences. Although most *artivists 4 life* members do not use the terms critical pedagogy or engaged pedagogy, the way these approaches are described in literature can be appropriated to describe the actual approaches members take. A description of *artivists 4 life* creative processes will carry more weight in academic milieus if described in these legitimated terms as opposed to referencing the pioneering work of the local BPU. Following Thiong'o (2011b), to conform to "legitimate" academic discourses is to follow "a process of continuous alienation from the base, a continuous process of looking at oneself from the outside of self or with the lenses of a stranger … rather than the local being the starting point, from self to other selves" (pp.15–16).

Still seeing through an artivist optic I will share a few points to illustrate how creative and collaborative modes of being and doing are side-lined as non-normative in educational and academic systems. For Noam Chomsky (2002)

> the whole educational and professional training system is a very elaborate filter, which just weeds out people who are too independent, and who think for themselves, and who don't know how to be submissive … because they're dysfunctional to the institutions. (pp. 111–112)

Bell hooks' (2010) liberation pedagogy is a response to these tendencies. She asserts that "in dominator culture the killing off of the imagination serves as a way to repress and contain everyone within the limits of the status quo" (p. 60). The systematic exclusion of creativity has become so naturalized at the doctoral level that creative forms of enunciation are almost non-existent. In cases where creativity successfully manifests its way into the higher learning system, it does so with one leg, while maintaining the other leg grounded in a "density of words … a kind of modern scholasticism" (Thiong'o, 2012a, p. 2). In my experience, the large majority of the artistically inclined are not willing to step back, even part way, into the education system, either because they accept that it is not their place or they realize that they are most effective operating from the extremities. Our scarcity in higher education can be likened to the under-representation of women in politics: the hostile hegemony of either system discourages our participation and we choose to enact our politics elsewhere, from the fringes; in cracks and crevices where the alternative, feminist, artistic, queer and experimental can remain non-submissive.

As is the case for the creative, Western education systems are adverse environments for the communal. The need to denaturalize modern constructions of individualism and verticality is perhaps nowhere more evident and pressing than in learning institutions. In a paper entitled

"Teaching as Killing the Self or Why Professors Deserve to be Beaten" (2008) Doug Aoki offers a compelling portrait of the over-represented University professor as a product of institutionalized narcissism. For Aoki (2008) "the academy is an institution that inveigles and forces academics to over-identify with their work, so that an academic's face and publications are not-very-different exhibitions of the self … the professor's texts collectively comprise exactly her/his face to the world of the university" (p. 7). The more publications, awards and keynote presentations, the higher the professor is ranked in the education system (a product of modernity/coloniality). Like the Artist genius, the professor (under the guise of free-thinking), is digested by the University's ordering and delineating principles. Her/his work becomes a marketable asset for the University and its funders to exchange on the market. With the University surrogated to capitalist values, professors find themselves at the mercy of quotas, struggling to maintain their marketability in the system as they serve to "uplift" their own institution's image. How well they actually teach and their abilities to mentor graduate students carry little or no weight, depending of course on how we "measure" such performance. The over-represented self-image of both the University and its professors function according to a model of individualism (disguised as "professional excellence") that students are meant to adopt. Standardized and egocentric University life in this way serves to alienate students from the "real world" while delimiting the referential universes available for creating alternative subjectivities. In this context, group potentials are subordinated to the pursuit of individual success under the rhetoric of personal growth. With Aoki (2008), I believe that education in the West needs "to wake up its subconscious and recognize that principles foundational to its teaching practice are ethnocentric at best and … corruptive of the soul exactly as far as they nurture growth" (p. 16).

This crisis in University points to the need to open up possibilities for new subjectivity formation where the emphasis is not necessarily on the self, but on the collective interests of the whole.

As it stands now coalitional sociabilities and alternative relational ethics are, like Art (and especially art), confrontational to the corporate modern University and its standardized teaching and learning practices. Group-based and community engaged learning is still relegated to the extra-curricular and, at best, the "for credit" community-service options. In the view of artivism, competition based education makes the shared objective of improving the lives of the marginalized a difficult, if not impossible, task. As learners are encouraged to focus on individual achievements and engage in public affairs as a means to achieve their own professional development the colonial system of measuring humanity is maintained. This crisis in academia is hence a cultural problem, accelerated by capitalism, but rooted deeply in modernity/coloniality. As Maldonado-Torres (2012) elucidates:

> Spelling out the current crisis of public education and the challenge that the humanities face today in terms of neoliberalism alone is a repetition of the same mistake that others have committed when they have aimed to articulate every problem as simply an emanation of capitalism, without seeing how capitalist exploitation is inextricably connected with multiple forms of dehumanization, many of them based on the colonial enterprises of European civilization. (p. 91)

As academics, the key question we need to be asking is this: *who are we really serving? The market or humanity?* If our answers lie in the later, then we need to get serious about reimagining educative boundaries to respond more adequately to modernity/coloniality and the role of the citizen in the world. As an artivist/scholar my response lies with the people. I propose that we begin by forming new relations with social movements and communities and develop approaches that legitimize their movements while creating new lenses for working in/out of the University, across and beyond disciplines and other categories.

Moving Out

With an eye to the artistic/academic I have a performed a set of reflections and visualizations to describe how the frame of modernity and its colonial reasoning are not precursors to our present moment but structures that still serve to under/over-represent bodies, communities, experiences and minds. I have drawn from the works of decolonial and other border scholars to create an assemblage of the underlying problematics that artivists and academics—particularly those among us disinclined to imitate—are confronting on the front-lines of what Fanon called a war against colonialism and what Maldonado-Torres calls (2007) the "naturalization of the non-ethics of war" (p. 256).[8]

Fanon helped to create an opening into the problem of the *color-line*, a way of seeing through structural racism by thinking critically about how damnation works. Decolonial scholars keep returning to Fanon's ever-relevant work because old patterns of domination prevail in the geopolitics of our present era. Fanon offered a radical vision for a new humanity, laying down the groundwork to guide us toward a society whereby the self no longer requires another for its own description (Wynter, 1976). The contributions of decolonial thinkers are building upon this foundation to guide us toward radical cultural change: a turn away from the relentless search for roots in European epistemes (Maldonado-Torres, 2004). Decolonial projects in this way aim to uproot our investment in the construction of heroes in favor of the nourishment of the communal and the creation of new sociabilities of co-existence. Such a cultural shift turns toward the rebuilding of a learning culture where a pluriversality of forms of enunciation can interact.

[8] Here, I am referring to the normalization of sacrificing what is good for humanity for the betterment of the market—to cut funds to the arts in the name of economics, for example—anything to feed the machine of capitalism through the infiltration of its ideology of expansion.

Decolonial learning spaces in this way are premised on a dialogical ethics (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) where both the invisible and visible—those categorized as less-than-human and the human—are invited to dialogue and imagine together new social relations for a collective re-existence.

For such a decolonial vision all forms of subjectivity have something to offer. The sense–experience that Fanon named as sociogenesis—the experience of racialized subjectivity—is for Mignolo the phenomenom of the colonial wound. Because classifications and rankings—along racial, gender, class and other lines—are man-made constructions rather than natural phenomena the wounded subject is not *necessarily* the poor, the black or the female. Since divisions that are both racial and patriarchal create the colonial wound it cuts across classes and other differences. With this in mind we need to look beyond identity politics and resist our learned tendencies to over-categorize subjectivities in favor of a deeper awareness of our shared colonial histories and the complexity of subjectivity formation. By denaturalizing the categories assigned to us we can begin instead from the decolonial understanding that knowing subjects are always implicated in the known from our respective positions, geo and body-politically (Mignolo, 2014) and then we can move toward placing emphasis on what people, communities and institutions actually do.

We as academics can have a key role to play if we choose to re-claim and re-make the responsibility of "uplifting the whole people"[9]. This requires both courage and humility so that we can accept to re-educate ourselves by *unlearning in order to relearn* (Mignolo, 2011a). Being an artivist/academic and thinking where *I am* and *We are* my hope for this transformation lies in the potential of creating affinities across differences and through a shared commitment to

[9] First stated by its first president, Henry Tory Marshall, "uplifting the whole people" is the University of Alberta's motto.

the re-politicizing of language/expression and its reconnection to action (Sandoval, 2000). Embracing that there is much to be learned from those who have been rendered invisible by modernity we can begin to see how many ideas and means are available for the reorganization of social life. In seeing in this way we might reclaim Fanon's (1963/68) affirmation that "the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people" (p. 197). Yet, in proposing this, I am reminded that claiming or re-claiming is not enough. As academics we are trained to make claims, yet rarely are we held accountable to transform them into action. As Sara Ahmed (2012) has argued compellingly, claiming can be like *showing*, which is a way of *not* doing. Through an analysis of University statements of commitment (through a focus on diversity work) she uncovers that the language of commitment in institutional documents, particularly in relation to epistemic racism, can function more like statements of "institutional pride" (p. 114). She shows us that such statements can be *opaque*: they do not actually commit the institution to action. Instead, they function as an institutional response to racism: to keep problems at bay and project the University's whiteness from being hurt. In this way such claims become *non-performatives*. Citing Judith Butler, Ahmed (2012) explains: "performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (p. 116).

My intention in following Fanon (and Ahmed) is not only to point to what a University that *shows* "uplifting the whole people" is not doing. Moreover, I am making the point that it is necessary to denaturalize our complacency in the rhetoric of institutions and disciplines and the separation of theory and practice that supports, by default, inaction. Instead of allowing ourselves to be digested *into* the houses of modernity We inhabit, I am calling us to use them as means to act *out* our imagined becomings.

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Re-Living artivist Encounters:

Inter-Cultural Spaces and the Double Process of Translation

Leslie Robinson

> [Artivism is] an exchange around the world and it is creating impact within different communities. Some different words I used to describe it: community, creativity, exploration, love, social change and awareness … Watching [artivists] and seeing your [work] shows us that it is obviously as important over there as it is in Canada but it is important to have some sort of community and then you can grow together.
>
> —Study participant, December 20, 2012

Figure 3.1. Contribution by *artivists 4 life* member to design ex**change** with *artivists 4 life* (artivistdesignexchange, October 2012)

> I want to do a "study" and I am asking you—any or all members of *artivists 4 life*—to join me. This study will ask if and how inter-actions between *artivists 4 life* and young people here—across youth cultures—can help us to decolonize our minds. …
>
> I first came to Africa to help the poor. I grew up in a society that taught me that I was first and you were last. I now know that the system that educated me failed me. I had to go to a village in Senegal and eventually to the Kayunga youth center and the basement of a church in Mukono to get the education I needed to begin to understand that all of us have experienced colonization of the mind in one way or another. I am now learning to unlearn much of what I was taught in school and what the media tells me when it says that Uganda is the worst place in the world to grow up as a child. I am learning that it is up to all of us, from both sides of the colonial divide, to work together creatively to re-make what was broken and to re-imagine what does not yet exist. …
>
> You see, my role in this study will be one of translator. I cannot seek permission from my University to do this study by using the same words I use when I write to you. I have to use words that fit the Western code. (Personal letter, October 4, 2012)

The above excerpts are from a letter I wrote to members of *artivists 4 life*, a community of practice in Uganda to which I belong since 2008. I had two purposes in mind in writing the letter. The first is obvious: I wanted to partner with project members in a scholarly study, which would ultimately help to validate my own existence in the academy. Since I have an established and ongoing relationship of trust with project members I could have sought their approval in a number of other ways, such as by asking them to sign consent forms or by presenting the idea in one of our regularly scheduled workshops for their overt consent. Yet, I chose to write because I wanted to articulate to each member (and myself) my second purpose. This purpose was threefold: to express my awareness of my complacency in the problem the study would address (rather than purporting myself as an expert seeking to solve their problems);

to communicate the goal of generating knowledge toward understanding and validating the work of the collective; and, finally, to make explicit the premise of the collaborative study: to design and do the study *with* them (important and valued contributors) and in the spirit of the African proverb and *artivists 4 life* credo "each one teach one" (Figure 3.1).

Double Process of Translation

I begin this piece by making my intentions explicit because I am aware of the highly problematic terrain of being a white female researcher doing research on/in Africa. In contending with this tension I persistently bear witness to and confront the normalized practice of studying people as data and the perpetuation of the myth of academic researcher as "expert". Rather than beginning from the dangerous terrain of good intention and the assumption that research *helps*, I proceed instead through a careful attention to the great potential of doing harm. To do this I consciously foster awareness of my own subjectivity, fraught with privilege, as I attend to the work of shifting emphasis away from the hegemonic domain of scholarship toward supporting *aritivist 4 life* and *our* shared goal of "creating for a better world" (*artivists 4 life* motto). I am guided by what Sékou Trouré said in 1959, quoted by Fanon (1963/1968):

> In order to achieve real action, you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought; you must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called forth for the freeing, the progress and the happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that fight for the artist or for the intellectual who is not himself concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle of Africa and of suffering humanity. (p. 206)

As an artivist committed to achieving *real action*, I have been searching for ways to contribute scholarly work while redirecting "academic desire away from its tendencies toward intellectual colonialism" (Sandoval, 2000, p. 72) and the power differentials this serves to maintain, such as

the persistent labelling of African youth as somehow lacking while blaming them for inadequacies they were born into (Best & Kellner, 2003; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2005; De Boeck & Honwana, 2005).

Engaging with the works of decolonial scholars while existing at the awkward intersection of University life/life in Africa has helped me to see that *the great battle of Africa and of suffering humanity* cannot be approached through Western scholarly protocols. Modernity, and the kind of disciplinary thinking it entails, continues to impose modern solutions onto the gamut of human problems, denying the existence of a plethora of alternative modes of knowing. Decolonial perspectives have been able to show that "on-going struggles for social justice are inseparable from the struggles for cognitive justice" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a p. 50). Thus, to respond to the inadequacies of the Western academic tradition, through my simultaneous becoming artivist/academic, I have come to search for understanding in "the double process of translation" across the colonial difference through which Western epistemology is re-appropriated by artivist epistemology, "transformed, and returned" (Mignolo, 2011a, pp. 224–225).

Mignolo (2011a) draws heavily from the Zapatistas' political history and contributions to decolonial theory to articulate the concept of *double translation*. Specifically, he refers to Rafael Guillén—the once Marxist urban intellectual who self-transformed to become the movement's leader Subcomandante Marcos, who became a double translator as he translated local perspectives to Mexico and the world at large while simultaneously bringing Marxism to the locals. What is different about this notion and unlike the missionary model, is that it requires that the communication of knowledges be "at risk and bi-directional" (p. 219). For Subcomandante Marcos this required the acceptance that "Indigenous thinkers and political leaders would use him in the same way he thought we would use them … . He realized that his Marxist cosmology

needed to be infected by Indigenous cosmology" (p. 219). In this case double translation made way for imagining together futures that could transcend the limits of the "two hegemonic abstract universals, (neo)liberalism and (neo)Marxism" (p. 221). Building on Subcomandante Marcos's movement and Mignolo's theorizing of it, I appropriate the concept of double translation to guide my own thinking and action as I work to unmask the myths of modernity while imaging spaces where *epistemic pluriversality* (Mignolo, 2011a) can gain traction. It is worth pausing here to note that the artivism of *artivists 4 life* is already a product of double translation. Initially I brought participatory design to Ugandan youth. I went through a process of unlearning as the communities with whom I engaged re-made the tools I offered. At the same time, the youth who became artivists showed me local tools and perspectives I did not have, including various artistic processes, modes of engagement and cultural understandings. It is this kind of inter-action—of undoing and redoing—that together we have aimed to share via our artivist encounters across cultures, knowledges and other differences.

In conceiving of and describing this artivist intervention I have already begun to engage in the double process of translation across the colonial difference, oscillating between languages and addressees. The questions I ask take on different meanings in each context, and this is no different for the questions asked by those with whom I collaborate. More important than the questions themselves is how they are asked and who gets to ask them. Drawing on Mignolo's (2011a) decolonial thinking, this requires "changing the terms of the conversation" and "delinking from disciplinary or interdisciplinary controversies and the conflict of interpretations" (p.122). Such a shift necessitates calling into question the modern/colonial foundation of the control of knowledge and placing the focus on the synergies and provocations that emerge through inter-cultural, inter-epistemic and inter-human contact. For Kenyan artist Ogonga (2011)

the cultural provocations that call us to question the moment and articulate complex answers are more intangible than we tend to think. He calls into question the circumstances around questioning, asking "how do we create tangible possibilities when our collective thinking is confined to a dysfunctional system, which ensures that our ideas are always at risk of being still born?" (p. 234). The *dysfunctional system* Ogonga is referring to is grounded in epistemic racism, a constituent of modernity/coloniality that is inscribed through the claims of a European universal philosophical trajectory that naturalizes the overrepresentation of Western knowledge (Maldonado-Torres, 2004). To break away from the kind of linear question-answer trajectory that traditional academic research beckons, I open up the questioning process by inviting collaborators to it. This leads to a pluriversity of questions where the emphasis shifts away from the linear trajectory of questions to answers, opening up the process to multi-directional flow where ideas can cross-fertilize. Here, the goal of asking is not necessarily to find answers: the questions may even take us backward rather than forward, as we realize they are fraught with myths and biases, or, they may take us to answers to questions we never thought to ask.

Through my role as artivist/scholar I engage in the double process of translation between two lifeworlds. Guiding artivism into scholarship and scholarship into artivism, my role in this artivist intervention is to conceptualize an inter-cultural and inter-epistemological space where scholarly discourse can be reappropriated by artivism, rethought and returned. This necessitates a mobile identity and the capacity to shift through social positions while twisting the politics of knowledge "to ensure that ethical commitment to egalitarian social relations be enacted in the everyday, political sphere of culture" (Sandoval, 2000, p. 62). As double translator I endeavor to bear in mind my questions and all the other questions that arise from and through encounters

with collaborators while focusing attention on opening up possibilities for the fostering of a decolonial creative space. Following Ogonga (2011), this means creating the terms for

> a collective curiosity to provoke questions, not necessarily in search of answers, but in search of a fitting selection of words, a range of artistic or stylistic forms, techniques or movements that could embody their histories, their future aspirations, while at the same time, articulate the complexity and immediacy of now. (p. 236)

Background

Since the embodied principles of our artivism guided this intervention, it is necessary to begin with a brief description of the shared—and always fluctuating—lens that shapes the encountering. "Our artivism" describes the way we—as *artivists 4 life*—have come to enact artivism and the way *I* have come to translate its significance *into* academic life. This is followed by "Artivism into Academia/Academia into artivism", a discussion of the way artivism and *artivists 4 life* members shape the co-research process and, conversely, how my project of pursuing an academic trajectory informs the *artivists 4 life* project.

Our artivism

Artivism, as practiced by *artivists 4 life,* is socially and politically conscious art "for the outcasts and by the outcasts" (Fanon, 1963/1968, p. 205). *Artivists 4 life* respond to injustices with the aim of shifting power in order to change both individual and collective circumstances (artivists 4 life et al., 2013). We endeavor to suspend attachment to any particular medium or artistic canon, opting instead to engage any media available through an emphasis on change processes. In this way our creative processes remain open to all artistic approaches that can serve to support a communicative and social change approach, such as participatory design, role play and

traditional/creative dance. Similarly, our artivism is not an option reserved for certain categories of people with the "right" portfolio or résumé, but is accessible to all those willing to engage politically and creatively in a collective effort to live in search of communal futures. Artivism recognizes that creativity[1] is vital, for "decolonization of knowledge and of being requires one to engage in rebuilding what was destroyed and to build what doesn't yet exist" (Mignolo, 2011a, pp. 108–109). Emergent creations, in *any medium necessary* (Asante, 2008) bring together thinking/doing/making in ways that make them inseparable. The transdisciplinary approach practiced by *artivists 4 life* encourages co-researchers, co-facilitators and other members/partners to take on multiple and shared roles as authors, co-creators, teachers and learners.

Artivism in this way confronts dominant arts-based research practices (Knowles & Cole, 2008) that maintain artistic processes as complementary in the academy through a self-serving aesthetic designed to supplement other research. Opting for an understanding of art as event, where the focus is placed on what art can do, artivism answers to the call for a politicized arts-based research capable of mobilizing minoritarian perspectives (jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013). By working to delink from the hegemonic understanding of art as an object of knowledge and representation, artivism is in solidarity with all art that "becomes a transformative act that escapes productionist logic of modern power that designer capitalism puts into play" (jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013, p. 3)

With the understanding that all art is political, artivism aims to intervene in colonial conditions through "counterhegemonic pedagogical acts of liberation" (Maldonado-Torres, 2008, p. 147). I bring artivism to scholarship by embodying a *differential consciousness* (Sandoval, 2000) that

[1] I am not referring here to creativity driven by competition or professional excellence but rather creativity motivated by a profound love for the world and for humanity.

allows for constant re-adaptation to the broader questions of decolonial and anti-oppression struggle that shape the realities of the youth partners with whom I collaborate. To do so I draw from critical and engaged pedagogies and participatory approaches—adapting them as necessary to suit the decolonial aim of communal futures. In this way I use relevant scholarship to *nuance* the thinking of the collective (Fanon, 1963/68) *and* to validate artivism in the realm of academia. The intersection of these approaches/perspectives is briefly discussed in what follows.

Our artivist pedagogy

Critical and engaged pedagogies (Freire, 1970, 1974; Giroux, 1994, 1997; hooks, 1994, 2003, 2010; McLaren, 1995) accurately describe the approaches *artivists 4 life* members use in our teaching/learning practices. Through conscientization (Freire, 1970) workshop facilitators encourage members to nourish critical thinking skills through dialogue and critical reflection upon our own self-identified concerns. A welcoming space is created where members take part in problem-posing education (Freire, 1970) through creative activities and the kind of *fierce conversation* and compassionate engagement that remains with us, in ways that encourage us to overcome fears and doubts (hooks, 2010).

Our collaborative way

The *artivists 4 life* collaborative approach corresponds with the goals of participatory action research. PAR calls for contextualized, self-critical and transparent practices and values, through a view of research as something humans do together in response to self-identified problems (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Park et al., 1993). PAR responds to dominant Euro-American community development projects that perpetuate hierarchical relations with research subjects, failing to acknowledge how they have embodied understandings of various oppressions and

legitimate ideas for liberation from them (Gitlin, 2008). The academization of PAR, however, runs the risk of marginalizing the very people it aims to empower through failure to problematize institutional and personal biases (McTaggart, 1994). To avoid appropriating participant knowledge for primarily my own ends my approach emphasizes community self-determination by honoring the potential of participants to generate knowledge through experiences that advance their own goals and purposes (Zavala, 2013).

Our adoption of decolonial perspectives

Guided by decolonial thinking and doing, artivism operates in the realm of political activity which is marginal to dominant market-driven and state controlled spheres of economic society (Mignolo, 2011c). The ongoing projects of *artivists 4 life* confront colonial divisions created and controlled by modernity by opening up creative spaces for imagining new modes of artistic expression and inter-action that contribute to decolonial futures, where a pluriversity of ways of knowing can interact (Mignolo, 2011a). Artivist pedagogy helps *artivists 4 life* members and our partners to understand that our lives are shaped by the pervasive force of modernity and its colonial underside, shifting the blame from personal failures to the workings of the colonial matrix of power (Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Mignolo, 2011a). This is reflected in what artivist Nalubowa (May 30, 2014) had to say at a presentation at the 2014 John Douglas Taylor Conference: Contemporary Orientations in African Cultural Studies at McMaster:

> Artivists 4 life seek to break [colonial] beliefs by proving that everyone has something to offer. With our approach of each one teach one, we create open learning and unlearning spaces where each one is special and has something to bring to the table.

Nalubowa's statement and its emphasis on both *learning* and *unlearning* echoes the kind epistemic re-making decolonial scholars are calling for. Following Fanon (1963/1968), one of

the first intellectuals to scrutinize the lived conditions of colonial oppression, purging the mind of the *untruths* internalized by the violence of colonialism is a necessary component of decolonization. Indeed in the Fanonian (1963/1968) vision for a new humanism (one that de-links from the European kind) *unlearning* the myths implanted by the master/slave dialect is necessary for any development of a fuller sense of self: It is *learning* to assert and recover one's agency that opens up the possibility of a new subjectivity, one that moves beyond binaries of racial, national and other identities.

Our artivist learning spaces

In his "Letter to the Youth of Africa" Fanon (1967) writes:

> It is essential that the oppressed peoples join up with the peoples who are already sovereign if a humanism that can be considered valid is to be built to the dimensions of the universe. (p. 114)

Artivist inter-actions strive to open up such spaces by bringing together the formerly colonized and the former colonizers (and those that occupy both sides or some position in between). To do so, in today's complex context of global coloniality, these spaces build on the decolonial notion of *interculturality,* which "promotes the re-creation of identities that were either denied or acknowledged first but in the end were silenced by the discourse of modernity" (Lockward et al., 2011, p. 35). Drawing on Fanon's reading of the colonial situation more than a half a century ago (in Martinique, Algeria, France and the World) is instructive for understanding the necessary shift from *identification to identity* that decolonization demands. For Fanon (1952/1967) the rendering of the colonized as inferior, characterized by absences (lacking intellect, consciousness, etc.) effectively strips away any possibility of self-identity. He showed us how, without a sense of self (and one's own culture), the black yearns to be seen as white by whites,

an identity that only the white can give and one that the black can never fully achieve (1952/1967). In what follows artivist Nalubowa (May 30, 2014) echoes and extends Fanon's diagnosis, in her account of today's context of global coloniality:

> These colonial beliefs and tendencies are global. From my experience, people from the developed countries, from the West, people who are educated, speak English or Spanish or French, people who *behave like those from the West* are perceived as superior and a source of knowledge. On the other hand, if you are not from the West, if you are African, don't have their kind of Education, don't speak their languages … or *behave like them*, you would be labeled "backward" and thus with no knowledge to share. Try hanging around youths these days, if you don't speak English, you are "so local" and this I have seen and heard a number of times. Such [is] continued colonization of the minds that we have allowed to go on. (italics are my emphasis)

What Nalubowa has observed corresponds with what Fanon (1963/1968), regarding post independence, warned about when he wrote "it sometimes happens that you get Blacks who are whiter than the Whites" (p. 144). The stark division of oppressor vs oppressed of the colonial era is now much more complex: it remains, at times inverted, and often hidden. It manifests, for example, in the new African elites, who, following Nalubowa, take on colonial logic through ongoing colonizing *behaviors*.

It is this *continued colonization of the minds* that artivist learning spaces respond to by fostering synergetic learning spaces for new ways of knowing and existing. Because subjectivity develops in an individual in relation to other selves, colonial logic silences subjectivities through the phenomenon of what Fanon (1952/1967) called *non-recognition*. Fanon's lived experience of colonialism and his consequent self-reflection and resistance, led him to imagine another, better world:

> I am asking to be considered. I am not merely here-and-now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else. I demand that notice be taken of my negating activity insofar as I pursue something other than life; insofar as I do battle for the creation of a human world—that is, of a world of reciprocal recognitions. (p. 218)

Decolonization, in the way Fanon *pursued* it, moves away from the binary and the reactionary toward the possibility of *mutual recognitions* (Fanon, 1952/67). To be clear, recognition here is to go beyond tolerance, beyond paternalistic curiosity: it is to surpass claiming that "we are all the same" (while acting otherwise). To recognize is to see and respect uniqueness and difference while simultaneously regarding that other person as a fellow human being. Artivist learning spaces are thus construed based on the understanding that the *creation of a human world* requires the participation of subjectivities from both sides of the colonial divide, where the recognitions flow in both directions. Moving toward recognition of the culture of colonialism permits the formerly colonized (and their descendents) to move away from identification through the eyes of the colonizer toward the creation of their own identities. The same movement allows colonizers (and their decedents) to realize their complacency in ongoing (epistemic) colonization, as both *perpetrators* and *victims* of a *delusion* that maintains dichotomies of superior/inferior (Fanon, 1952/1967).

Moving toward reciprocal recognitions in this way is to become conscious of difference; it is to become self-reflective upon one's position while not being trapped by it (Fanon, 1963/1968). Taken together, artivist inter-spaces manifest as *decolonial options*[2]—or artivist tactics—for

[2] To be clear, decolonial options do not suggest that we all have choices, as this is often not the case. Options in this case point to the understanding that decoloniality is not a mission that claims to be the only way. Decoloniality accepts that it is one option among modernity and other alternatives to modernity. Decolonial options point to epistemic delinking by those who engage in projects toward a pluriversal future (Mignolo, 2011a).

"creating for a better world" through artistic reflection and collective inter-action across knowledges, cultures and other differences where the goal is reciprocal recognitions.

Artivism into Academia/Academia into artivism

In 2011 *artivists 4 life* began to share our sophisticated and collaborative processes of creating community messages and interventions with student groups at the University of Alberta and other young people residing in Edmonton. Responses to such exchanges had a snowball effect and the collective has developed an ongoing practice of engaging with young adults and others in Edmonton. For this "study" I partnered with fellow *artivists 4 life* members to design and facilitate a serious of focus groups/workshops to explore both the impacts of this new mode of engagement as well as to gather insights to inform future artivist inter-actions across cultures. These creative and collaborative spaces became an opportunity for discussing and exploring—or re-living—previous experiences shared between *artivists 4 life* and Edmonton-based counterparts.

When I began my doctoral studies in the fall of 2010 I proposed a study, in a grant application, to "co-develop pedagogy for a participatory arts-based research program for exploring youth issues in Africa." The proposal was guided by the question "how can engagement with art encourage African youth to develop more agency to address their current problems and prepare for a more hopeful future?" In many ways fellow *artivists 4 life* and myself were *already* responding to this question though the activities of our ongoing community of practice. Because our answering process was embedded in our everyday work I was reluctant to "study" fellow *artivists 4 life* members and to engage with them according to "ground rules" and cultural practices that may conflict with our own principles, such as procedures, protocols and ethical

guidelines endorsed by my University that are structurally hierarchical. With David G. Smith (2000) I believe that "if there is to be truth in the world, it will be only truth as shared, something between us. Such is the foundation for ethics in the age of globalization" (p. 32). Rather than studying *artivists 4 life*, their problems and their agency, I chose instead to learn with them under the principle (and the African proverb) "each one teach one," engaging together around our shared circumstances and seeking solutions to our shared problems. This led me to further reflect upon my own complacency in the problems and my agency as an artivist/scholar.

Through our ongoing artivist practice fellow artivists and myself respond to the kinds of socio-political and economic problems that plague our everyday existence. Such problems include widespread youth unemployment, rampant sexual exploitation, and drug abuse—all inter-meshed with HIV/AIDS related issues and poverty. Although these problems should not be understated, I have come to apprehend that they symptoms of a deeper problem with a longer history, that of modernity/coloniality[3].

In parallel to my participation in *artivists 4 life* projects I struggle as a solitary artivist within the University. Misfit by my geo- and body politics, here I confront repressive institutional assertions, such as those that stifle creativity and collaboration including overemphasis on textual modes of expression and individual achievement[4].

[3] See Piece 2 "Artivism-Into-Modernity: Exposing Coloniality in High Art and Higher Education" for a detailed discussion of modernity/coloniality.

[4] I am not suggesting that my experience in University is dreadful, in fact, it is not. Nor am I denying the privileged opportunity to engage with knowledge and interact within a community of scholars. Here I am making the point that much of my existence in University, as someone who doesn't buy into modernity, is figuring out how to re-exist within it, which is pedagogical in and of itself. This question of how to re-exist runs through all components of my overall doctoral thesis. See Piece 2 for a discussion of how modernity/coloniality serves to frame academia.

From this dual existence as artivist/scholar I have acquired a double consciousness, an "awareness of coloniality of being, of being out of place in the set of regulations" (Mignolo, 2011a, p. 109). Although these two sets of struggles may be worlds apart, certainly across cultures and knowledge systems, they are both deeply entrapped in the same governing principles of modernity/coloniality. Whereas modernity cannot function without its colonial underside, decolonial options are needed in both realities. This understanding has obligated me to re-ask the same question(s)—about artivism, youth and the future—but instead from both sides of the colonial divide (and various points along the crossing). Asking, through an artivist lens, has required a shift in emphasis away from the enunciated to the enunciation and the enunciator. Through the understanding that knowledge is not static, or something represented in the world, but rather continually re-made through its enunciation, I stress how the questions are asked/answered and by whom. In this sense the questions always come to be in the asking, in each and every unique context, always contingent on who is doing the asking and from where. For example, in the letter I wrote to members of *artivists 4 life* on October 4, 2012, I questioned in the following way:

> Some would say Africa was decolonized. Uganda has been independent for 50 years, does that mean colonization is over? How do you respond to this question?
> How would youth here in Canada respond to this question?
> What would happen if we talked about this together?

The Artivist Intervention[5]

For this artivist intervention members of *artivists 4 life* and myself drew on our shared artivist practice to design and facilitate informal focus groups/workshops with participants in Edmonton. We conceived of questions and activities to encourage reflection on shared experiences around prior artivist encounters. Participants, in turn, were invited to draw on their own creative processes, practices and experiences while engaging with us to respond to the provocations conceived by *artivists 4 life*.

In this section I articulate the necessary "Terms for the Conversation" followed by the "Guiding Questions" for the artivist intervention. I then outline the two main "Components of the artivist Intervention" before proceeding to a description of the "Focus Groups/Workshops".

Terms for the Conversation

The aim of this artivist intervention was to perform a collaborative and exploratory inquiry into a set of artivist encounters across cultures. *Artivist encounters* describe prior exchanges between the Uganda-based *artivists 4 life* youth collective and young people in Edmonton. These encounters unfolded around creative activities including design, dance and drama and were guided by *artivists 4 life* participatory processes and principles and involved discussions and

[5] In a conscious act of epistemic disobedience I moved away from calling this piece a "study". *Artivist intervention* is a more accurate description of the mode of inquiry. The adjective artivist is suitable since the activities build on *artivists 4 life* processes and principles and involve members of the collective. These events were interventions because they worked to interrupt prior/ongoing exchanges in connection to *artivists 4 life* projects to critically reflect upon their impact and potential. In other words, the set of focus groups/workshops were interventions because they were not simply intended to gather information or study people, but to create a space where those present would have the opportunity to take part in creating knowledge, much like *artivists 4 life* do through artivist interventions in Ugandan communities. Research processes, in this way, were embedded in artistic and collaborative practices.

The component filed in the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board under ID:Pro00019620 is, in order to fit the code of the system, described as a study.

activities around youth issues. This artivist intervention had the goal of creating *inter-cultural learning spaces* where Ugandan youth and young people in the Edmonton could engage across the colonial divide through reflection upon prior collective experiences taking part in artivist encounters. Inter-cultural learning spaces in this context promote the sharing of identities across non-Western and Western cosmologies through the invitation to engage around local, regional and global youth issues. By interrupting artivist encounters this intervention created an adjacent space for further reflection and a more pointed inquiry about the impact of taking part in such inter-cultural learning spaces. Through these focus groups/workshops we sought to understand the extent to which artivist encounters can encourage the emergence of re-existence and communal futures. *Re-existence* is a de-colonial concept that refers to the idea of not only resisting subordination or subjugation, but engaging in a critical analysis of circumstances in order to conceive alternative movements (Mignolo, 2011a). *Communal futures* are imagined trajectories not yet in existence. A vision for such futures includes the possibility of all human beings living together in a pluriversity of cultures and cosmologies where all ways of knowing and doing can interact (Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Mignolo, 2011a). The quality of this kind of inter-action is indeed idealistic. Yet creating imaginaries for seeing things *otherwise* is a necessary first step toward action that is premised on the belief that change is possible.
As Greene (1995) elucidates:

> A space of freedom opens before the person moved to choose in the light of possibility; she or he feels what it signifies to be an initiator and an agent, existing among others but with the power to choose for herself or himself. (p. 22)

This kind of inter-action supports the recognition that multiple perspectives always exist and that knowing and understanding is always partial and never finished: "There is always possibility. And this is where the space opens for the pursuit of freedom" (Greene, 1988, p. 128).

Guiding Questions

The question that informs artivist interventions, following the vocabulary introduced, is:

> At the interstices of modernity/coloniality: (how) can decolonial options guide collaborative and creative processes (artivism) toward the emergence of re-existence and communal futures?

To begin to answer the above question with artivist collaborators, I proposed the following questions as starting points:

> How are study participants being impacted through their inter-actions with *artivists 4 life* around youth issues and creative processes?
>
> How are members of *artivists 4 life* being impacted through their inter-actions with study participants around youth issues and creative processes?

Using yet another set of words, I wrote a letter to *artivists 4 life* members, inviting them to join me in designing and facilitating focus groups/workshops. I suggested that the artivist intervention might "ask if and how inter-actions between *artivists 4 life* and young people here—across youth cultures—can help us to decolonize our minds?" The above questions were thus starting points for devising more questions, together. Following decolonial understanding, more important than the questions themselves, are the ways we ask them (the terms of the conversation). In other words, the kind of space appropriate for asking the questions, is a critical

consideration. I draw from Ogonga (2011), to describe the kind of synergetic creative space I hoped to foster:

> It is to walk into the space where others walk, or are afraid to walk. It is to create alternative spaces not yet in existence, for young artists to produce and present their works, engage anew with contemporary audiences and design fresh relations with their societies. It is to corrupt the zones of silence. It is to invent curiosity where none exists. (p. 235)

Components of the artivist Intervention

Figure 3.2. Artivists 4 life member exchanging with University of Alberta student via skype about Edmonton Fringe Festival collaboration, Mukono, Uganda, May 2012

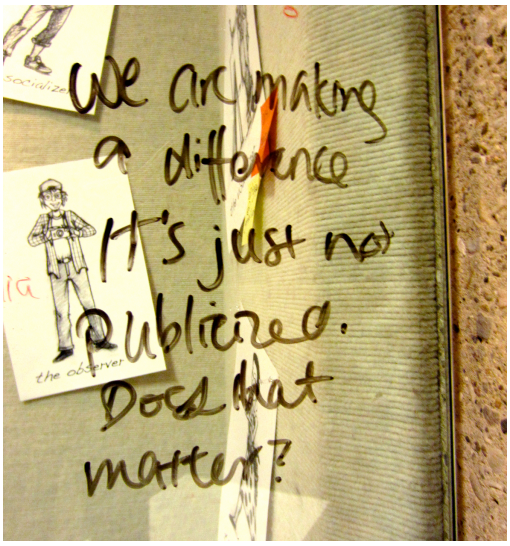

Figure 3.3. Detail of public display around design ex**change** with *artivists 4 life* (artivistdesignexchange, October 2012)

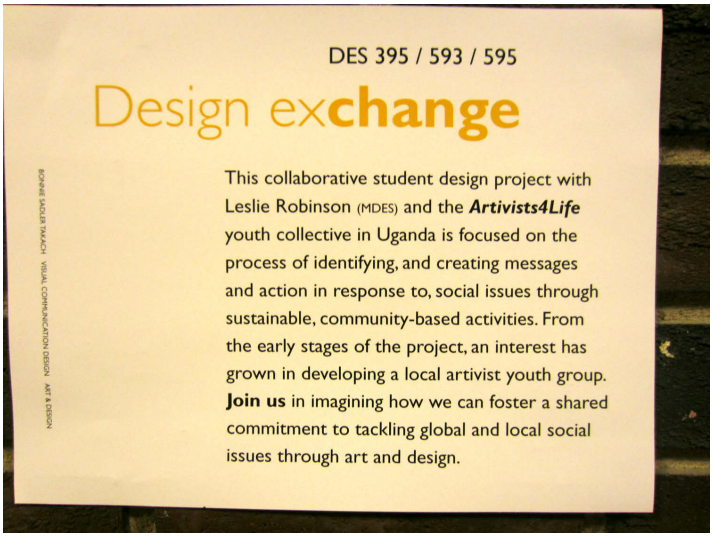

Figure 3.4. Description of design ex**change** with *artivists 4 life* by Associate Professor Bonnie Sadler Takach, Visual Communication Design, Department of Art and Design (artivistdesignexchange, October 2012)

There were two distinct components of this artivist intervention. The first was all the ground work that made asking the questions possible, including the development of mutual trust through years of community building with fellow artivists and eventually the creation of a network of

partners in and around the University of Alberta. Since March of 2011 *artivists 4 life* have engaged across cultures though informal exchanges with various young people connected to the University of Alberta, though not necessarily enrolled as students. These artivist encounters took place with youth from iHuman youth society, design students from the Department of Art and Design, members of the African students' association and a wide range of audiences across campus. Such "happenings" included International Week 2012, on campus, and the Edmonton Fringe Festival 2012, off campus (Figure 3.2). These creative and collective learning spaces opened up opportunities for exchanging issues-based artistic projects and engaging in tense dialogue. Within these diverse spaces questions, artworks and stories were shared, revealing differences, similarities and contradictions. Those present had the opportunity to learn toward consensual understandings of other peoples' realities, redistributing "agency in the production of social meaning" (Papastergiadis, 2011, p. 277).

The second component of the artivist intervention (the registered "study") responded to a question one anonymous University student asked (Figure 3.3) during a performative happening facilitated by design students as part of *design ex**change*** with *artivists 4 life* (Figure 3.4). On the glass of a display case the student scrawled: "We are making a difference it's just not publicized. Does that matter?"

Figure 3.5. Skype exchange during design ex**change** with *artivists 4 life* and design 395 students, November, 2012

Figure 3.6. Detail of public display around design ex**change** with *artivists 4 life* and design 395 students, October, 2012

This component is distinct because it allowed a conscious stepping back from all the organic happenings unfolding in relation to *artivists 4 life* inter-cultural encounters by inviting those who

have been a part of them to answer how it all *matters*? (See, for example, Figure 3.5 and Figure 3.6). This component is separate because it involves participants under new roles: as co-designers/co-facilitators and study participants and is registered in the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board under ID:Pro00019620.

Co-researchers and study participants

I have a longstanding relationship with *artivists 4 life* as a member of the collective and together we are interested in better understanding how sharing and interrogating aspects of our projects might impact the lives of others as well as our own. I invited fellow members of *artivists 4 life* to take a central role as co-researchers and co-facilitators of this artivist intervention. The culture of *artivists 4 life* is based in local knowledge systems (shaped of course by global coloniality) and has developed according to consensus-making processes and the development of mutual trust and a deep sense of belonging to the group. The collective has developed ground rules and a manifesto among other protocols for guiding social processes such as appropriate ways of sharing and distributing *artivists 4 life* knowledge. As a member of the *artivists 4 life* community I am aware of the many ways that these principles differ and even conflict with the Western epistemologies that guide scholarly research processes. For example, *artivists 4 life* members encourage the expression of ideas using any form of expression. As articulated in the *artivist 4 life* manifesto (2011), members "express ourselves by creating safe spaces and rapport to enable open, honest, passionate and creative ideas". Whereas *artivists 4 life* emphasize free expression and dialogue, orthodox scholarship underscores individual and text-based forms of expression.

In order to respect such differences *artivists 4 life* are defined as *co-researchers* and other participants are defined as *study participants*. This distinction allows for both groups to take part

in the artivist intervention according to terms that are appropriate to their different contexts. For example, *artivists 4 life* provided consent through overt action whereas those participating from the University of Alberta and/or Edmonton provided written consent, a process of which they are accustomed to. Furthermore, because *artivists 4 life* were involved from the onset, in the design of the study, it is also important to distinguish their roles as co-researchers.

Co-researchers as epistemic partners

I did not approach *artivists 4 life* members as research subjects nor did I ask them to contribute "data" for my "study". Instead, I invited *artivists 4 life* members to collaborate with me as co-researchers in order to co-design the activities and questions to be explored with study participants and subsequently facilitate the focus groups/workshops. This was not simply a gesture of inclusion but an acknowledgement of the capacity of *artivists 4 life* to contribute to a learning experience far greater than what I could create on my own. I was aware that fellow members of *artivists 4 life*, their agency, their creativity and their eagerness to engage across cultures would shape the artivist interventions through the sharing of their ideas and through their "real", not symbolic, presence. Through the recognition of the agency of fellow artivists in knowledge-making and creative processes my role went beyond establishing a certain rapport for the purposes of data collection. It was instead a reciprocal relationship through which we worked together as epistemic partners (Papastergiadis, 2011). By centering this artivist intervention on *artivists 4 life*—by making visible the invisible and recognizing "their intellectual production as thinking—not only as culture or ideology" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 262) I hoped that other young people would see what *artivists 4 life* have shown me. That is, I hoped that other young people on this side of the colonial divide, through their inter-actions with *artivists 4 life*, would

be humbled and awakened to a new understandings of humanity not based on charity but the "principle of receptive generosity" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 260).

The Focus Groups/Workshops

Artivist 4 life questioning

When *artivists 4 life* members agreed to partner with me in this artivist intervention we proceeded by devising questions and approaches for asking them. To do this, I had initial discussions with the lead co-researcher/project facilitator through video conferencing (via skype) and email correspondence. She then worked with a team of 6 co-researchers to determine the most important questions to ask. Questions were selected in relation to the overall goal of gaining shared knowledge and experiences toward advancing the *artivists 4 life* project. For a list of all questions and related activities see appendix A.

Visual/conceptual approach to asking/answering the questions

Figure 3.7. The emergent community-quilt project, part of design ex**change** with *artivists 4 life* designed by *artivists 4 life* and design 395 students (artivistdesignexchange, November, 2012).

To structure the questioning and responding we chose to build upon the notion of a conceptual quilt that had been developed with design students (Des 395) from the University of Alberta in a previous artivist encounter under the name "artivist design ex**change**". Figure 3.7, the working community quilt, designed not as fixed or finished and with shiftable components, featured contributions from all participants. The notion of a "community quilt" served as a conceptual framework for approaching the focus groups/workshops because it allowed for free expression/ reflection by individual contributors in a way that supported the "quilting" together of artworks/ designs, in this case questions and answers. This approach also reflected a commitment to the understanding that every contributor has something to offer through a visual approach that would allow for expression through image/text that could later be quilted.

Logistics

We designed invitations to attend focus groups/workshops and I distributed them to our networks in both print and electronic form (see appendix B for invitation). Two focus groups/workshops took place on December 18 and 20, 2012. Each one began at 8h30 pm in Canada, 6h30 am respectfully in Uganda. On December 18, 5 *artivists 4 life* co-researchers, three participants and myself were present. On December 20 the same 5 co-researchers were present along with four different participants and myself. Beverages and snacks were offered at both sites. *Artivists 4 life* members received a transport refund of 5,000 Ugandan shillings (approximately $2) to attend each workshop.

Overview, background information and administration of consent forms

The focus groups/workshops were introduced by myself while *artivists 4 life* gathered at their headquarters in the early morning in Uganda. At the University of Alberta location I introduced

the workshop to participants and explained that *artivists 4 life* members would be facilitating the workshop/focus group and the reasons behind this approach. I then administered consent forms. I showed a five-minute video about the *artivists 4 life* project as well as a slide show with images of prior encounters between the collective and various student/youth groups in and around the University of Alberta. I then showed images of two questions (presented as artworks on square images) and asked participants to answer them on the paper squares provided as we awaited the conference call from Uganda. These questions were: "What is your understanding of artivism and artivists 4 life?", and "Has your participation in artivist 4 life activities changed your perception of life and people in other societies with different backgrounds?"

Figure 3.8. Participant responding to the question projected, Fine Arts Building, University of Alberta and *artivists 4 life space*, Mukono, Uganda, December 20, 2012

Inter-actions with artivists 4 life

Figure 3.9. Participants taking part in a round of introductions, Fine Arts Building, University of Alberta and *artivists 4 life* space, Mukono, Uganda, December 20, 2012

Once *artivists 4 life* co-researchers connected through skype (30 minutes into each focus group/workshop, at 7h00 am in Uganda) they facilitated an icebreaker activity aimed at engaging everyone present in a round of introductions (Figure 3.9). This gave everyone a chance to say their name along with an action/pose, followed by the group repeating each name and action/pose together. This activity was intended to emulate artivist practice while setting a tone for collaboration and creative expression. Co-researchers proceeded by sharing anecdotes of lessons learned through prior artivist encounters and invited participants to do the same. This was done to encourage reflection upon prior encounters with *artivists 4 life* and to open up an opportunity to share personal experiences and perspectives.

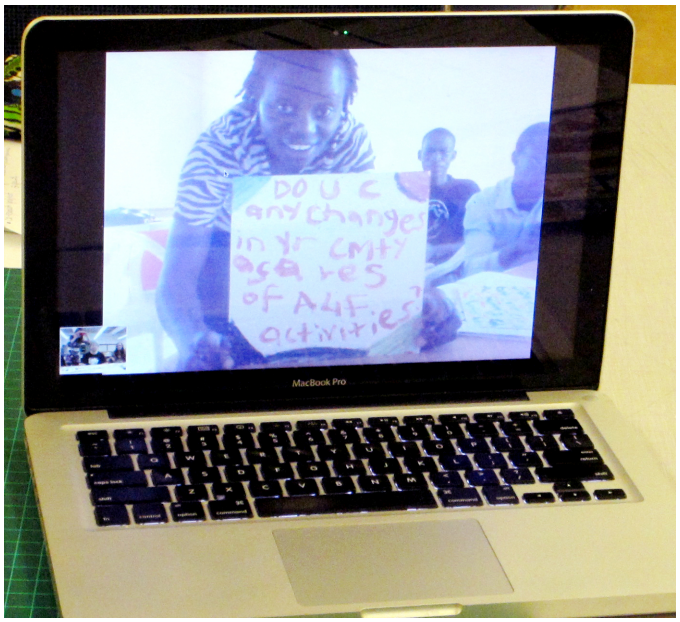

Figure 3.10. Artivists 4 life member presenting a question square, Fine Arts Building, University of Alberta and *artivists 4 life* space, Mukono, Uganda, December 18, 2012

Figure 3.11. Participants observing as *artivists 4 life* respond to questions
Fine Arts Building, University of Alberta and *artivists 4 life* space, Mukono, Uganda, December 18, 2012

After introductions and stories were exchanged each of the five co-researchers presented a *question square* (see, for example, Figure 3.10). Participants were asked to use the blank squares provided to answer one or more of the questions posed. These included the question: which *artivists 4 life* activity do you think best lives up to the motto of "creating for a better world?" (see appendix A for list of all questions*).* Co-researchers then asked participants to choose and answer one question, among the 5 presented. Participants were then asked to share their responses by any means they deemed appropriate (such as visually, verbally or through writing). Finally, co-researchers and participants presented their responses (see, for example, Figure 3.11).

Discussion

Through content analysis of artworks, written statements and recorded discussions gathered through this co-research, I identified prominent themes and grouped them into three clusters: "Toward More Complex Understandings of Self and Other"; "Toward New Modes of Inter-Action"; and, "Toward Affinities of Togetherness". In what follows I interpret and describe these indigenous themes in relation to a broader set of lenses provided by sensitizing themes from decolonial and other relevant literature. Each theme is discussed in relation to the overarching shared goal of informing future artivist encounters and other creative/collaborative pedagogical projects that aim to engage toward decolonial futures where a pluriversity of perspectives can interact (Mignolo, 2011a).

Toward More Complex Understandings of Self and Other

In artivist encounters processes of problem identification and/or exploration served as a basis for guiding inter-action. Participants reported that engagement around contemporary issues exposed them to issues they were not aware of. As one participant put it, artivist encounters are

"broadening our horizons … cause this is real life" (December 18, 2012). A common pattern of these inter-actions was the need to simultaneously engage around local issues and across cultural, regional, and even global conceptions of human circumstances. This tendency opened up a double perspective at the crossing point between the need to have an attachment to one's own place, but also to participate in the wider dialogues around what it means to be human (Papastergiadis, 2011). One participant spoke about this tendency; "not only have I become more aware of other cultures … more patient with understanding the perspectives that people are coming from, but also a lot more aware of my own culture and how we interact" (December 18, 2012). Engaging across boundaries in this way creates the opportunity to dehabituate from our known lifeworlds and gain access into the realities of others, gaining at once a renewed sense of other and self. For example, one artivist observed that so-called first world countries have some of the same problems of so-called third world countries. He explained; "I came to know that Canadians also can face a problem of unemployment, yet before I was thinking that you can't find anyone in such a country who is unemployed" (December 20, 2012). A participant made a similar observation; "I learned that we don't only have drug abuse issues in Canada it is also down over there" (December 18, 2012). Such understandings help to problematize the widespread assumption that those in the "West" are rich and without problems while those in the "global south" are poor, with problems. Actually engaging with Others to understand their circumstances helps to shift the discourse away from binary constructs of us and them toward deeper and more complex impressions of interconnected realities. Increasing one's awareness of other cultures while simultaneously becoming more self-aware corresponds with the goal of inter-culturality, or "inter-epistemology, a tense dialogue that is the dialogue of the future" between non-Western and Western cosmologies of all diversities (Mignolo, 2007, p. 143).

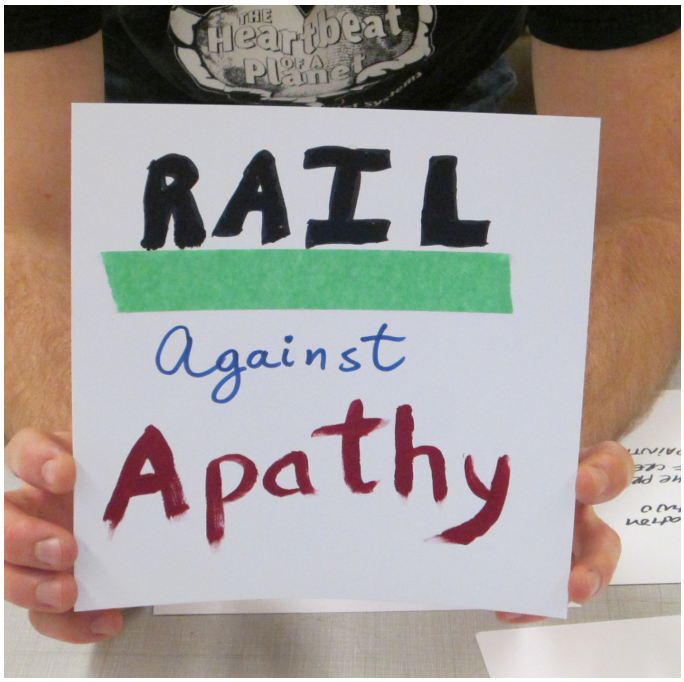

Figure 3.12. Participant presenting his response to artivist questions, Fine Arts Building, University of Alberta and *artivists 4 life* space, Mukono, Uganda, December 20, 2012

Artivist encounters not only created opportunities for considering the kinds of issues faced by different youth communities they also provoked consideration around how communities identify and respond to them. As one participant explains, "this exchange as a whole has provided a great opportunity for those who were involved to really think about the issues that need addressing in their own communities and to learn about the communities of others" (December 18, 2012).

A common response to artivist encounters was the tendency of participants to compare and consider levels of community involvement relative to their own context. Repeatedly, concerns arose around what came to be described collectively as "youth apathy" in the Edmonton context. One participant describes his reflection on this issue in relation to his artwork (Figure 3.12):

> Since [exchanging with artivists] I have had more chances to think about [apathy] and how it can affect us to become more withdrawn and more inward. … I think in order to not be apathetic you have to be active … it has got to be real participation in fighting apathy … It is very easy to fall into an apathetic mind frame and I want to participate in

> fighting against it … You [artivists] are a great example of fighting against an apathetic stance. (December 20, 2012)

Another participant explains her response to the *artivists 4 life* example:

> It is so cool to see so many young people banning together to solve the problems of their society … it is it a little harder to get people to become active here because there is so much going on … I hope that we can bring that excitement here and overpower all those other distractions that initially seem so alluring that have no sustainability to them … I am really excited to be exchange with you guys. (December 20, 2012)

Such responses are counter-intuitive to common conceptions of north-south inter-actions where those from the north are positioned as having knowledge or something else to offer to the south. As Ugandan artivists and their Canadian counterparts exchanged stories and creative works, differences, similarities and contradictions were revealed. Collective discussion and reflection around the concern of "youth apathy" in the Canadian context served to shift common understandings of north-south relations: in this case the northern vantage experienced that they have something to learn from the southern vantage. The effect of such overlapping or interlocking perspectives shifts the epistemic vantage; it is no longer the West that is defining the rest. In this way subjectivities (and their forms of knowledge and understanding) that have been subordinated by modernity enter into the kind of double movement that shifts the coloniality of power, as Ugandan youth are seen as critical thinkers and doers (Mignolo, 2011a). This movement toward being seen/seeing the Other responds to the kind of reciprocal ethics Fanon may have been hoping for when he wrote (appropriating Hegel) "it is on recognition of that other being, that [one's] own human worth and reality depend" (p. 217, 1952/1967).

Toward New Modes of Inter-Action

Responses to the question: what challenges do you see *artivists 4 life* facing in their efforts of "creating for a better world?" revealed some of the barriers to inter-action across cultures and knowledge systems. In relation to the *artivists 4 life* approach of engaging multiple forms of creative expression one participant explained, "it is rare that we feel comfortable in any or all of those different mediums". He added that this challenge involves "enrolling new people in trying new things and to somehow figuring out a way of creating safety" (December 20, 2012). This challenge was also apparent in the body language of many participants: there was a general shyness/reluctance to engage multiple and different forms of enunciation, such as dance and drama, in the way that artivists were doing with relative ease. Yet, the same participant also offered: "this process for me has challenged me think that maybe I can engage in those ways and be creative and communicate with people in a different way" (December 20, 2012). This sentiment was also observed in other participants' body language as they became increasingly receptive to engaging in the new ways of interacting that artivists were expressing. A participant describes this transition:

> What I learned in my participation is to be comfortable when you are uncomfortable. By stretching or going outside of your boundaries you can create new things and you can be with new people and it just opens a lot of opportunities when you learn to be a little bit uncomfortable and that is a good thing. (December 20, 2012).

This shift points to what Mignolo (2011a) describes as *changing the terms of the conversation*, a necessary aspect of decolonial thinking and doing. One participant, also a design instructor, had this to say:

> I have seen students working on the projects and discussing what [artivists] do … they are really really involved and curious to learn something new. … they are going beyond what they used to learn here … acquiring new knowledge beyond the boundaries of the known. … a lot of students are sort of scared because they do not know what they should expect but at the end everyone is feeling fulfilled. (December 20, 2012)

Through the creation of inter-cultural, inter-epistemic and inter-human spaces we can allow ourselves to go beyond our comfort zones, provoking new curiosities through entry into the symbolic worlds of others. Through the creation of such synergetic inter-cultural learning spaces we open ourselves toward a greater understanding of individuals, communities and contexts. In this way, artivist encounters respond to the decolonial goal of "re-inscribing, embodying and dignifying those ways of living, thinking and sensing that were violently devalued or demonized" by the agenda of modernity/coloniality in any of its forms (Lockward et al., 2011, p. 36). Decolonization of the mind requires re-membering practices (Thiong'o, 1986; 2009) to restore what was lost by the violence of colonialism and present day global coloniality. Yet this goal is not necessarily about returning to or reliving the past. Fanon refuted the categories colonialism inscribed on him, refusing to be locked down by the colour of his skin. He rejected essentializing categories and any concept of "pure", including any pure African past. Central to the new consciousness he hoped for was the notion of re-making of self and culture through shared recognitions of colonial histories through the kind of action and reflection that has "respect for the basic values that constitute a human world" (Fanon, 1952/1967, p. 222). This may involve the re-emergence or appropriation of ways of knowing and doing of times past, but what must be emphasized is the recovery of the possibility of becoming fully self-actualized: it is to discover the humanity that exists beneath the colonized/colonizer, who is both victim and

perpetrator of a system that has reduced him/her. Following Fanon (1963/1968; 1952/1967), this can only be done in relation to Others.

For Thiong'o (2009) "creative imagination is one of the greatest of remembering practices" (p. 28). Artivism in this way allows for the restoration of dignity by celebrating ways of knowing and being that are different from modernity's prescriptions. For Fanon *collective thought process* (1963/1968) manifests as national culture and thus people are educated through cultural expressions. This is consistent with Mignolo's (2011a) emphasis on the creation of new collective imaginaries, where imagination is inseparable from enunciation and enunciation is necessarily social. Artivism in this sense has the capacity to revitalize the social collective through the freedom to engage, share and celebrate multiple forms of enunciation. As participants and artivists from both sides of the colonial divide engage in decolonizing processes participants are invited to unlearn biases and assumptions of colonial legacies and their normalizing practices while *artivists 4 life* share and celebrate their identities in ways that validate their existence as human beings. Fanon (1963/1968) recognized that freedom given is not the same as freedom granted, calling upon the formerly colonized to seek freedom through their own actions. *Artivists 4 life* in this way are acting as leaders as they encourage their counterparts to *go beyond the boundaries of the known* into an imaginary of equal power relations, the necessary grounds for mutual enrichments. One artivist had this to say about the significance of artivist encounters: "regardless of how the final piece comes out, whether through art, design, theatre, creative writing or any other way, everyone is equally important in this project" (December 20, 2012).

Toward Affinities of Togetherness

A thematic of togetherness arose repeatedly throughout this artivist intervention as participants shared how their inter-actions with *artivists 4 life* exposed them concrete examples of collaboration. One participant describes this tendency:

> Especially in the design community where I exist … artivists 4 life have brought a greater awareness to the power and the strength that there is in collaboration … working together we are able to make so much more change to go so much further with our ideas … and that's relevant in the classroom and outside. (December 18, 2012)

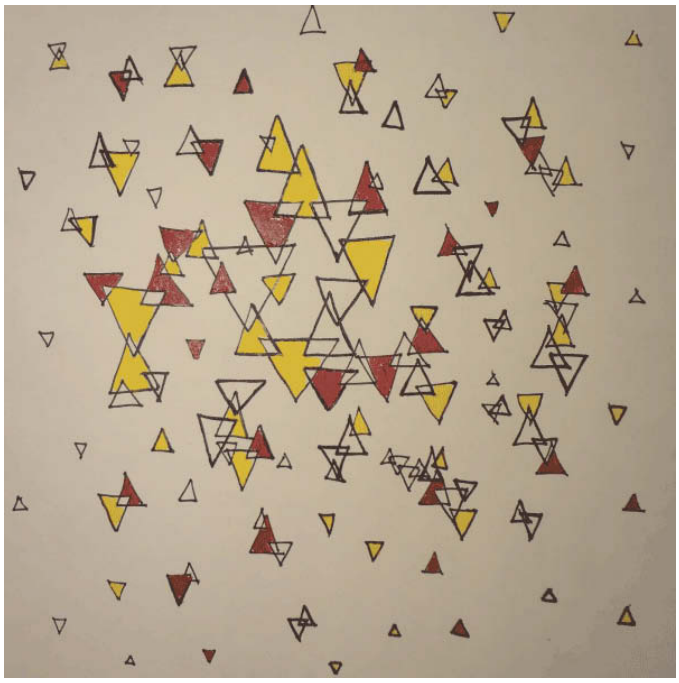

Figure 3.13. Contribution to the emergent community-quilt project, part of design ex**change** with *artivists 4 life* designed by design student participant, November 2012 (artivistdesignexchange, 2012)

Similar to the above description of a new *awareness* of the *power and strength of collaboration,* another participant chose to create a design in response to her overall experience interacting with *artivists 4 life* (Figure 3.13). She describes her concept:

> Through our experiences with the artivists I found myself continuously drawn to the notion of togetherness. The whole artivist experience revolves around people coming together as a grassroots movement, expressing themselves and using art to address social issues. (artivistdesignexchange, 2012)

The triangles in her design symbolize the coming together of identities that "are interlocking as you near the centre of the composition" (November 15, 2012).

The above observation and artwork point to how change in the directionality of translation—through the coming together of subjectivities through bi-directional inter-action—has the potential to open up to the kind of "getting in/letting in" infection made possible by sensing power differentials in the colonial ontological and epistemic difference (Mignolo, 2011a, p. 222).

Taken together, aspects of this artivist intervention come together to reveal how bi-directional inter-actions across power differentials can support subjectivities and sociabilities to move toward epistemic decolonization. Like Fanon's vision of post-colonial humanism, transformation manifests through outward movement, from the individual to the collective, from community to nation, from race to world … where perceptions of self and Other are simultaneously renewed. Moving away from dualisms, toward complex and layered understandings of our inter-connectedness, helps to shift the epistemic vantage to include formerly excluded perspectives. As traction is gained toward equal power relations, mutuality and inter-dependence are modeled, creating an imaginary where all those involved can become more human.

Conclusion

> What I am observing from this side of the world in these young people from here is the beginning of a transformation. I recognize it because I too am experiencing it. (Personal letter to members of *artivists 4 life*, October 4, 2012).

For Ugandan youth artivists, being where they are, responding to multiple forms of oppression is the impetus for their creations and the force that synergizes their resistance and re-existence. Encounters with *artivists 4 life* have the power to challenge and provoke contemporary concepts of art and art-making while creating traction for imagining together alternative (and better) futures. In many ways art and artistic practices in the West—and Westernized art practices elsewhere—have become increasingly de-politicized through their absorption into market logic and constituent cultural practices motivated by the relentless search for validation in European epistemes. Art and art practices that conform to the art market are necessarily derivatives of an ideology that persistently elevates certain subjectivities (and behaviors) to the status of art genius while disqualifying the rest (Preziosi & Farago, 2012). Artivist inter-actions are manifesting as alternatives to remaining complacent in the hierarchy of relations built on racism and patriarchy and prescribed by global coloniality. They are allowing for movement toward the decolonial consciousness and the new humanism Fanon called for by taking colonial differences as a point of departure for creative/critical reflections/action premised on mutual transformations. Members from both sides of the colonial divide are coming together in artivist inter-spaces guided by the spirit of "creating for a better world". Emergent artivist relationalities are unfolding new understandings of our shared histories of colonization. Such a path to understanding suggests an ethic of responsibly toward those in positions of subordination as participants are invited to respond critically to those who have been rendered invisible by modernity. For Maldonado-Torres (2004) such critical awareness "should not lead necessarily to defeatism or despair, but to a heightened sense of responsibility that helps to bring into view that which the project of European modernity has made invisible in Europe and elsewhere" (p. 47). While working to unveil the colonial side of modernity this vantage simultaneously brings to light the epistemic

capacities and contributions of non-Western knowledge systems. It was in this spirit that this artivist intervention worked to facilitate a space where the potential of *artivists 4 life* would be recognized, and in turn, offer insights toward a model of engagement for decolonial creative projects for imagining and performing communal futures. This requires the acceptance of the agency of the invisible and the willingness to be guided by their perspectives toward reimagining and reorganizing social life (Mignolo, 2011a). The inter-cultural learning spaces that *artivists 4 life* are fostering are revealing this kind of willingness. A participant describes the impact of artivist encounters on her design community:

> This has definitely made a change and we are doing things now that are working with that collaboration that is rooted in artivism … we are planning a design show around this idea where it will be more about coming to the show with an idea rather than a finished project and working on it with the community to create something. (December 18, 2012)

As *artivists 4 life* model new modes of inter-action, their counterparts across the world are moving toward the kind of responsible awareness decolonial thinkers are calling for. Such awareness has the capacity to inform new creative projects attuned to alternative conceptions of what art could be, such as the one described above. Figure 3.14 points the kind of *radical diversality* (Maldonado-Torres, 2004) that artivist inter-actions strive for. A participant describes how her group imagined a better world informed by artivism: "Its not one square but two and everybody is connected, people here are female and male, young and old and all together, different and colorful" (December 20, 2012).

Figure 3.14. A participant presents a response to artivist questions, Fine Arts Building, University of Alberta and *artivists 4 life* space, Mukono, Uganda, December 20, 2012

The event that spurred the creation of this shared response to *artivists 4 life* questions was collective and it involved the cross-fertilization of perspectives. The making of it echoes calls made by Nalubowa, Mignolo, Fanon and other decolonial thinkers to transcend binaries by recognizing differences while creating solidarities around shared commonalities. Here subjectivities are invited to come together as victims of the cruel process of colonization in its various forms: Everyone can connect through the recognition of suffering. It is this kind of inter-action, sensitive to suffering and difference, that opens possibilities for beings and becomings all-together more human.

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Aesthetic Disobedience and Other artivist Tactics

for Creative and Communal Re-Existence

Leslie Robinson with *artivists 4 life*

[Synergy] drives the artivist to spend her days and nights feverishly creating in the face of ferocious destruction … to encourage others to create as well … it is this synergy that urges the artivist to make love in wartime.

—Asante, 2008, p. 20

What if we subvert the epistemic scaffolding on which (the world order) is erected? What if we posit that, in the present moment, it is the global south that affords privileged insight into the workings of the world at large? That it is from here that our empirical grasp of its lineaments, and our theory-work in accounting for them, is and ought to be coming, at least in significant part? That, in probing what is at stake in it, we might move beyond the north-south binary, to lay bare the larger dialectical processes that have produced and sustained it. Note the simultaneity of the descriptive and the prescriptive voice. … Each is a reflection on the contemporary order of things approached from a primarily African vantage, one, as it turns out, that is full of surprises and counter-intuitives, one that invites us to see familiar things in different ways.

—Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012, pp. 1-2

This paper takes its point of departure in the *what ifs* that Comaroff and Comaroff posit, embracing the experimental and the artistic as forces for re-imagining decolonial futures through an engaged scholarship that comes out of the African experience. The locus of enunciation is a coalitional consciousness born of the *artivists 4 life* collective comprised of Ugandan youth and one Canadian scholar and a shared desire to voice our *insights into the workings of the world in a way that is, and ought to be coming from a primarily African vantage.* By privileging and indeed celebrating the artistic and youthful subjectivities and sociabilities characteristic of Ugandan members of *artivists 4 life* and the forms of agency they encourage, We/I[1] are not ignoring or downplaying the present day predicaments of Ugandan society and Africa at large. Rather, our enunciations arise simultaneously from an African perspective and a world-systems lens that in concert recognize that the "present-day crisis is in fact a crisis of imagination of a different future. It is not simply an African crisis, it is a global crisis" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b, p. 42). We/I are thus working from the understanding that modernity is failing to produce modern solutions to modern problems and that this very impasse is intensified by actors who "spend all their time responding to a world where they have been reduced to respondents rather than initiators, resulting in mimicry and compromised agency" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b, p. 39). As artivists, our strengths lie in our abilities "to create and to have a palpable impact in the real world" (Asante, 2008, p. 205) and it is from this vantage that We/I struggle to open up spaces for new ideas and artistic expressions that de-link from the standardized protocols and dominant discourses that govern modern conceptions of what art should be, what it should do, and how scholars should write about it. In doing so We/I are also exposing the same modern logic that

[1] The signifier "We/I" is used throughout this paper to point to the complex multi-authorial and performative approach taken up by *artivists 4 life* (the "We") and my artivist/academic self (the "I"). This is elaborated further in the section "Process: Experimental Co-Authoring".

over-determines which subjectivities can engage in art-making processes and creative scholarship alike by intervening in the mechanisms that confine African subjects, and especially youth, to "stagnant positions where relationships between the spectator and the action are confined to fixed positions as a security measure for keeping [African] imaginations sterile" (Ogonga, 2011, p. 234).[2]

While our contribution is a response to the geo-politically situated circumstances of our small collective of creative agents working out of central Uganda it simultaneously arises from the observation that *High Art* and *Higher Education* are not only proponents of the celebrated modernity of our times, but mechanisms that serve to perpetuate its darker, colonial underside (Preziosi & Farago, 2012; Mignolo 2011a, 2011c). The modern Art system and Academia[3] both function like sub-systems in the prevailing World order of our times, reproducing the symbiotic relationship of modernity/coloniality through their respective institutions, disciplines and discourses which function in turn like interconnected cogs. Like modernity/coloniality at large, each cog works to classify and measure human beings and our thinking according to scientific descriptions prescribed by the *colonial matrix of power* and founded in principles of racism and patriarchy (Mignolo, 2011a). With this understanding, and thinking and doing as artivists and critical students/learners, our intervention into modern Art/Academia resists the intellectual coloniality that inferiorizes subjectivities on a scale of less-than-to-more-than-human (see for example Maldonado-Torres, 2008, 2012; Mignolo, 2011a; Wynter, 2003).

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[2] See Piece 2, "Artivism-Into-Modernity: Exposing Coloniality in High Art and Higher Education" for a further discussion of this.

[3]For the purposes of this paper "modern Art system" refers to the interconnected institutions, disciplines and discourses that maintain dominant ideas of what Art is, who creates it and how it functions in society. "Academia" is used broadly to describe the notion of (modern) University life including teaching, learning and research and the structures and protocols that sustain it.

As subjectivities are deemed *less-than* according to our body- and geo-politics (defined as so by modern European standards, presented as though universal) so too are our enunciations; the Indigenous, the artistic, the collaborative, the feminist, the queer, the youthful, and the otherwise subaltern. In Art/Academia this modern/colonial ordering logic works to stifle imagination, stagnate culture creation, delimit collaborative sociabilities, and ultimately undermine ways of knowing/doing to the degree to which they deviate from disciplinary norms (Mignolo, 2011a). Resisting the violence of this biocentric categorization, our contribution aims to create a critical imaginary for transitioning toward creative re-existence through epistemic and aesthetic de-linking. Our focus is to articulate a "new politics of knowledge rather than new contents" (Mignolo, 2011a, p. 58) by exploring ways of intertwining artistic and youthful forms of enunciation with scholarly discussion.

Organization

This piece is comprised of four sections. Because the writing is experimental, the first section, "Process: Experimental Co-Authoring", presents the actors and articulates the nature of our relationship. Here the necessity of bringing artivism into academic writing is elaborated, followed by a discussion of Fanonian thought, the theoretical linchpin of the artivism this piece aims to embody. The second section, "Context: Coming of Age in Africa", begins with a discussion of how, since independence, the logic of colonialism has continued to impose Euro-American epistemology on African subjectivities, effectively maintaining the socio-cultural mechanisms that hold them in lockdown. Moving between scholarship on African youth identities and literature specific to the Ugandan context, the harsh predicaments facing Ugandan youth are outlined. The historical roots of these symptoms are discussed, including the ways that the forgetfulness of colonial history forces African youth to see the world through an imported

and distorted perspective. This section concludes by acknowledging the underemphasized agency of African youth and their capacities to live meaningful lives in spite of the precarious conditions they were born into. The third section, "Background: *artivists 4 life* Youth Collective" describes the history of *artivists 4 life*, the structure of our collective and the specific aspects of our work that are contingent on my position as a becoming scholar. Finally, the last section, "Artivist Projects and Results" shows aspects of two recent artivist projects, a comic narrative and a visual art project exploring Baganda proverbs. The impacts of these projects on artivist subjectivities and relationalities are discussed in relation to relevant decolonial literature.

Process: Experimental Co-Authoring

> We are a youth-led, community-based organization with members from Kayunga, Mukono and Kampala, Uganda. Our group brings together performing and visual arts, craft-making and any medium necessary through youth-led activities that engage our communities to respond to issues that affect us. As *artivists 4 life* we seek to create for a better world. *(Artivists 4 life* constitution, 2013)

> *I think and do* from two places in this world; as a member of the *artivists 4 life* youth collective in Uganda—where *I am an artivist because we are artivists*—and as a student enrolled in University education in Canada—where I struggle to re-exist as an artivist. Within and between these worlds apart *I think and do*—as thinking and doing become synonymous (Mignolo, 2011a)—as an artivist/academic. (personal statement, Robinson, 2014)

The above two statements serve to juxtapose the loci of enunciation that intersect in the making of this piece. The entanglement of enunciators and our enunciations is complex, impossible to delineate in any concrete fashion, and lined with contradictions including the kind of unequal power relations We/I struggle to shift. Philosopher and decolonial thinker Maldonado-Torres'

(2012) calls scholars to "consider entering into a different relation with social movements, and develop methods that simultaneously legitimize those movements and provide new lenses for work in the humanities, the social sciences, and the university at large" (p. 93). The response enacted here is an effort to embody the artivist way of partnering across boundaries in the process of knowledge production and sharing by performing our relational ethic through an experimental "writing" process. By acting as epistemic partners in/out of scholarship our creative approach blurs the division between the personal and communal "closing the false gap that often exists between speaking and acting" (Sium & Ritskes, 2013, p. v).

The signifier We/I draws attention to this blurring. The "We" honours all contributing members of *artivists 4 life*[4] and marks a coalitional artivist consciousness. *Artivists 4 life* are placed as first author(s) not only in a gesture to shift power, but through the understanding Agali awamu gegaluma ennyama[5]. The "I" signals my complacency, as a white female settler in Canada and a mzungu[6] in Uganda, in the modern/colonial structures this piece (and our artivist project in general) confronts. Since I participate in the Western institutional academy as student and researcher and am the sole contributor occupying a position on the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo, 2011a) that can "legitimize" this contribution to scholarship, my role is differentiated and marked as the solitary "I". Epistemically misfit by my practice as an artivist, I experience the violence of "biocentric disciplinary discourses" (Wynter, 2003, p. 312) that serve to undermine artistic/collective modes of inquiry, however, I cannot claim exemption from the unequal

[4] *Artivists 4 life* members: Jjita M., Kabanda J., Kakome P., Kalungi J., Kisitu J., Kizito J., Likicho H., Mashakalugo C., Mukasa V., Muwanga J. J., Nalubowa A., Nampanga M., Namulondo D., Obol A. J., Robinson, L.

[5] This Baganda proverb can be literally translated as the teeth that are together can bite the meat, meaning metaphorically that in togetherness we can find strength to address our issues.

[6] In Uganda the term mzungu is commonly used describe someone who is white.

distribution of power as prescribed by the colonial matrix. My Canadian whiteness, paired with some educational and economic capital, position me as privileged, particularly in relation to Ugandan youth artivists. Thus, the "slash" between the "We" and "I" simultaneously marks the coming together of community and scholarship while denoting our separation, delineated by the colonial divide.

It should also be noted that I, in the literal sense, contribute the "scholarly writing" component of this paper. I do so not to speak on behalf of fellow *artivists 4 life* members but rather through my transforming self that is contingent on my relationship with them and the teachings they so generously share with me. Thus, while all contributors are artivists and indeed the existence of the collective itself is the impetus for this contribution, the weaving together of words with collective artivist works, is undertaken by myself with checking and approval from volunteer *artivists 4 life* members. This means that another limitation of this piece is that the contributions by all those outside the discourses of the Western academy (all other project members), have a degree of translation in response to an academic paradigm where in order for such enunciations to be considered seriously they need to be framed and "articulated, always, in relation to European categories of thought, whether conservative or progressive, whether from the Right of from the Left" (Mignolo, 2011a, p. 240). To counter-act this I appropriate the concept of *double translation*[7] to guide my enunciations that are necessarily contingent on my inter-actions with *artivists 4 life*. Thus out of bi-directional communication of knowledges the writing has become

[7] See Piece 3, "Re-Living artivist Encounters: Intercultural Spaces and the Double Process of Translation" for a further discussion of this notion.

infected by the teachings of fellow *artivists 4 life* members. Thus, I ask to be read as an expression, however inexact, of something more than me sealed into singularity.

The artivist projects that are described later in this piece were produced as collective responses to concerns identified by *artivists 4 life*. The mediums of art and storytelling allow a greater openness to creative and collective artivist enunciations, offering avenues for breaking away from normative academic writing processes such as the tendency to exclude African youth perspectives in discussions about them (Ugor, 2013). Speaking/acting through stories (both visual and textual) thus honors a collective consciousness and serves to counteract the academic writing (and framing) process adopted by necessity by myself.

Writing Fanon into artivism

Finally, the community-academic partnership that has made this contribution possible is inspired by the pedagogical writing of Frantz Fanon (1952/1967; 1963/1968; 1967) and the insights of contemporary decolonial thinkers who build on his diagnosis of colonialism as a destructive force that cuts across psychological, social, economic, cultural and all other aspects of life. Because Fanon worked from specific loci of enunciation (Martinique, Algeria and France), while moving toward a vision of a decolonized world, his thinking and doing can be extended to help understand and challenge today's re-organized and globalized colonial situation. Indeed much of Fanon's work, at the onset of anti-colonial struggle, was particularly situated due to both his active participation in the Algerian revolution and his proximity to, and analysis of, the psychiatric conditions of the colonized (through his psychiatric practice, including his own hospital). Fanon's work lends itself to critical appropriation precisely because his contextualized analysis of colonialism informed his radical vision for a decolonized world. Indeed over the

course of his works Fanon emphasized movement from self to other, from community to nation, and from nation to world through his articulation of the stages that decolonization requires. Fanon's life as a political activist/scholar/physiatrist and the eclectic way that he mixed and innovated methods to reveal the interconnectivity of the individual psyche and the social provide inspiration to the artivist, also seeking to bring together diverse perspectives to respond to individual and collective struggles while fighting for a better world for all. For Fanon it was the possibility of colonized subjectivities re-becoming that guided his vision for a new humanity, one that refuses to accept European claims to humanism premised on racialized and otherwise exclusionary binaries. Like Fanon, We/I seek to transcend the binaries imposed by colonial logic toward inter-action premised on ethical recognitions.

Maldonado-Torres reminds us that the Fanonian vision for liberation takes its point of departure in the "preferential option for the damnés" (2008, pp. 158–159) where subjectivities otherwise institutionally excluded can contribute critically to the new humanity Fanon called for. Thus collectively, out of our/their *proper place* in the realm of scholarship, We/I make a subversive entry into scholarly knowledge generation and dissemination with the de-colonial aim of "making visible the invisible" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 262). In this way We/I work to enact a coalitional artivist consciousness by shifting power relations to improvise a new relational ethics. In doing so an opening for the creative and intellectual agency of Ugandan youth as thinking and acting subjects is made through the re-playing of processes and principles co-created by the collective. Hence, it is through the messyness of working across epistemic, disciplinary and cultural boundaries as partners in creative processes—and through awareness of the *incommensurability* of our intersecting and differentiated roles (Tuck & Yang, 2012)—

that We/I hope to gain traction toward decolonizing our selves, our senses and the ways in which our knowledges/actions are shared and re-lived.

Context: Coming of Age in Africa

The world order of the day—variously called *post-colonial*, *late modern*, *neo-liberal* and *global coloniality*—is manifesting rapidly in complex ways in the lives of youth all around the world. The ever-increasing contraction of social and economic opportunities for youth (Blossfeld & Mills, 2005) is nowhere more acute than in Africa where populations are tripling every 30 years and young people themselves comprise the largest population segment in most African countries. As traditions yield to new global transformations in contemporary Africa much of everyday life is characterized by startling levels of social disruption. Factors such as the rapid spread of global communication, the globalization of markets, high-speed travel, and rapid population growth expose young Africans to information, obstacles and opportunities that undermine local values, norms and traditions (Durham, 2000; Wiegratz, 2010).

African youth are living in a paradox where the promises of the 21st century fall drastically short as socio-economic disjunctures widen. Scholars of African youth culture have drawn from the discourses of modernity to make sense of contemporary challenges facing young Africans in relation to an unpredictable, accelerated, constantly in-flux and devious global society (Cieslik & Pollock, 2002; Fornas & Bolin, 1995; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; McRobbie, 1994; Ugor, 2013). This context reveals that we are faced with a generation of young Africans whose future survival is not only threatened, but locked to a societal structure where relationships between the powerful and powerless are confined to stagnant positions as a measure for producing docile

minds and thus stifling capacities to imagine alternative futures (Ogonga, 2011; Pomerance & Sakeris, 1996; Thiong'o, 1986).

The landscape of predicaments and opportunities, or norms and exceptions, for youth in Africa is particularly acute in Uganda, a country reported to have the youngest population in the world and the highest youth unemployment at an estimated rate of 83 percent (World Bank, 2009). At independence in 1962 Uganda's population was just over 7 million. Today, only a half century later, the population has increased more than five fold to an estimated 37 million (New Vision, 2013; World Bank, 2013). This accelerated population growth occurred over a 50 year period that included Idi Amin's seven year "killing-machine" (Rukandema, 2012, p. 44) and the chaos that followed its overthrow in 1979, as well as Joseph Kony and the LRA's 20 year "war without a cause" (Rukandema, 2012, p. 100) in Northern Uganda. This last half a century has also endured the ongoing war on HIV/AIDS, at its worst in the 80s and 90s but still cause for much concern with a current prevalence rate of about 7 percent, but reportedly on the rise again (Uganda AIDS Commission, 2011).

Ugandan youth of today were born between the mid 1980s and the mid 1990s, in the aftermath of structural adjustment policies, and in an era of relative peace, with the exception of those residing in the North. This period marked a shift toward increasingly neoliberal economic reforms—premised on prescriptions of a market-society and the consequent cultural reshaping they required. Indeed, Uganda is known as the African country that bought into the neoliberal reform package most extensively. Although Western influence and capitalist restructuring had already begun to infiltrate Ugandan society during colonialism and the first decades that followed independence, the more recent configuration—coinciding with long withstanding president Museveni's ongoing regime since 1986—is more pervasive and all-encompassing in its

blatant adhesion to free market engineering (Wiegratz, 2010). So today's youth came into a society facing unprecedented change and social disruption. In the "Artivists Projects and Results" section of this paper some of the specific circumstances impacting the lives of Ugandan artivists are discussed, including specific issues related to HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation, unemployment and the uprooting of local culture. Here, an effort is made to sketch a wider picture of the impacts of global coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b) on Ugandan/African ways of thinking, being and doing, particularly, in relation to youth experience.

Since there can be no modernity without coloniality the everyday lives of young Africans are subordinated by largely invisible global imperial designs (Mignolo, 1999, 2011a). This context and the ways it manifests in everyday life are difficult to name precisely due to the precariousness of what it means to come of age in a neurotic and increasingly unpredictable society. For youth in Uganda, like their counterparts elsewhere in Africa, the consequences of our present world condition are manifesting in diverse ways and at an unprecedented speed. This accelerated influx of problems including barriers to education and training, poor housing, unemployment/underemployment, poor access to healthcare, violent conflict and war (and its aftermath), increased conflict between men and women, a rise in immoral behavior, and many other socio-economic deficits are threatening not only the daily lives of young Africans, but also their very futures and the futures of their communities at large (Kennelly, Poyntz & Ugor 2009; Rukandema, 2012; Vorhölter, 2012).

In Uganda, as market reforms were promoted by foreign actors (including proponents of the development industry and international financial institutions) and a range of Westernized domestic players, the nation was resocialized and reconditioned (Wiegratz, 2010). This period of neoliberal economic reforms since the late 1980s manifested as much as a cultural reformulation

as an economic program. Co-constituted by an aggressive moral restructuring program these so-called reforms brought with them the imposition of Euro-American epistemology, effectively controlling subjectivity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b). With an exaggerated emphasis on individual success and accumulation of material wealth over regard and compassion for the collective good, this recent period required "making the self-interest principle the overriding or hegemonic moral code" (Wiegratz, 2010, p. 126).

For Ugandan author and social critic Rukandema (2012), the most drastic form of social disruption plaguing Uganda today is the toxic disease of self-seeking or corruption. For him "the seeds of today's pervasive lack of values, indiscipline, disregard for cleanliness and extreme selfishness were sown during Amin's rule" (2012, p. 46). The turning of order into chaos in the last half century and especially in the last 25 years can be seen in the relative disorder and filth of today's streets. Boda-boda (moto) taxis take over existing sidewalks and their maneuverings are so poorly regulated that entire sections of hospitals are dedicated to responding to moto accidents. In many ways manners and work ethic have fallen by the wayside, in favor of an attitude of "it is just me and no-one else" (Rukandema, 2012, p. 26). Whereas 50 years ago, men took pride in paying their taxes, today many people use the common expression "looking for money" as they turn a blind eye to its source. The decaying of morals in Ugandan society was well articulated by Ugandan singer Bobi Wine (known as the "ghetto president") in his song kiwani (meaning *not real* or *fake*), which became a hit across the country in 2007. The frequent use of the slang "kiwani" points to the normalization of deceitful and cunning behavior, especially in regards to financial transactions (Wiegratz, 2010).

If one is to visit Kampala, he or she won't fail to notice the outcomes of the recent explosion in the capital of modern shopping malls, bars and hotels and the domestic elite and foreign

expatriates and visitors that frequent them. Such observations, paired with the aggregate economic growth rate are, however, poor indicators of the welfare of the majority of Ugandans (Rukandema, 2012). With an ever-increasing gap between the elite and the poor, and despite the return of peace to the country, its most entrenched problems remain closely tied to the mechanisms of social control that divide human beings into categories of less-than or more-than or haves and have-nots.

Many people today including Africans can't help but blame this predicament on poor African leadership. What they often fail to see is how the present-day formulas, manners and motives were instigated by the modern legacy of colonialism and are still maintained by its current thrust of global capitalism. Critically understanding the roots of current leadership does not absolve the failure of leadership in Africa today, however, it shifts the blame away from the Africa-elite vs African poor binary toward a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of global coloniality and their historical designs. Toyin Falola (2005) articulates this conundrum of root causes:

> Contemporary Africans have a right to be angry, but they must also probe into the reasons for institutional failure, the roots of which lie in colonial past. They must question the inherited forms of government, economy, and relations between Africa and the West. They must situate the African condition in a global context: a poor continent supports the industrialized West with its labour, raw materials, markets, and service payments on debts, among other mechanisms that transfer wealth abroad. They must situate African politics in the context of colonialism: modern political institutions are derived more from the colonial past than the precolonial … The postcolonial seeks its roots in the colonial, alienated from the precolonial and established local traditions. (p. 4)

While young Africans today are bombarded with the seductive calls of modernity they are simultaneously induced with an amnesia that alienates their individual memories from that of the

collective. Through the systemic engineering and infiltration of modern capitalist values into Africa by Western and Westernized subjects colonial power and capitalist mechanics work to produce passive minds while shattering African memory and value systems. Through a co-opted imperial education system, the inferiorization of local languages, entrenched corruption and a political climate premised on self-seeking, Africa's youth learn to navigate the world from an imported and skewed perspective. As understandings of historic colonialisms and the mechanisms of modernity/coloniality become marked with shame and confusion "memory is shut up in a crypt, a collective psychic tomb" (Thiong'o, 2009, p. 46). For Kenyan artist Ogonga (2011), African society has perpetuated the colonial encounter and all its inadequacies and patterns, failing to realize that healing requires "a reinvention of ourselves, the colonised, and for us to begin a deliberate reconstruction of our past … [through] a common vision as a common people" (p. 234). Carrying the burden of an unhealed and fractured collective psyche Africa's young are forced to navigate precarious circumstances with few inherited principles for measuring the alienating surpluses of the present as "the unity of the dead, the living, and the unborn is broken" (Thiong'o, 2009, p. 46).

In this very climate of social instability, economic uncertainty and fractured memory, African youth are in many ways an unhealed generation. Already predetermined to failure or demise by asymmetrical global relations that persistently position them as less-than-human on the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo, 2011a), African youth are faced with a double assault. They are inundated with discourses of unrelenting pessimism that seem to blame them for much of the problems they were born into. In dominant scholarly discourses young Africans are framed as destructive, ignorant, idle or otherwise problematic—or, at best, needy receptacles for foreign help and instruction (Best & Kellner, 2003; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2005; De Boeck &

Honwana, 2005). Indeed, African youth occupy the bottom ranks in the spectrum of subordinated subjects, however, we can only begin to comprehend their predicaments by understanding them not as constitutive of an African crisis, but rather, as symptoms of a global crisis. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013b) describes this scenario as "a multi-layered and structural crisis … a crisis of methodologies, a failure to understand how to solve modern problems" (p. viii). He also warns that when grappling with global coloniality we must avoid creating stories of Africa as static and Africans as defeated and instead shift our analysis to the global imperial designs of subjectivation and how they impact subjectivity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b).

While African youth are undeniably confronted with weak postcolonial economies and a general attitude of suspicion, scholarship on African youth identities almost systematically overlooks a critical characteristic of young people in the post-colony: the resiliency to survive and live meaningful lives in spite of the unpredictable and unstable nature of life in Africa today (Hoffman, 2011; Ugor, 2013). So amidst the concerns for the future of Africa's young some scholars are advocating for a re-thinking of African youth not as victims but as resilient social agents capable of intervening and transforming their own circumstances. Such scholars recognize that many African youth are challenging and confronting their destinies as idle and troublesome, redefining themselves as agents of change and telling their own stories (Hansen, 2008). These lesser know stories of African youth point to a new generation of unsung heroes who are reinventing their circumstances through complex and contradictory means. Creators of new forms of social agency, some African youth are actively taking part in social and political movements. For example, they are at the forefront of popular culture in Africa—using music, dance and visual art to respond to their realities and create their own identities (De Boeck & Honwana, 2005). Despite and in spite of what society has dealt them, many African youth are

indeed positioning themselves "at the center of the dynamic imagination of the African social landscape" (Durham, 2000, p. 114). It is this vantage, one that sees the promise and potential of African youth subjectivities, while not denying the cards stacked against them, that this piece aims to advance.

Background: *artivists 4 life* Youth Collective

Zavala (2013) has called for a reclamation of participatory action research (PAR) by grassroots movements through an emphasis on community self-determination. By taking on mobile positions that allow for constant adaptation in order to respond to the broader questions of de-colonial struggle, *artivists 4 life* have maintained a sustainable space for creative resistance and collective re-existence. Through artivist process principles and organizational tactics, the collective challenges conventional conceptions of both community/academic partnerships and artistic practice, offering an example of how creative action nurtured by community can contest global coloniality while offering an alternative imaginary for moving toward decolonial futures[8].

History and Organization

Building on relationships developed through mutual participation in community art projects since 2008, the *artivists 4 life* collective was co-founded in 2011 by a small group of eight Ugandan youth artists and activists along with myself. Following the notion of artivism the collective brings together artistic processes with community activism through youth-led educational activities and creative interventions. Drawing from dance, drama, visual art and

[8] See Piece 1, "Youth Artivism in Uganda: Co-Creators of Our Own Becoming" for an alternative an earlier description of the *artivists 4 life* collective, our processes and projects. Also, see Piece 3, "Re-Living artivist Encounters: Intercultural Spaces and the Double Process of Translation" for examples of artivist inter-actions across the colonial divide with counterparts in Edmonton.

virtually any necessary creative process *artivists 4 life* respond to our own identified issues. The shared goal of establishing our own sustainable and creative space of resistance culminated in the registration of the group as a community based organization in 2012. With members from Kampala, Kayunga and Mukono, the collective currently includes fourteen active members with alumni of over 40 members. Members meet regularly (1-2 times per week) for workshops in centrally located Mukono.

At its onset the group was led by a small group of multi-talented youth facilitators with various art and/or counseling skills along and myself. At this time the proverb "each one teach one" was identified as a guiding principle (*artivists 4 life* manifesto). As a result of ongoing youth-led trainings, leadership has since transitioned with roles now being dispersed among all members through a system of rotating facilitation and division of weekly tasks among all members.

From 2009 to 2012 sources of income were largely provided by annual contracts to develop community arts programming including the co-creation of community messages. In 2012 these contracts were terminated forcing the collective to search for other means to sustain the group. Currently *artivists 4 life* operate on an average of less than 1,000,000 UGX ($400) per month, only a fraction of the funds that were available in previous years. In terms of support for local members, all members participate on a volunteer basis, receiving group-funded transport allowances for attending workshops and small honorariums for duties including accounting, project coordination and maintenance of the database. A new focus on income generating projects has helped the collective to transition to a model of self-reliance, independent of donor funds and the political agendas that accompany them. *Artivists 4 life* generate funds through sales of art and craft products and through small scale farming projects. These projects are organized according to the circulation of investment funds among members for specific projects.

All members are free to bring proposals and the collective as a whole selects which proposals to advance through consensus making processes. Conditions and expectations for the borrowing and return of capital are flexible and are negotiated separately for each project. For example, in the case of farming projects capital can be returned to the project in the form of piglets, chicks or eggs, whereas in the case of craft-making capital is returned in cash profits. This kind of structure maintains self-sustainability.

Through international and local educational exchanges at conferences and in classrooms *artivists 4 life* have also built a network of partnerships with academics, students and youth groups in Canada promoting inter-cultural understanding through the sharing of artivist processes and stories. The opportunity to exchange with youth counterparts across cultures, epistemologies and other differences has been paramount to deepening members' understandings of the mechanisms of global coloniality and ways to de-link from them.

Community-scholar partnership

Although *artivists 4 life* was sparked by my involvement with Ugandan youth in connection to my Master thesis research (2009) the collective has, over the last six years, become largely self-sustained by its local members. My membership has transitioned from lead facilitator to epistemic partner and advocator. This transition occurred in large part through a shared focus on creating a sustainable space of resistance with built-in structures and protocols for distributing ownership among all members. Thus our collaboration has shifted from responding to objectives brought by an outside researcher (my initial facilitation of participatory design projects) to purposes collectively identified by the group (such as income generating activities) while I now focus on knowledge sharing. I do so by facilitating opportunities for knowledge dissemination

with *artivists 4 life* through co-presentations at conferences/exhibitions and the co-authorship of publications. With *artivists 4 life* as co-researchers, rather than the researched, the nature of work takes on new meaning. Different questions are asked as new problems and goals are identified as people ultimately participate on their own terms (Smith, 1999). Arriving at this mode of relationality and partnering embodies the understanding that "individual subjects do not enter into relationships, but rather subjects are made in and through relationships" (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012, p. 52). In this way the everyday struggles of the collective and the interconnectivity of our relationships have taken privilege over particular methods of research. Thus the terrain of our work is an imaginative and expansive space at the intersection of local predicaments in Uganda and the challenges of making these concerns of utmost urgency in globally designed discourses around what it means to do artistic scholarship with communities in Africa.

Bringing together artivism and engaged scholarship

Artivism fuses art and activism in the struggle for social justice (artivists 4 life et al., 2013; Asante, 2008; Sandoval & Latorre, 2008). Artivists move between multiple perspectives, responding to injustices by committing to "unprecedented forms of language, to remaking their own kinds of social position utilizing all media at their disposal—whether it is narrative as weapon, riot as speech, looting as revolution" (Sandoval & Latorre, 2008, p. 77). It takes its point of departure in the everyday circumstances of modern/colonial existence—inadequate health services, entrenched unemployment, prostitution, and any other form of injustice. Artivists reflect critically, creatively and often collectively on such problems so that we can, in turn, act upon them to redirect both personal and collective futures. Because artivism only comes to be in the doing and this doing always begins in the everyday conditions we find ourselves in,

it advances an understanding of art not as subject or object, but *as event* (jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013). Reconnecting creative practices to collective action, artivism repoliticizes art to become a powerful social encounter rather than a mere cultural product or symbolic communication to be momentarily viewed or consumed (artivists 4 life et al., 2013).

For us co-authors artivism is taken up as an attitude, becoming the synergizing force that infuses all our activities and collaborations. Bringing artivism, as an embodied practice, into scholarship poses the conceptual challenge of how to honor an artistic and collaborative practice while speaking the text-dominated language of traditional academic discourse. In order to bring artivism into scholarship, as a collective working across epistemic boundaries, We/I adopt what Sandoval (2000) calls a differential consciousness, which allows "functioning within, yet beyond, the demands of dominant ideology" (p. 44). This lens requires an ongoing attentiveness to the broader context of global coloniality and the ways it shapes the intersecting realities of fellow artivists and collaborators from the various positions We/I occupy.

Artivism as aesthetic disobedience

The artivism practiced by *artivists 4 life* is guided by *decolonial options* through an explicit political commitment to resisting modernity/coloniality and imagining alternative options to contribute to a world where a pluriversity of ways of knowing and doing can co-exist (Mignolo, 2011a). *Artivists 4 life* projects are informed by the goal of *decolonial aesthetics*: they confront and traverse colonial divisions created and controlled by modernity in an effort to liberate sensing and sensibilities (Lockward et al., 2011; Mignolo, 2011a). In this way *artivists 4 life* are in solidarity with others artistic/creative thinkers/makers/doers around the world that are confronting the homogenizing current of global coloniality by challenging the modern art

system's self-referential claim as the definitive curator of what art is by producing art and art experiences that perpetuate the appropriation of differences. We/I are affirming our own transnational/mobile/multiple identities and joining other decolonial thinkers/doers in celebrating the diversity of creative traditions and their potential to open up artistic possibilities that de-link from modernity and its reliance on market incentives. Through our awareness that the idea of modern aesthetics, brought forth as a philosophical theory in the eighteenth century in Europe, concerns experiences and investigations that aim to rationalize what is beautiful, we engage in *aesthetic disobedience* (Mignolo, 2011a). Our creative acts and ideas move away from identification with the modern art market toward emphasis on identities by acknowledging how loci of enunciation shape any art encounter. In this way decolonial aesthetics emphasize *aesthesis*, or the pre-reflective awareness of sensation, closely related to perception (Lockward et al., 2011; Mignolo, 2011a).

Taken together our artivism responds to Mignolo's (2009; 2011a; 2011c) call to change the terms of academic conversation through acts of epistemic and aesthetic disobedience, our artivism performs a new politics for creative and collective re-existence. Our artivist/academic inter-actions work to mobilize and validate youth perspectives by bringing together artistic processes, community activation and engaged scholarship through a critical awareness of the workings of global coloniality and legitimate ideas for liberation from them.

Artivist Projects and Results

This section of the paper features the critical reflections and artistic works of *artivists 4 life* members through narratives that perform artivist subjectivities and sociabilities. These composites are drawn from written reflections, workshop minutes and archives of artworks and

photos in connection to two recent artivist projects. The first comprises the initial stages of a comic project where artivist subjectivities are re-made through the creation of graphic characters. This project corresponds with the goal of celebrating and disseminating various artivist teachings compiled over the collective's history. The second is a collaborative art project exploring Baganda proverbs through drama skits, image theatre and visual art/design. This project was pursued as an artivist response to perceived misrepresentations of Ugandan culture abroad, including the tendency for Ugandan youth to be regarded as passive sufferers in need of Western help.

Artivist Comic Project

Context of the intervention

Artivists 4 life routinely engage in participatory processes for identifying our most critical concerns[9]. Unemployment, drug abuse and sexual exploitation have been among the pressing issues addressed. Artivist Kakome describes this context of instability; "life has been very difficult for me ... Some of my good friends and who are good people have ended up being bad people in the community because they are doing wrong things to get money" (workshop notes, 24 July, 2012). Such high levels of youth unemployment have created a context of desperation and exploitation. As Nampanga describes, it is "one of the major problems facing the youth in the community and this has forced many especially the males to resort to stealing and other bad habits, females resort to carpet interviews[10] for jobs" (workshop notes, 24 July, 2012). As

[9] See Piece 1, "Youth Artivism in Uganda: Co-Creators of Our Own Becoming" for a detailed description of the *artivists 4 life* problem identification and response process.

[10] The "carpet interview is an activity practiced by some employers of the opposite sex especially male employers to female job seekers where they demand for sex in exchange with the job available" (Nampanga, feedback transcript, 3 October, 2012).

Nampanga warns, even though many young women may secure some capital through these practices, it comes "at the expense of their lives and dignity since many consequences result from that act … loss of dignity, HIV infection and other STDs" (workshop notes, 24 July, 2012).

Artivists 4 life have collectively responded to this context through a number of interventions including the creation of counter narratives in the form of visual messages and drama skits. Such messages point to tactics for resisting sexual and labor exploitation as well as drug abuse. Figure 4.1 is an example of one such message and Figure 4.2 is an image of artivists acting out the related scene.

Figure 4.1. Message developed to address sexual exploitation
English translation: Your body is not your capital. Protect yourself against HIV/AIDS.

Figure 4.2. Artivists acting out carpet interview scene

As Musaka explains, the "artivists 4 life project has recruited youths in the project to curb unemployment through perfecting or polishing youth talents like visual arts, dance and drama which has elevated the youths in Mukono" (personal communication, 24 July, 2012).

The "chokolo"[11] income-generating project is one such practical response to youth unemployment and is an alternative to joining the "sexual network". For Kisitu, the chokolo project has taught members "how to make earrings, how to make bowls and many other things that can help them to get money and personally I used that knowledge which I got from artivists 4 life to create my own jobs" (personal communication, 24 July, 2012). Learning to be creative, *artivists 4 life* are learning that "job creation is better than job seeking, hence people should learn to become entrepreneurs and those who are already owning their own businesses should keep it up, for example chokolo making" (Nampanga, feedback transcript 3 October 2012). Artivists are re-appropriating their creative and teamwork skills obtained through artistic processes and collaborative activities, effectively avoiding exploitation and positioning themselves as job

[11] Chokolo is a Luganda word for bottle-cap. *Artivists 4 life* have developed an independent income-generating project called, chokolo, whereby members make earrings and other jewelry products by upscaling bottle caps and other recycled materials.

creators. This is true of Ssenkindu who writes; “my being in the artivist 4 life project has enabled me to explore so many skills of creativity, inter-personal skills and has widened my future prospects” (newsletter article, 18 August, 2011).

Re-purposing comics

The creation of stories about composite artivist characters emerged out of a shared desire to document and express some of the lessons learned by artivist members in order to educate fellow youths also struggling to overcome hardships. The medium of comics was selected and appropriated for the following reasons: members of the collective expressed interest in the medium because it suitable for communication to fellow youths; one member already had skills in the medium and a willingness to guide others while another member expressed interest in facilitating the development of the writing; and finally, because the medium lends itself well to collaboration and the mixing together of forms of enunciation (drawing, drama and creative writing).

Co-creation process

Project members began by conceiving of a group of artivist personas based on a *combination* of actual personalities, lived experiences and ideas of different members of *artivists 4 life*. Although all members contributed ideas, artivist Obol took the lead in illustrating the composite characters. Through a myriad of enunciatory forms these change-agents perform emerging subjectivities and sociabilities characteristic of the *artivists 4 life* collective. The cases of two characters—Patience and Innocent—are discussed in the section that follows. Epitomizing “artistic agency as distributed rather than authorial” (Preziosi & Farago, 2012, p.15) these characters become

catalysts for embodying a new relational ethics. The artivist characters role-play through different acts of aesthetic and epistemic disobedience (Lockward et al., 2011; Mignolo, 2011a).

The story of Patience

> Job searching needs a lot of patience since patience pains but pays. (Nampanga, feedback transcript, 3 October, 2012)

Figure 4.3. Sketches for artivist comic chapter about Patience

Well educated but struggling to find a job, Patience (Figure 4.3) joins *artivists 4 life* in 2011. Taking part in educational workshops about HIV/AIDS and learning various artistic skills including drama and craft-making she gains confidence as well as an increased awareness about the dangers of cross-generational sex[12] and the sexual network[13]. She also demonstrates an

[12]Cross-generational sex is a term used frequently in Uganda to describe sexual relationships among partners with a wide age difference. Such relationships are often characterized by the exchange of gifts or money for sex, or even sex for grades on campus. In recent years there have been a large number of campaigns targeting young University students of the dangers of cross-generational-sex such as acquiring or spreading the HIV virus.

[13]The sexual network describes sexual practices of being sexually active with more than one person or with someone who has at least one other sexual partner. The concept is used primarily to warn against sexual practices that put people at increased risk of acquiring or spreading the HIV virus.

eagerness to learn new skill sets in order to find work, realizing that "it is not good to be too proud of having higher education levels so as not to undermine many other jobs like chokolo business" (Nampanga, feedback transcript, 3 October, 2012). Around this same time one of her girlfriends sets her up with an interview for a job in marketing. To her disappointment, she is offered a job in exchange for sex. Patience refuses the "carpet interview", narrowly escaping threats of violence by the business owner. She shares her story with *artivists 4 life* at the following workshop and together the group discusses coping strategies with her. With the support of her peers, Patience decides to take a break from job searching and focuses her efforts on developing her own business by making and selling crafts including paper bowls and bottle-top earrings (chokolo). This leads to the development of a new drama skit called "the carpet interview" whereby the lead character takes on Patience's story, resisting sexual exploitation and alerting others to such dangers while opting to take on small creative jobs "instead of waiting for my dream job and doing nothing for a living" (Nampanga, personal communication, 24 July 2012).

The context of sexual exploitation, in the form of cross-generational sex, the sexual network, and the carpet interview, exemplifies the Fanonian (1952/1967) understanding that within the colonial context ordinary life is over-determined by the political to such an extent that abnormal turns normal. For Maldonado-Torres (2008) "one of the distinctive features of this reality is that dehumanization reaches stages in which feelings of disrespect gradually become either muted or transformed into desires for identification or participation with the dominant culture" (p. 127). Identification in this context involves pressures to conform to patterns of social behavior including ways of dressing, owning a "cool" phone and generally associating with those in positions of power. Giving into various forms of sexual exploitation becomes a trade off for

entry into the esteemed dominant culture. Patience's critical resistance to the normalization of sexual exploitation is an indication of her agency. Not only concerned for her own wellbeing, she recognizes the need to extend her teachings to others in her community. For Patience, "people have to act as role models to others … job creation is one of the major ways of how to avoid being abused by such employers" (Nampanga, feedback transcript, 3 October, 2012). Taking on responsibility as a proactive agent of communal change, Patience's story is one of overcoming both personal and collective circumstances while setting an example for her peers.

Figure 4.4. Sketches for artivist comic chapter about Innocent

Innocent: From identification with the norm to acting otherwise

When Innocent (Figure 4.4) joined *artivists 4 life* in 2011, he was known among his peers as a heavy drinker and "socializer". He went by the name "Senator", the name of a local beer. Like many of his fellows, Innocent fell victim to the systemic exclusion of young people from the societal structure, resorting to the abuse of alcohol and other substances. As noted by Nampanga

> drug abuse is a major issue among the jobless people especially the youths since due to unemployment, they end up being idle in most cases and get into peer groups … . This issue forces many to lose self control and resort to raping, theft and alcoholism. (personal communication, 24 July 2012)

Drug abuse in Uganda keeps youth in general in an ongoing trap, judged by their communities as suspicious, violent or otherwise problematic. This behavior is consistent with Fanon's (1963/68) diagnosis of the colonial situation. Bearing the weight of societal structure that persistently denies one's humanity, the colonial subject engages in violent acts to purge one's self, such as those described by Nampanga. Here aggression is directed against one's own countrymen since the colonized can't yet confront the colonizer. The first step toward confronting such oppression is to understand the colonial context and thus shift blame away from one's self to the imposition of colonial societal control. In the context of Innocent's contemporary struggle, what we are observing is movement away from violence for violence's sake toward *absolute violence* (1963/68). *Artivists 4 life* have responded to the need for alternative spaces where youth are understood as important contributors to society capable of intervening in circumstances toward radical change. Through opportunities to engage through creative activities Innocent discovered some of his own hidden talents including acting and teamwork, earning the respect and recognition of his peers. While managing to overcome his old lifestyle Innocent was elected as the leader of the *artivists 4 life* branch in Mukono, reappropriating his "socializer" identity to a greater purpose. A few months later, when his branch was struggling with internal challenges including bullying and favoritism he led the group through a meeting to resolve gender-based conflicts, ultimately helping to bring the group closer together. In this space Innocent found greater purpose for his pent up angst, moving toward decolonization by confronting the actual

structures of re-organized colonialism by re-creating himself.

Toward reciprocal recognitions

For Innocent, his agency is being revealed through his work. Through purposeful engagement within a community his ability to give to others is being restored. Supported and supportive, Innocent is no longer trapped by an imposed identity of "idle" or "troublesome". Like other artivists he is becoming a well-respected leader in his community. He is embodying the new subjectivity Fanon called for, out of which genuine acts of giving and receiving begin to unfold. He is struggling for a world of "reciprocal recognitions" (1953/1967, p. 218)

For Maldonado-Torres (2007), drawing on the work of Fanon, decolonization must, at the very least, aspire to recreate a context where subordinated subjects can take part in a society grounded in the "restoration of the logic of the gift" (p. 260). The personal transformations of Innocent and Patience are epitomized by their deepening desire and ability to extend their teachings to other artivist members as well as the community at large. These artivist characters, like artivists themselves, are becoming active and responsible members of their communities by exemplifying new subjectivities capable of positive and transformative re-existence. With each movement and personal transition they are imagining moving ahead again with another. Their shared compassion for the collective and their community denaturalizes modern constructions of individualism creating new sociabilities where the emphasis is on the interests of the communal and a shared spirit of receptive generosity.

In this way even a minute step ahead can become enough not only to recognize their own mobility but to become more attentive to the struggle of another. Desire for recognition by the

dominant patriarchal and colonial system—where one is persistently denied his/her place—begins to collapse. Through a subversion of colonial logic, this desire breaks down and the subject turns to her fellow in a radical gesture of love. Through renewed acts of solidarity and compassion this emerging artivist subjectivity becomes consistently receptive to the cries of another. In this paradoxical space, identity affirmation is suspended and a loving subjectivity emerges displaced and attuned to another worse off than one's self. Here, akin to Fanon's (1953/1967; 1963/1968) conception of a new humanity, space is created for "ethico-political movement from slave to slave" (Maldonado-Torres, 2008, p. 152)—or from outcast to outcast.

Baganda Proverb Project

Two main factors lead to the development of this intervention. First, following the success of income generating projects involving the creation and sales of batik artworks as well as chokolo jewelry products, a number of members expressed concern that not all members were involved in visual arts projects, suggesting that those with new skills should share them, echoing the African proverb and *artivists 4 life* credo "each one teach one". The other factor was a growing concern among *artivists 4 life* members about the way Ugandans are perceived abroad. Project members have taken part in a number of inter-cultural collaborations including co-presentations (via video-conferencing) at various academic conferences and educational/cultural exchanges with undergraduate students at the University of Alberta. Through artivist pedagogy these inter-actions emphasized community-engaged learning as well as the sharing of artworks and creative processes across exchanging groups. Out of these exchanges a prevalent theme arose: artivists were finding that their Canadian counterparts were consistently making incorrect assumptions about Ugandan youth, their country and African societies at large. For example, artivists observed that many Canadians have very limited knowledge about Ugandan society and that the

perceptions they do have are garnered from popular Western media including social media, such as narratives about warlord Joseph Kony via the poplar online Kony 2012 video and campaign, reports about Uganda's reputed homosexuality bill and for some, vague impressions of Idi Amin's genocidal regime. A sentiment of frustration over (mis)representations or one-sided stories of Ugandan society is expressed by artivist Obol:

> Most people don't know Uganda exists and those who know about it, know about Idi Amin, and Kony 2012, that movie I didn't like. It's a sad situation because if you actually come on ground you see that there is so much peace. Everyone out there thinks we are in a war zone. Kony left about 5 years ago. Idi Amin is long gone yet people still have these things stuck in their heads. I blame the media for that—how we are represented. (feedback transcript, 15 February 2013)

In response to such concerns members agreed to create artworks that celebrate and showcase Ugandan culture as counter-narratives to the messages and discourses popularized by Western media that accentuate Uganda's problems of poverty, disease and political violence among others, while ignoring positive aspects of the culture. Members followed our established process for message development (artivists 4 life et al., 2013) to create the artworks.

Collaborative process exploring proverbs

The first phase of the project was facilitated during three regularly scheduled weekly workshops by Nalubowa, a co-founding *artivists 4 life* member and drama facilitator. A small budget from the sales of artivist products was set aside for two supplementary workshops, which included transport refunds and art supplies for the visual art component of the project. Each of the 15 participating members was asked to contribute two of their favorite proverbs. With Nalubowa's guidance, members identified and discussed the meaning and significance of about 30 Baganda

proverbs. Using consensus-making processes the group then selected 12 proverbs to further explore through drama exercises and later visual artworks. Members translated these proverbs to English.

Figure 4.5. Image theatre for the proverb Okalya dda kadda dda, translated by artivists as what goes around comes around

Artivists worked in small groups to develop and present skits to each other. These activities included an image theatre component (creation of still images using bodies). An example of this process is shown in Figure 4.5. This process encourages the collaborative expression of ideas through the creation of a narrative and then challenges collaborators to synthesize the main message into one image. Feedback was shared to improve each narrative and image until all members were satisfied, often requiring multiple changes and enhancements to best communicate the meanings of the proverbs. Final image theatre pieces were then photographed to later guide the drawings to be made in the next phase of the project.

Figure 4.6. Artivist members creating proverb artworks

Artivist Obol, a co-founding member and illustrator, facilitated the comic workshops, guiding fellow members to create images and incorporate text. Members can be seen at work in Figure 4.6. Obol's facilitation supported fellow members to express their visualizations while learning or improving the basic skills necessary to do so, such as mixing colors and drawing simple figures. Emphasis was less on achieving technical perfection, or following a pre-determined aesthetic, and more about co-creating visual messages that communicate a vernacular interpretation of each proverb, as confirmed by the collective as a whole.

Figure 4.7. Baganda proverb: Agali awamu gegaluma ennyama

Figure 4.7 shows an artwork with a proverb translated by artivists as 2 heads are better than 1. The piece reflects the artivist commitment to collaboration and collective thinking as a means of working toward communal futures that de-link from the forces of modernity that force Ugandan youth to identify with *everything Western*. Indeed it is the working together in the process of artistic discovery that becomes the synergizing force for the creation of new decolonial sociabilities through the fostering of interculturality (Lockward et al., 2011). In this sense emphasis shifts away from outcomes such as *art that sells,* or identification among modernity's acclaimed (individual) art geniuses.

In a feedback session (feedback transcript, 3 October, 2012), members expressed that the overall impact of the project was positive, and in some ways "unexpected". Members acquired various technical skills, yet importantly, they expressed renewed feelings of pride and belonging to their cultures. This involved the recognition of ways that cultural expressions are embedded in everyday acts, and as such, are often overlooked. The project challenged members to really think about their own oral histories and what these proverbs can teach. As Nalubowa explained: "It is really our responsibility to change perceptions about our culture and our communities, but first we have to know what our culture really is" (personal communication, 24 July, 2012). As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013b) notes, "the most difficult challenge for Africans has been how to re-imagine themselves outside the thinking imposed by the Euro-American imagination and representation of Africans" (p. 39). This project opened up a trajectory for such re-imagining of cultural identity through the opportunity to create counter-narratives that support us to "unlearn our colonial beliefs and tendencies" (Conference presentation, Nalubowa, May 30, 2014). Indeed, this kind of celebration of local language goes against common practices among Ugandan youth, where:

> [E]verything Western is superior or "cool" and everything that is not is inferior or "uncool". … Try hanging around youths these days, if you don't speak English, you are "so local". (Nalubowa, May 30, 2014)

Another significant lesson learned was how members themselves are indeed well positioned to identify and respond to important questions about our/their identities, at home and abroad. With the understanding that all art is political, creative inquiry, in the form of problem identification and response, can work to intervene in colonial conditions through pedagogical acts that confront dominant culture by imagining liberation from it (Maldonado-Torres, 2008). However small, this project, initiated by Ugandan youth themselves, served as a counterpoise for re-thinking art and aesthetics as action with the potential of decolonizing self and society by getting to the roots causes of contemporary problems, which lie in the colonial past. By questioning relations between Uganda and the West artivists were able to situate their local culture in a global context by thinking critically about their own positions there within (Falola, 2005).

Figure 4.8. Baganda proverb: Atabyetise, tamanya buzito bwabyo

Figure 4.8 is an example of one of the proverb artworks. Translated by artivists as he who is not carrying never knows the weight, this piece speaks to the collective's intention to (re)educate their foreign counterparts and remind themselves about the African condition and its global history. It should be noted that although this project arose as a response to "foreign" perceptions of Ugandan culture as variously problem-laden and lacking, the teaching that the proverb offers can not only serve to inform relations between Ugandans and Canadians, or Africans and the Westerners. It can be extended as a response to colonial hierarchies in general that position certain subjectivities to carry the weight of another, or, the kind of colonizing behavior that supports indifference regarding another human's suffering. Indeed, this artwork responds to the hegemonic attitude that guides and instructs colonial relations in its own modern image by refusing to bow to the logic of the modernity and its colonial underside (Mignolo, 2011a).

Conclusion

Artivism as a multi-lingual and experimental "writing" process has been used to respond to normalizing and intellectually colonizing tendencies of standard academic frameworks to disseminate and represent knowledge through modernity's image, self-defined and self-professed. Through the reconnection of creative practices to collective action a new politics of knowing was modeled as emphasis shifted from the known to the knower. The way ideas were enunciated, and who was positioned to enunciate them, took on preferential significance in order to shift power. The artivist projects enacted and the circumstances that informed them were brought together to re-live some of the ways that *artivists 4 life* are taking steps toward a vision of liberation as they join other de-colonial thinkers/doers in taking the "de-colonial turn" which "includes the definitive entry of enslaved and colonized subjectivities into the realm of thought at previously unknown institutional levels" (Maldonado-Torres, 2008, p. 8). Thus, out of the

collective and creative synergy that this experimental writing process allowed for, an *artivists 4 life* collective consciousness emerged as decolonial aesthetics and aesthesis took form.

This approach to critical/collective art-making embodied a commitment to resisting the seductive tendency to identify with dominant conceptions of what art should be or do in order break free from the kind of cultural mimicry the reincarnation of colonialism, or Western capitalism imposes. Instead the art encounter was re-imagined as an inter-active imaginary for reclaiming both personal and collective agency from our specific loci of struggle.

In *Black Skin White Masks* (1952/1967) Fanon articulates a vision for decolonization through his understanding that freedom can not be given, only achieved by dismantling colonialism. This understanding can be extended to support our understanding of how new subjectivities must be created in order to defeat colonialism's contemporary re-organization.

For Fanon, movement toward decolonization means:

> *Yes* to life. *Yes* to love. *Yes* to generosity.
> But man is also a *no*. *No* to scorn of man. *No* to the degradation of man.
> *No* to exploitation of man. *No* to the butchery of what is most human in man: freedom.
> (1952/1967, p. 222, italics are Fanon's)

Though a kind of negation that is fueled by desire for a better world *artivists 4 life* are echoing Fanon's vision and Asante's re-affirmation of it by coming together through the kind of creative and collective inter-action that encourages the *making of love in wartime.*

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Phenomenological Passports: Youth and Experiences of Place, Mobility and Globalization

Leslie Robinson, Cathy Mashakalugo, Andrew Jackson Obol and Maria-Carolina Cambre

Culture, they say, is a two-way street.

—Langston Hughes, 2004

The time is out of joint.

—Hamlet (I v189)

Preamble

It was constructed to be, among other things, a gateway: A very special gateway for an event, an experience, one of a series of exhibitions, or "World's Fairs" as they came to be known, which were later to be understood as milestones of global integration (Young, 2008) claiming to "put the world—or at least what its organizers deemed the most important parts of it—on display" (p. 342). At a time of intense European empire building, and promising the world (whose world?) to visitors, the 1889 Paris Exhibition "attracted 28–30 million visitors and an average of 175,000 per day" (Young, 2008, p. 341). At the foot of the iron latticed gateway, visitors were met with France's exuberant and detailed display of recent acquisitions, rather colonies, "… the Algerian and Tunisian pavilions, complete with dome and minaret; the Vietnamese pavilions of Annam and Tonkin; and the Angkor Pagoda for Cambodia, modeled on the recently excavated ruins of Angkor Wat" (p. 348) complete with reconstructed "primitive dwellings" (p. 350) from Asia, Africa and early Europe (Young, 2008). Simulations of distant lands and cultures, complete with imported inhabitants instructed to perform dances or daily "routines," were expressed as a panorama of readily viewable exhibits compressing time and space and "altering the terms of contact between Western and non-Western cultures" (Young, 2008, p. 354).

Entry to this bustling fair signalling progress and industry, optimism and anxiety, grandeur and folly, was accessed by way of the new Tower of Babel (Conley, 2010). Yet this very marker, to the surprise of Exhibition organizers who had endured it being ridiculed as a "useless and monstrous blot on the skyline" (Conley, 2010, p. 765), was visited by nearly 2 million people during the fair. Somehow it quickly accrued meanings as the symbol of "modernity, of communication, of science or of the nineteenth century, rocket, stem, derrick, phallus, lightning rod or insect, confronting the great itineraries of our dreams" (Barthes, 1997, p. 1).

The poet Huidobro was equally enthralled and asked whether there is anyone who has not heard its song, famously describing it as the "Guitare du ciel" (sky's guitar) (Conley, 2010, p. 770). For Spanish Dadaist Guillermo de Torre it was a station on the celestial route of an interplanetary railroad (Conley, 2010). A physiological study done the year it was built showed that "hearts beat faster there" (Harriss, 2009, p. 64). At its debut this 106-story tower of riveted girders became the world's tallest structure and at the same time the subject of so many and varied representations whether visual or verbal that they defied cataloguing (Conley, 2010). Beyond its transmission, within a decade the tower quickly became a transmitter with its wireless signal extending to Moscow, Madrid, New York, and Prague, transgressing "geographic, national, and linguistic boundaries" (Conley, 2010, p. 765-6). And as Conley (2010) astutely observes, it calls people to it, it is "absorbent" and at the same time "projective," travelling via visual reproduction, circulation, and the conditions of an emergent global consumer culture. By now you may have an image of the iconic monument we are referring to in your minds eye. Do we need to name it?

Celebrated by international artists, for Roland Barthes (1997) it is the first "obligatory monument; it is a Gateway, it marks the transition to a knowledge" (p. 7). But what conditions must exist for visitors to feel obliged to make their way to it? What kind of knowledge is promised, proscribed or authorized? Where does it take viewers and what is it that this tower marks? Barthes maintains there is nothing, a "zero degree" and empty monument, "there is nothing to see inside the tower" (p. 4). He wonders "why then do we visit?" (p. 4).

And "we" do visit. Crowds continue to flock with about 7 million visits per year making it the most visited and most photographed monument worldwide (Harriss, 2009). But the question must be asked: is it in fact, as Barthes (1997) claims, "present to the entire world?" Is it part of

"the universal language of travel?" (p. 1). Does it actually attract meaning "the way a lightning rod attracts thunderbolts," (p. 2) for everyone? American writer Joseph Harriss (2009) recalls his own "epiphany" occurring one evening as he strolled down the street not far from his apartment. He found himself below the tower and glanced up. He writes,

> Above me the gigantic, intricate tracery of crisscrossing girders soared more majestically than the columns and vaults of any Gothic cathedral. I was held, fascinated—awestruck is not too strong a word. (p. 64)

Harriss feels himself *held*, the size and complexity of the structure itself awe him exerting some sort of fixating spell. And yet what is the dream or myth in which he participates that makes the experience take on an enchanted quality? Is he not already one of those whom this tower was meant to interpellate? Is he not already positioned to pass through the Gateway and transition to "a knowledge?" Perhaps prior knowledge of the tower and its haunting fame, gained through print, televisual and electronic media, sets the stage for experiences such as this one.

Introduction

We had travelled to Paris for a cultural studies conference. Three of us travelled directly from Uganda, and the fourth from Canada.

> I think it was our first evening … Mashaka and I decided to head out to look for something to eat. It was late but our perception of time was a bit off since there was still so much light and we had some jetlag. It was July yet Mashaka was wearing a puffy black jacket that looked better suited for early winter. I recall passing by a touristy shop and Mashaka pointing energetically … "what is this funny thing I keep seeing everywhere?"

Noticing the never-ending reproductions Mashakalugo was compelled to ask, "what is this funny thing?" Given its illustrious history and its role in the Western imaginary, many may be unprepared for the possibility of arriving at this monument or images of it without any predetermined ideas. It may be the case that such an incident indicates that what is meant when the monument is described as a global icon is not, in fact, the entire world. So what "world" is implied? We might wonder what words like global, worldwide, globality and globalization *mean* when they are used descriptively or in terms of lived experiences. How might someone without preconceived notions of the tower experience it? Javanese dancers were presented as part of the "viewed" world to the "viewing" world in 1889, which was clearly an-other one, performing as part of the Paris Exhibition during the tower's inauguration. What might *they* have made of Eiffel's engineering marvel?

Do our understandings of globalization include assumptions about how such iconic monuments should be experienced by travellers? What is the relationship between a certain kind of knowledge and notions of globalization? Mashakalugo's question was met with disbelief:

> I stopped walking in that moment. Could she possibly not recognize this iconic structure? Didn't she know Paris was the city of love? "Mash, are you serious? That's the Eiffel tower!" I said, immediately recognizing a tone of amazement in my voice. I regretted what I said and the way I said it.

Some have never seen the Eiffel tower and many do not know it exists. Yet, it feels like everyone is supposed to know that it is in Paris, the city of love, that it is famous and iconic, but the news of this must-see monument is not, as Barthes would have it "present to the entire world" after all. Leslie regrets her reaction, but how many of us assume that knowing something about this monument is "common" information and that we must *all* know that the Eiffel tower is a symbol

of Paris and of France. In certain spaces, not knowing this is often simply seen as ignorance. In other words, it is required knowledge. But what geographical knowledge is deemed indispensible and for whom?

Like many in the Westernized world, Leslie's knowledge of the tower has been absorbed vicariously over time through media representations of various kinds. It was her first visit too, but for her, there was the presence of a knowing-how-to-see the tower. Access to this knowledge is unequal, it is simply not available to all, but assumed to be essential on some level.

Leslie muses:

> As we continued walking my mind went back to Uganda as I was trying to compare my own experiences to what I thought Mash might be experiencing. I pictured Gaddafi's mosque, the Kasubi Tombs that recently burned down, both of which I have seen from afar but neither of which I have actually visited. … Images of Idi Amin and Joseph Kony followed. I regretted conjuring up such negative images of Uganda, the country I have chosen as my second home.

And Obol reflects:

> I am saddened that when Leslie was thinking of Ugandan icons that the first things that came were Idi Amin and Joseph Kony. In Paris, I felt that most people didn't know Uganda exists and those who do, know about Idi Amin and "Kony 2012", that movie I didn't like. Everyone out there seems to think we are in a war zone and it's a sad situation because if you actually come on ground you see that there is so much peace. I blame the media for how we are represented. Or maybe I should blame it on the government for not doing enough to clean up the country's image. Uganda is a peaceful place, a nice place to stay. Its good that Leslie calls it her second home, its very hospitable here.

The images presenting themselves to Leslie's mind involve places/people some might consider famous but that she had never encountered. On some level they are stereotypes or clichés. The reality may be that the significant places/people Leslie is actually reaching for are unknown because they are somehow deemed unimportant. Obol "blames the media" for this unfair and unequal communication, resisting the presentation of Uganda as a "war zone." He also feels "most people" don't know Uganda exists. Who might most people be for him here? On whose terms are so-called iconic events/things created and how is access to understanding, or even knowing of the existence of what is understood by mainstream Western media to be globally significant, permitted or denied? Despite visual and verbal representations of the Eiffel tower beyond number and always increasing exponentially through ceaseless processes of reproduction, circulation and consumption, and it's pre-eminent fame as something so globally recognizable that it can be used as a cipher, this is not exactly the case. The experience of the monument is in this case a rupture with the known rather than a progression in some kind of relational transaction. What can we learn then, through our experiences about globalization? In what follows we will explore experiences that can be said to fall under the rubric of globalizing forces that, like the spellbinding force of the Eiffel tower, draw people into their rhythms and logics. We critically ask in whose image/interests do stories of globalization function and serve? What is at stake, and who is forgotten, in projecting globalization as a universal and universalizing phenomenon?

Why Phenomenology?

Hermeneutic phenomenological reflection orients both research and researchers to the components of both descriptive and interpretive perceptions of a lived experience. In other words, it is about how people go about understanding the world in which they live (Gadamer,

1998; van Manen, 1997). The process involves investigating the experience as lived in the lifeworld, allowing essential themes to emerge, while writing and rewriting to feel out the essence of what is often overlooked, maintaining a strong relation to the phenomenon and repeatedly stepping away to examine how the parts inform the overall experience. This approach demonstrates a will not to explicate but rather to describe, in the spirit of a commitment to the nature of lived experience (van Manen, 1997). The four existentials of spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality are used because they are fundamental structures of the lifeworld and are grounded in the way that all human experience occurs (van Manen, 1997).

There are many schools of thought in phenomenology, or "accents" (Lyotard, 1991) and many ways to write phenomenologically, but one thing on which it is generally agreed is that it is not a social science method or technique, rather it is a way of being/seeing the world. Jean-François Lyotard (1991) does not mince words regarding the shortcomings of the social sciences: "Given the objective experimental methods, modeled after physics, that are used by psychology, sociology, etc., are these fields not radically inadequate? Will it not prove necessary to at least begin by making clear the diverse modes according to which consciousness is "interwoven with the world?" (p. 34). Many scholars have attempted to systematically examine human experience through phenomenology, and there is no agreement on what in the end phenomenology actually is. In *Phenomenology*, Lyotard (1991) wrote that it is "a step in 'European' thought and has understood itself as such, as Husserl showed in the *Crisis*." And that, "there are presently *many* phenomenologists, and since its meaning is still in process, it is unfinished precisely because it is historical. Despite the different 'accents'... there remains a common phenomenological 'style'" (p. 34). As Gayle L. Ormiston (1991) notes in her foreword, Lyotard shows that for phenomenology, analysis is always beginning and never finished, "Lyotard's phenomenological

analysis demonstrates the extent to which phenomenology always and already has been involved in seeking radically new beginnings" (p. 2).

So why phenomenology?

The term signifies a study of "phenomena," that is to say of *that* which appears to consciousness, *that* which is "given" … In the place of the traditional consciousness which "digests", or at least ingests, the external world ... Phenomenology reveals a consciousness which "bursts outward" (Sartre)—*a consciousness in sum, which is nothing if not a relation to the world*" (in Orniston, 1991, p. 7). In this approach, phenomenological meaning is never conclusive: truths and essences are profiled, but never quite fully discernable. The phenomenological researcher does seek decisive ends, but works to open up to the phenomenon and the surprises it reveals (p. 8). Thus engaging in this process means that "with every thinking there is a rethinking, a re-collecting that modifies the parameters of the debate … by the very fact that the issues or the contentious points have been (and will have been) re-contextualized, recited, and recalled for a particular purpose … [with the recognition that] every reconstruction ... involves a "rupture in the order of things" (p. 9).

As we approach experiences of globalization by reengaging with particular moments before, during and after a trip to Paris, essences of experience emerge and in turn, trigger our reflections on the context of asymmetrical globalization. We operate from the understanding that, as Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, "the phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears" (p. 28).

The lived experiences described herein—all in relation to a shared yet divergent set of experiences in Paris—are guided by the Dutch phenomenological school of thought represented most prominently in Canada by the work of Max van Manen. We also draw on *Africana phenomenology* (Henry, 2006), particularly drawing inspiration from Frantz Fanon and W.E.B. DuBois' works, both explicitly poetic and anti-colonial.

Our processual and emergent approach allows us to engage in phenomenological sense-making from "a comparative cultural perspective" (Henry, 2006, p. 1). Exploring non-Western/marginal experiences, we work toward de-linking from the Western universal claim to reason and its embeddedness in European culture. In so doing we "do not attempt to subsume culturally distinct philosophies under the categories of another" (Henry, 2006, p. 21), accepting incongruities and contradictions in sense-making as necessary and unavoidable. Rather, as students/learners we aim to glean insights that respond to Paget Henry's (2006) call to invent new hybrid approaches to comparative phenomenological analysis, which "seek to create bridges, partial points or areas of complementary convergence, meta-philosophical discourses and communicative groups between … culturally distinct philosophies" (pp. 21–22).

Thus, we four authors work in the spirit of de-colonizing our sense-making through a commitment to inter-cultural and inter-epistemic writing processes that are both creative and collaborative. Our work draws from and is shaped by our intersecting experiences in and around a trip to Paris as a crystallizing event. As co-authors—two Ugandans, one Canadian and one Argentine immigrant to Canada—we work to open up new expressive potentials though phenomenological explorations and analysis where "youth" co-author a collaborative meaning-making process. Mashakalugo and Obol, both in their mid-twenties, contribute as epistemic partners in knowledge-making and creative processes (Papastergiadis, 2011). We note that, in the

Ugandan context, young people up to and even beyond thirty are considered youth. Mashakalugo is a Ugandan citizen of Rwandese and Tanzanian origin. A volunteer youth centre coordinator and HIV/AIDS counsellor and member of numerous youth groups, she is also a first year University student. Mashakalugo describes her social position as falling into the lower class. Obol, from Northern Uganda's Lira District, has spent most of his life residing and schooling in the country's Kampala capital. With a degree in industrial, fine art and design from Makerere University, majoring in illustration, he works as a freelance illustrator. Obol describes his social position as lower-middle class. Carolina and Leslie, both over thirty, participate in the Western institutional academy as students and researchers and reside primarily in Canada. The lived experiences of the four travellers involved in the research represent their expertise, while all four are also artists and activists.

Following Fanon, our collaborative partnership is shaped by an ethical commitment to those whose existence is subordinated and systemically excluded from traditional academic discourse in general. Philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008) tells us that vision for liberation takes its point of departure in the "preferential option for the damnés" (pp. 158–159) where subjectivities otherwise institutionally condemned can contribute critically to the new humanity Fanon called for. Thus, our collective stance has the de-colonial aim of "making visible the invisible" through lived experience descriptions that manifest "the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility in light of a large stock of ideas that must necessarily include the critical reflections of the 'invisible' people themselves" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 262). In this way we work to improvise a new relational ethics for knowledge generation and sharing. In particular, Ugandan youth such as Obol and Mashakalugo can be seen as being out of their *proper place* in any conventional academic milieu and may then be well placed to make

subversive entries into knowledge dissemination—at the inter-play between creative, spontaneous and poetic expression and (Western) scholarship.

Our Phenomenological Process

All four authors contributed lived experience descriptions as we re-collected our memories of the trip to Paris six months later. We focused on preparation, critical travel moments, and the return. Following our shared commitment to art/artivism[1] we took an *any medium necessary* (Asante, 2008) approach including poetry, drawing, journaling, and oral recordings. The process involved continuous reworking of reflections and stories with an emphasis on encouraging deep reflection and wondering and sitting with the stories. While our roles varied in terms of recording, transcribing and translating our experiences, the ordering and stringing together of pieces was undertaken by the Canada-based travellers with checking and approval from the Ugandan travellers. This means that one of the limitations of this piece is that the words written by those of us outside the discourses of the Western academy, have had a measure of translation in response to an academic paradigm where in order for these words to be taken seriously they need to be framed and "articulated, always, in relation to European categories of thought, whether conservative or progressive, whether from the Right of from the Left" (Mignolo, 2011a, p. 240). The challenge of honouring multiple modes of enunciation while being conscious of what might be *permissible* in academic writing comes through in Leslie's journal:

> … as I began to read Mashaka's words I recognized the need to settle myself and slow down my pace: "world of opposites", "psychological torture" and "witch traitors" drew

[1] Artivism is embodied art that acts in the struggle against all forms of oppression and is epitomized by all artist/activists working at the interstices of creative expression, social/political change and self/community empowerment (Asante, 2008; Sandoval & Latorre, 2008).

> me in, … It became clear to me that I would need more time to grapple with words that struck me as coming from a deep and mysterious place. As an only partial sense of her writing impressed upon me I felt a tinge of worry invade my burgeoning and distracted sense of intrigue. I thought her writing was probably too cryptic, too creative, too random, too analytical … I folded the papers up neatly and placed them in my laptop case, for a later time and place where I could sit with them and see what to do.

Drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty, Max van Manen (1997) understands every expression of meaning as always already marked by suppositions. We thus constantly questioned these beginning suppositions marking the collaborative process. As students of phenomenology, working at times side-by-side in either Uganda or Canada and other times independently across time zones and through cyber space, our enunciation and translation work was necessarily iterative and emergent. We continuously wondered how certain constraints and liberties around time, technology and space—different for each of us—impacted our inter-cultural inter-epistemic collaboration. We were conscious that our very collaboration was in itself an expression of globalized communication and asked how globalizing forces were enhancing or inhibiting our goal of equitizing power relations. As we grappled with ambiguities, we maintained an ongoing effort to gain traction in negotiating our asymmetrical relations through reciprocity; with artistic/poetic and youthful enunciation transforming our scholarship while our scholarship informed the artistic and youthful.

Space/time/body/relation

If we accept Giddens' (1991) understanding that the processes of globalization concern the "interlacing of social events and social relationships 'at distance' with local contextualities" (p. 21), where does it leave us, with regards to the "*specific experience* of globalization?" (Tomlinson, 1994, p. 150). Giddens (1991) asserts that "the transformations of place, and the

intrusion of distance into local activities, combined with the centrality of mediated experience, … radically change what 'the world' actually is … Although everyone lives a local life, phenomenal worlds for the most part are truly global" (p. 187). Giddens' theory of *time-space distanciation* explains how he sees the transformation of place and time in modernity. Once time was measured with clocks, rather than with context specific markers like the altitude of the sun in the sky, or the length of one's shadow. The lifting of time out of space set the stage for the "globalizing tendencies of modernity" (Tomlinson, 1994, p. 151). While global capitalist markets may shape the economic flows in local neighbourhoods, then everyday experiences are "*structured* by forces which are, ultimately global … does this imply that our phenomenal worlds are global?" (Tomlinson, 1994, p. 151).

Giddens' formulation of the concept of 'mediation' as something that also distances, and his understanding that all experience is mediated, at least through language, are linked by Tomlinson to the arguments Giddens makes regarding global experiences.

To draw us closer to the (im)possibility of global words we derived a set of indigenous themes from the phenomenological accounts and our consequent reflection upon them. Experiences of standardized asymmetrical travel, (mis)represented and (mis)placed identities, and pain and betrayal prompted our further exploration orienting ourselves around the salient literature on youth and globalization.

Asymmetry and standardization paradox

Obol posits:

> Take the dilemma of whether to go slow or fast: either the developing countries who move a bit slow should catch up, or the developed countries should slow down for the

> rest to catch up, could it ever come to that? If globalization is to work in this colonial system would that mean that there must always be a certain order from the top to the lowest?

At the same time Carolina feels pressure around her behaviours in the Metro, her navigation of the Metro system succeeds:

> Although I had used the Metro in Paris before, it still seemed like a maze with all its connections and long winding passageways between different trains where the advertisements kept repeating themselves. I found myself learning where to look for signs of which way to go and practicing my instructions for how to get from one place to the next. I felt hyper aware of my movements. In my small notebook, I recorded the exact moves to make … "take the mustard line 10 in the direction of Pont de St-Cloud at Cluny la Sorbonne for one stop to Odeon and transfer to the reddish purple line towards Port d'Orleans and get off at the last stop." All the details of direction and colour were necessary so that I could walk confidently.

Obol approached it differently:

> Upon entering the metro I felt as though I was in a Giant maze full of hyper people. Overwhelmed and anxious I adjusted my speed to a much faster pace just to keep up … . Moving in all directions and up and down twisting stairways left me dizzy and in a sweat. At least the colour codes helped us to move faster, like everyone else.

How often do we question our efficient and mechanic-like movements? Should every "body", every village, every nation be moving at the same pace?

Carolina continues:

> Standing in line to buy tickets, I studied with a sense of urgency how the people in front of me managed the ticket machine. I did all I could to avoid attracting any attention from

> impatient commuters, who were so impatient that they would sometimes leave the line and speed over to the turnstiles and jump over them.

Obol comments:

> I am just like smiling at how Carolina wanted to show that she is not a tourist (laugh) as I felt the same way. I thought asking around for directions would deem me vulnerable while inconveniencing others. When desperate enough I would put much effort in to looking for the friendliest face to approach.

What are the conditions that drive us to fit in? What are we really afraid of as we avoid "inconveniencing others" or simply being spotted as someone who just doesn't know the way? How many of us, like Carolina, may appear to be managing the system, yet are internally panicking in an effort to mimic the movements of those around us? And where do the fastest ones, those that "jump" the turnstiles, fit in the hierarchy? Are they beating the system?

Carolina takes us further:

> This particular day Mash was trying to insert her metro ticket but the machine was not responding. Normally it would vacuum it up and spit it out while unlocking the turnstile, but the machine kept refusing her ticket. It seemed as if we were all just standing there lost not knowing how we were going to get through and stay together. Yet, we did not say anything or have any suggestions for Mash, it was as if we were all stuck in some kind of time lag. Persisting, she turned towards the rest of us, shrugging her shoulders as a rush of commuters arrived. I learned quickly that these Parisian commuters will not wait, and do not really care how they get through, they must keep going.

As our movements become increasingly mechanized, do our tolerance thresholds for those out of sync change too? Will there be a moment when a certain pace is expected no matter where you are?

> As the tension rose with Mash in front of that one turnstile and people rushing towards her, a large middle aged man wearing a suit with the jacket opened, strode right up to Mash, and with his big belly he briskly walked right into her, pushing her forward as she hopped and jumped to keep in front of him. Being so tiny, Mash practically disappeared from sight in that instant without the man even acknowledging she was there. He swiped his Metro pass swiftly not missing a step, using his belly to drive Mash through without so much as a word or a glance at her. Trapped, she bobbed forward arms waving in the air, with a bit of a yelp with eyes wide calling for help! But there was no time to react. It was like watching someone get swept away by a sudden swift current. Suddenly the man was gone, and Mash was on the other side of the turnstile, it was so comical and unexpected that I had to laugh. A new meaning came to me for the phrase "taking it in stride" and it seemed we were all united in our surprise, with a chorus of "oh my goodnesses and did you see that?"[echoing] at this shocking moment where a perceived obstacle suddenly dissolved.

Obol recalls:

> Carolina and Leslie stood just looking helpless on the other side of the turnstiles. That moment and place put people from the different continents together, separating Mash and I. Well Mash was stuck in the middle, trying to get to the other side. Is using these turnstiles meant to be so hard? People like that French man with the big belly, I guess he was used to it and he saw this small girl who could go through with him. I guess he helped a lot.

John Urry (1996) describes the *tourist gaze:* it is projected by visitors to a given place around their expectations of the inhabitants, and in turn, reflected back by the locals to the visitors. This performative behaviour has countless adverse effects on residents and visitors alike who are swept up in an economic system which prioritizes certain cultural attributes while those that can't easily be commodified/standardized are stereotyped, marginalized or lost, such as the slower pace Obol is accustomed to. Urry (1996) recalls how the reconstruction of Paris in the

mid-nineteenth century created the conditions for *la vie Parisienne* as the "quintessentially modern experience" (p. 116) enhanced by unprecedented capacities for seeing and being seen. Urry suggests that the anonymity of the crowd creates space for "those on the margins of society to move about unnoticed, observing and being observed, but never really interacting with those encountered" (p. 118). Perhaps there is something about Paris, where the visitors far outnumber Parisians, that accelerates and isolates us all, marginal or not? As strangers in the city, how do we encounter each other, do we address and help each other, shrug our shoulders, or just grumble and go on our way?

Returning Home

Returning home after those two weeks was difficult for all in the sense that our stories of travel were met with varying degrees of non-acceptance. In Carolina's case she didn't even attempt to share her experiences:

> I did not really talk to anyone about the trip. No one asks about my travel and when they do it is really out of courtesy and not actual interest.

How many of us have felt some kind of resistance to hearing about someone's time abroad? Leslie recalls:

> "So how was Paris?" a friend asked me, shortly after my return to Canada. My mind immediately went to my stockpile of stories much less about Paris itself, but fixated instead on the shared adventures of navigating the trip alongside my two close friends and colleagues, both first time travellers from Uganda. "It was a miracle really, how we managed to pull it off—so many hurdles!" I told her.
>
> I summarized the trouble we had convincing the airline attendant that Mashaka's ticket was legitimate and later in Addis Ababa how she was accused again of not having a proper ticket and was interrogated until the last moment, until finally she was the very

> last to board the plane … how after searching for Mashaka and Obol for hours, I received a panicked email from the Parisian lady who was to host us explaining how she had received a call from the immigration police who were holding my colleagues for interrogation. My friend at first seemed surprised to hear the stories, though her attentiveness quickly faded.

Obol reflects:

> When asked about my journey I didn't share very much as some people just ask it as a formality, to seem like they are interested … but as you speak they are not even paying attention. So I learned not to discuss a lot about the travelling unless it's very important.

If one were to assess the collective intensity of our desires to tell travel stories against people's general unwillingness to hear them, might we also learn, like Obol and Carolina to keep them to ourselves? Are there unspoken social cues that lead people to ask about travel experiences through "courtesy and not actual interest" as Carolina puts it, or as Obol suggests "as a formality"?

Leslie concludes:

> She cut me off eventually, exclaiming that she had "challenges at airports, but nothing that bad". I remember thinking "of course she wouldn't have had anything 'that bad' with her Canadian passport and bright white skin".

Obol reflects:

> Leslie, a Caucasian, is talking about white skin and privileges that give her friend (and herself) easy go through at airports. I guess it has always been like that but being conscious about it adds a lot of credible value to what one says. I think that for many Westerners it's very easy to use the airport, it's an everyday thing. Yet for someone like Mashaka, it is a one-time thing, it can even demoralize someone to travel again.

> The reality is, like Bob Marley said, "I have no chains around my feet but I am not free". Its like this illusion of freedom, but when you look deep it's not true. This is coming from Leslie: if in your passport your photo is white, there are some privileges you have for yourself.

Both of these travellers connect the source of the travel issues to skin colour, Leslie felt her listener did not understand that travel was much different for someone from Uganda, the blackness is taken for granted. Obol notes a view of Westerners having "ease" at airports. But is this only a skin colour issue, or is it more complex? Is it not much easier for a black American to pass through an airport than a white Colombian? Is it not just that Leslie's listener had white skin, but also that she had a Canadian passport? How many of us have noticed a hierarchy amongst passports and that some passports seem more valued than others?

For Mashakalugo this trip was a "one-time" thing and demoralizing. For whom is travel made so upsetting and humiliating to the point where they are disinclined to travel again? Those who travel will eventually have issues, baggage may be lost, seats may be switched, flights delayed and cancelled. We may encounter rudeness or poor service where we will personally blacklist an airline, but won't most of us travellers travel again?

In Mignolo's (2011a) construct of the colonial matrix of power, he charts our modern/colonial world order extending Anibal Quijano's (2000) earlier work on the coloniality of power. The colonial matrix unveils how racism and patriarchy (and the authoritative and economic power of nation states) manifest as the modern conditions for constructing and controlling knowledge and subjectivity. Through this frame we can see that "those who classify often forget (that) those who are classified do not" (Mignolo, 2011a, p. 45) and that being out of place in the set of regulations points to the existential condition of coloniality of being. Overlooking the fact that passports are

also culturally overdetermined is an indication of what Maldonado-Torres (2004) describes as the constitutive feature of modernity, the *forgetfulness of damnation*. When a Canadian arrives in Uganda and pays her fifty US dollars for a visa stamp on her passport, how often does she think of the medical tests, the interviews and the waiting game that a Ugandan might endure simply for aspiring to get a Canadian travel visa?

(Mis)representation

What is it like to experience travel abroad for the first time as a twenty-something Ugandan: to cross the colonial divide over to a city that represents the epitome of post-modern globality? In some senses the voyage has the potential to alter or re-configure one's sense of personhood. With a broadened imaginary for seeing and interpreting the world does a young Ugandan like Obol or Mashakalugo return home with a heightened sense of self, or rather a further complicated one? For fellow peers, whose circumstances deny the chance of travel, bearing witness to the intercontinental experience of another is fraught with conflicting emotions. How might attaining a first stamp on one's passport become a marker of an altered identity and sociability for a youth upon returning to the "underside"?[2].

Obol expresses his experience of returning home through sequential art along with anecdotal descriptions;

[2] Following decolonial thinkers such as Mignolo (2011a), the "underside" points to the colonial divide and the understanding that modernity is contingent on coloniality.

Figure 5.1. Calling me "French buoy"

> Back from Paris, about one week, I went one cool easy evening to see my friends at my former hostel. There I found them all seated in our favourite hideout spot behind the hostel smoking the good stuff, chatting and laughing off their escapades as usual.

Obol's story evokes a sense of comfort and familiarity, setting a "cool and easy" tone. With a feeling of belonging and emplacement he readily approaches the "favourite hideout spot", eager to assume his membership among friends "as usual". The tone of his account contrasts with another scenario, one where he was among a crowd of new friends while in Paris.

> Me, Paul and some other friends were hanging around outside the conference room waiting for the bus to take us to the Sorbonne. My friends were sharing experiences, while I was busy listening. I felt like everyone had so much to share about themselves,

> while I shied away. Since there was a big number of people from all parts of the world I was just looking around at people, different dress codes, hair styles, skin colours. I didn't feel like I fit in. I felt like I was in the midst of a group so far away from my state of mind.

With these contrasting *hanging out* moments in mind we may wonder if Obol will find his friends back home in a "state of mind" closer to his own.

> Everyone was surprised to see me because I was humungous. I remember my friend David said "Uh OJay you look so big, look at your arms". I wasn't surprised at their reactions because I was conscious of my physical weight. My other friend Elijah kept calling me "French buoy".

The anticipation of returning to chats of the "usual escapades" was met with a seemingly inflated search for a physical marker of change, a sign of a new man. Being called "French Buoy" reflects a change in the eye of a friend, has Obol been somehow contaminated by "Frenchness"? He was given a nickname, and in a teasing way his difference, largely invisible though marked by weight gain, was noted and underscored.

> Everyone laughed at that name, even me, but in my mind I didn't want the name to stick. I didn't want people associating me to that wealth and money stuff. It felt like I am bragging because I have travelled around the world. It is a common thing that happens to people who have come back from outside as everyone thinks that they have a lot of dollars on them.

In the almost impossible feat of interpreting what international travel could have been like for Obol, his friends made assumptions. The social relationships *at distance* with local contextualities called for negotiation. This mutual impact in the relationship appears to be more than a Giddensian "interlacing" of social events. Even the notion of *time-space distanciation* seems to be inadequate in the experience of change in the social milieu that is more akin to a

time-space mash-up. For Tomlinson (1994), "the experience of place in modernity is not one of alienation, but of ambivalence. People 'own' their local places phenomenologically in a sort of provisional sense, always recognizing the absent forces which structure this ownership" (p. 153) and the awareness of the influence of capital, "wealth and money stuff" from afar, including its geographical connections.

Renowned creative writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2012b), attentive to the lived experience of identity formation, offers us an entryway into the absent forces that recondition Obol's ownership of his locality. He writes: "the colonial process dislocates the traveller's mind from the place he or she already knows to a foreign starting point even with the body still remaining in his or her homeland" (pp. 15–16). In the symbolic world "behind the hostel" and in the presence of those who "come back from outside the country" it seems as though one's travel experience earns "bragging" rights along with a re-jigged identity. Yet for Obol, the proposed identity transformation is unwelcome and he resists playing along as "French buoy". Travel can mean different things, but is often linked to "a lot of money or dollars". With this assumption, people ignore funding alternatives enabling travel without one personally acquiring wealth. The colonial process mitigates alienation from one's base through "a continuous process of looking at oneself from the outside of self or with the lenses of a stranger … that is from another self toward oneself, rather than the local being the starting point, from self to other selves" (Thiong'o, pp. 15–16). Obol, now associated by his peers with wealth, is in reality no wealthier than he was two weeks earlier.

But a specific kind of travel marks Obol's alienation:

> If I were coming back from Kenya or Rwanda it may not be that way, but the fact that I was from Paris, it was obvious to them that I must have a lot of money. The mood was nice though, they were all happy to see me, welcoming me.

Obol recognizes an implicit hierarchy of destinations revealed through his friends' responses. His particular experience of mobility resulted in a virtual shift as his friends looked at him as-if transformed, and for signs of increased wealth. In his dissonant encounter with this, Obol's own views appear to have changed.

Fanon (1963) takes us further into how *alienation from the base* manifests in the social and political context at play in this moment among friends. For him a colonial system denies aspects of humanness among the people it dominates continually forcing one to ask the question "in reality who am I?" (Fanon, 1963, p. 250). Obol makes it clear for us who he feels he is not: someone associated "to that wealth and money stuff". For Fanon (1967), in the colonial context ordinary life is over-determined by the political to such an extent that abnormal turns normal. Obol's *travel around the world* and his consequent representation by his peers—became over-determined by the political and distorted by *a foreign starting point.* Was the mood "nice" because the modern world somehow, in that moment, returned with Obol?

Obol continues,

> I was uncomfortable with the fact that they wanted me to shoot them beers to celebrate the moment. I was broke, I think I had about 20,000 shillings (about eight dollars), but I understood why they were hoping I would sponsor them some drinks. My reaction was polite; I bought some spirit sachets and one "U.G." (a very famous Ugandan spirit). So those passed around as I shared some more experiences. It felt good to be back home.

Obol feels simultaneously "uncomfortable" and glad to be home, suggesting how our prevailing modern/colonial world system maintains "a field of gravitation that makes aspirations for humanity collapse into aims for inclusion and projects of assimilation based on the ultimate value of the master's kind of life" (Maldonado-Torres, 2008, p. 131). Obol negotiated his discomfort amid his welcoming friends because he "understood" the (mis)conception into which he was inserted. Why does he not say he is broke? Instead he spends his last shillings "to sponsor them some drinks" and maintain the illusion. Perhaps for Obol in that moment it was a small price to pay "to celebrate the moment" of coming home. Had he not "passed around" spirits would he have faced rejection? Does his reaction attest to Tomlinson's (1994) assertion that "local exigencies maintain a certain priority even in a lifeworld opened up to the global" (p. 160)?

By considering the complex ways in which meanings are assigned to the human acts of giving and receiving we might move toward a better understanding of how colonial contexts work to mediate relationships in Obol's encounter. Modernity/coloniality works to impair the possibility of reciprocal inter-human contact, maintaining generosity as an expression reserved for the exclusive use of the dominator (Maldonado-Torres, 2008). When Obol finds his friends at the hostel *as usual* his re-entry into that world seems to emerge as a paradox: Is he one small step closer to the *ultimate value of the master's kind of life?* Or is he one step back, facing possible dismissal by his peers? *In reality who is Obol?*

Pain and Betrayal

> Hello, to open minded people and change lovers for betterment. As I was sharing my experiences in a world of opposites I learnt that in this world people will never see, perceive, act or think in the same way. This testifies to the fact of difference and

> uniqueness in people. And this makes me believe more strongly in the Artivist way of using all possible medias to reach, teach, learn and change for a better world, responding to Asante's call in one of his books.

Mashakalugo's greeting to "change lovers for betterment" invites people of a certain bent/calling to collaborate in an artivist (artist/activist) way. She calls out to "open minded people", is there something that connects us all? Her opening address incites reflection on one's own position on the spectrum of open-mindedness, open according to what terms, whose terms?

"A world of opposites" is Mashakalugo's articulation of difference, as she experienced it in relation to her Paris *aller-retour*. Thinking back to a shared experience walking to the Eiffel tower, an image reformulates: Mashakalugo wanders slowly and cautiously in her black winter jacket as a cluster of seemingly care-free girls dash by in mini-shorts. The magnetic force that seems to draw so many of us to the "city of love" to return to share our stories of the view from the top evokes an alternative response: "*in this world people will never see, perceive, act or think in the same way"*.

Kjeldgaard and Askegaard's (2006) research on the *Glocalization of Youth Culture* explains how the assumed to be uniform consumption habits of young people (clothing styles, music tastes, and media habits) as purported by marketing and popular business literature, has caused youth to be seen as the ideal example of a global segment (see Hassan & Katsanis, 1991; Marketing News, 2002: Moses, 2000; Tully, 1994). As noted by Lukose (2005) "a short-hand way to mark the advent and impact of globalization is to point to the evidence of 'global' youth consuming practices" (p. 915). Often, signs of a global youth culture are all too readily treated as obvious evidence of a homogenized group of consumers. Yet myth is exactly such a naturalization of a social set of signs (Barthes, 1957). The myth of a global youth hence constitutes an ideological

explanatory framework for practices observed in social reality" (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006, p. 231).

Mashakalugo's own calling to "change for a better world" is reminiscent of African-American scholar and artivist M.K. Asante's (2008) vision "to create and to have a palpable impact in the real world" (p. 205). Her commitment to the "artivist way" is reinforced by her observation abroad, "the fact of difference and uniqueness in people". In Mashakalugo's symbolic imaginary, what *different* and *unique* symbolic world stood in lieu of the packaged and sold *rêve de Paris*?

Upon her return from Paris, Mashakalugo reunited with her friends:

> The reactions I received from the people I used to call my people as I shared these experiences are unbelievable to me … . My friends in need and indeed, the people I would recommend to be my next of kin, they blew me like sand at the coast. Blown in no direction the wind instead makes the sand meander, not meeting or reaching its destiny, kept at the coast all the time though in the motion of movement. Even at this moment I still feel the pain and the psychological torture put on me in struggling to get the answer to the question of whether it was worst or best, right or wrong, to accept the call and respond positively to world developers and well wishers.

Mashakalugo's voyage somehow functioned to interrupt and re-set a sense of time and awareness of space as she attempted to reconnect with her people. In a way it is as if by travelling a long distance, we bring that distance with us. Returning to the trip, perhaps to some of the experiences Mashakalugo would have liked to share, we recall an unforgettable moment when she stood up in front of an audience during a session on HIV/AIDS research in Uganda. She brought two professors up to date on current realities in her own community as they frantically took note. It was surprising that these so-called experts were so disconnected. Later, the excitement of tasting strawberries for the first time and her desire to share them by packing a

few to take home, vaporize in the shadow in the feeling of being *blown like sand in all directions and going nowhere*. Somehow the going "somewhere" became worse than staying in place. Mashakalugo experienced a deep and violent rejection and betrayal by "people I used to call my people", but what, in actuality has changed?

Excerpts from a letter Mashakalugo wrote to the organizers of the cultural conference that brought her to Paris recall her pre-trip aspirations;

> At the conference I hope to contribute my views to help big people[3] better understand the nature of young people, especially in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa. … Upon coming back I hope to share up with my fellows alternative ways of handling issues that I will learn from people from across the globe. … I hope to get inspiration as I have plans of joining up with others in related disciplines to advocate for combating youth unemployment (26 February, 2012).

But back home there is a tangle of contradictions to get caught up and "kept" in, as her hopes to "share up" and "advocate" are met with indifference or perhaps even malice. Thiong'o's work on the decolonization of African memory can offer an entry point into the complex and layered psychic terrain of Mashakalugo's post-travel suffering. For Thiong'o (2009), Africa's contact with Europe, since the onset of modernity/coloniality manifests through enactments of dismemberment whereby the colonial subject's memory severs from her own individual and collective body. "Colonialism attacks and completely distorts a people's relationship to their natural, bodily, economic, political, and cultural base. And with this base destroyed, the wholeness of the African subject, the subject in active engagement with his environment, is fragmented" (p. 22). Paradoxically, in the "motion of movement", Mashakalugo fits this

[3] In the Ugandan context "big people" is an expression commonly used to denote people who occupy positions of power such as professors, policy makers and political leaders.

description as she is held hostage by haunting visions of betrayal as her *plans of joining up with others* are derailed. Through the legacy of colonialism and its systemic assault on African memory unity is broken: "there is no healing, no wholeness; only a dislocation of the national psyche, for in not remembering the past, there are no inherited ideals by which to measure the excesses of the present" (Thiong'o, 2009, p. 46). Mashakalugo asks if it was "right or wrong, to accept the call and respond positively to world developers and well wishers?" For those of us who are scholars, who called upon Mashakalugo to join forces in our efforts toward *world development*, this question begs more questions. Were our efforts to bring artivist Mashaklugo to the world stage to speak on her own behalf about youth concerns just another case of good intentions gone wrong? Despite only one year of University education, her conference *performance* elicited lavish encouragement including invitations by professors to supervise her graduate studies. What are the conditions that led such "well wishers" to suppose that our encouragement will indeed help her? Or were we really thinking of helping our own agendas? Did our adherence to the universal (according to whom?) claims to higher (Western) education overlook "the question of whether it was worst or best" to entice Mashakugo to join our *calling*? The aftermath of Mashakalugo's trip to Paris evoked "pain" and "psychological torture", yet what called forth this misery?

For Maldonado-Torres modernity/coloniality reveals a coloniality of Being, evinced first by the cry, "not a word but an interjection … a call of attention to one's own existence … And the cry points to a peculiar existential condition: that of the condemned" (2007, p. 256). Failing to comprehend the connections between our past, present and future, the strategic antagonist of our global age has become our amnesic and distorted sense of self (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

> While other people were showing the contentedness, curiosity and hopefulness with their eye turned straight on me questioning me and waiting for sweet replies and maybe to learn or not from them there was a chick of gung starts (do not ask what they do anyway). They roamed around like lost cats in the desert, tried to hide like icebergs in oceans. But their hearts were black with burning fire. They used to change places on hearing conversations looking at me on angle 45 degrees opening and closing their eyes often like disco lights. Whenever my face would meet theirs they would turn their five heads down and sideways as if they were dodging their eyes from wind or water.

Like "lost cats in the desert" the treachery of friends is signalled. The travelled Mashakalugo stirs up fractured memories. Her international travel (and the staying behind of her young friends) evokes hearts "black with burning fire". Is it threats of future change or domination—*blowing in like wind* or *charging like water*—that her "friends in need and indeed" are "dodging"? For Thiong'o memory of colonialism has become "shut up in a crypt, a collective psychic tomb" (2009, p. 46) through denial and the lack of collective mourning. The five heads "down and sideways" in shameful gesture avoid eye contact in contrast to the others with eyes "straight on". They do not allow a connection and do not validate the teller's tale. By extension, the teller herself is denied. Focusing on the structures of our social fabric that distort and bury collective memories allows us to acknowledge the complexity of subjectivity formation and the subtle, dispersed and unpredictable ways that pain manifests in the ordinary sphere of life. Veena Das, attentive to the lived experience of social suffering asks:

> What is it to bear witness to the criminality of the societal rule that consigns the uniqueness of being to eternal forgetfulness through a descent in everyday life—to not simply articulate loss through a dramatic gesture of defiance but to inhabit the world, or inhabit it again, in a gesture of mourning? *It is in this context that one may identify the eye not as the organ that sees but the organ that weeps* (2007, p. 62, our emphasis).

Das' (2007) work nuances the notion of resistance by conceptualizing agency in ordinary life as multi-faceted, fragmented and mobile. For her, some subjectivities are formed through the complex relationships between originary moments of pain and the bleeding pain that endures, creating a psychic and corporeal terrain that can no longer be accounted for by one particular outside force. As the structures of social control infiltrate, the assault on the individual multiplies, disperses and fractures becoming difficult to identify and name. But the pain becomes a place inhabited.

Mashakalugo continues:

> However much these witch traitors didn't want to listen, the truth remains the truth and no man shall ever burry the truth. At least one day in a lifetime it will be dug up and known by the world. A good thing remains good whether in dark or light. As the clouds cover the sky, rainfalls, the sky darkens but the sun will never cease to shine. I felt bad but it made me stronger.

Mashakalugo's truth refuses to be buried and forgotten, it "remains", it "will be known" it is good and is as sure as the unseen sun shining behind the rain: it is resilient. What kinds of resilience are required to confront the subtle rejections based on non-acceptance of some kind of perceived privilege? Following Das, the excessiveness that is the pain, is not just extra-territorial but creates its own territory where one can gain traction.

As pain is marked into the everyday transforming subjectivity, an opening can yield to yet another self, the subject that *re-becomes*. Within this opening, wounds can make possible new forms of agency as human subjectivity transforms (Das, 2007). Mashakalugo, simultaneously vulnerable and powerful seems to occupy a terrain where "both the limits of insanity and the possibilities of emancipation are born out of the same horrors of subjugation" (Sandoval, 2000,

p. 85). To "respond positively to world developers and well wishers" is sacrificial pain that makes her stronger. With a nod to her affinity to African orature, Mashakalugo testifies that "creative imagination is one of the greatest of remembering practices" (Thiong'o, 2009, p. 28). The non-concrete but real world of pain accompanies these experiences made possible through "globalization": a micro-fracturing of selves, worlds and a re-suturing of subjectivities.

Conclusion

Our goal was to explore avenues for liberating subjectivities and forms of sociability in the context of Western globalization and its modern/colonial structure particularly in relation to the agency/invisibility of Ugandan youth perspectives and our/their entry into engaged scholarship. Through reflection and dialogue around a set of lived experiences that intersected, diverged and fragmented in relation to a trip to Paris, the standardizing mechanisms of asymmetrical globalization were brought to the fore, provoking many more questions. Mashakalugo asks:

> Do we not still follow colonial orders only indirectly? Aren't the two systems of colonialism and globalization now intermarried? Has the work of the colonizers, now difficult to recognize physically, only manifested through the operational wiring of the same logic through machines and regulations?

We questioned the very notion of globality—and the conundrum of its impossibility if it is meant to include everyone, if everyone can include a pluriversity of ways of knowing, doing and being. Utilizing the lens of modernity/coloniality positioned us to consider how marginalized epistemic subjectivities are disallowed to make claims about the human condition and how dominant knowing subjects categorize and map the world in their/our own image. Wondering about the ways that differentially placed agents (mis)interpret/(mis)represent what it means to be "global" in our shared *world of opposites* we were besieged by the multiplicity of perspectives.

As Mashakalugo observed earlier, we can at least agree that "in this world people will never see, perceive, act or think in the same way". This attitude is consistent with decolonial thinking which rather than claiming to be the only option, accepts being one option among many, epitomizing "the horizon of pluriversality as a universal project" (Mignolo, 2011a, p. 44).

Through our wondering about our journey moments re-emerged as representations of self and other were shattered and pieced together again in unexpected ways. Our accounts of subjectivity transformation also revealed a shared sense of hope embedded in the synergy that emerges through working together as epistemic partners toward justice. By taking youth perspectives and artistic/poetic enunciations seriously, we move towards an inter-cultural and inter-epistemic imaginary for rupturing the apartheid of knowledges in Western scholarship, making space for subaltern forms of expression.

Philosophically, phenomenology attends to lived experiences while at the same time recognizing that these very experiences can never be portrayed in their original form. The focus is on reflective understanding, always situated yet engendering a consciousness that allows the world to appear. Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes,

> Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards a unity of consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice… (p. xii)

The phenomenological stance recognizes our situatedness in space and time and the plurality of influences on our human condition. In many ways this attitude is inline with Mendieta's (2001; 2007) formulation of a phenomenology from below; one that works fragmentarily as globalizations (both adverse and beneficial) intersect and manifest unequally. Such a view of

the global condition allows us to witness how, "as participants in globalization, we experience and witness only aspects of it. As agents conditioned by it, we may be acted upon by planetary forces and tensions, but differentially" (Mendieta, 2007, p. 18).

The planet is globalized, indeed, but not all in the planet are globalized in the same way. As different actors move into globalized *spatio-temporal configurations* (Giddens, 1991) they enter a terrain *already* organized to disable certain subjectivities from exerting their rights with the same degree of power and competence as more privileged others. As it appeared to us in the scenario of the Paris metro *turnstiles*, the ways we come to understand our relationships to space and time and thus conceptualize our world, are reflected in the way we see ourselves and other selves as human beings being in the world. While some may see or be seen moving *swiftly* through globalized configurations, placed to *help* an-other along the way, others may be held momentarily, *stuck in the middle* or *standing helpless on the other side*. Yet, as affected agents in and of globalizations, we have come to share the view that rethinking experiences of place, mobility and globalization demands a rapport that works "fragmentarily and by way of fragments" (Mendieta, 2007, p. 17) through the inclusion and valorisation of subaltern perspectives and means of expression.

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Toward Experiencing Academic Mentorship

Leslie Robinson

A few years ago I was struck by a colleague's account of her relationship with her doctoral supervisor. She said it was "debilitating" and explained:

> Feeling so lost and disconnected, I tried several times to change supervisors, but mine was the Chair … I got stuck with her and I felt so trapped. … It took me years to finish. What hurts me most is that I feel like I really missed out on that chance of being mentored.

I began to wonder what it was about her experience that she identified and interpreted as *not mentorship* and what it might have been that she was expecting. Where did the feelings of being "lost and disconnected" arise from? Less than a year into my own doctoral degree, my own expectations of mentorship were called into question, leading up to the following experience:

> For months I felt the moment coming and for weeks I rehearsed what I would say. That day I anxiously endured a three-hour workshop with my supervisor and her students, awaiting the moment I would finally tell her of my decision. As the last student left the room we sat down at the corner of the long table, enveloped in a familiar, yet acutely awkward silence. I can't recall the words I used as I looked at her unsuspecting face and expressed my decision to change supervisors. The words just barely off my tongue, I could feel the weight start to lift. I took in a deep breath: I had done it. But then came her response … she asked me to reconsider, she promised to change. I never imagined this: I sat there dumbfounded as she went on. I guess I agreed to think about it. I left that meeting through still and silent halls onto the empty street and I just walked, with no real destination in mind.

The above anecdote describes my experience communicating "my decision to change supervisors". Indeed I thought I "had done it", yet in a moment my decision seemed to come undone by my then supervisor's response. I have reflected on the layered and interconnected experiences both preceding and following this particular moment in an effort to make meaning of my own lifeworld as a becoming academic and a member of the academic community. This singular moment that left me "dumbfounded" has preoccupied me the most. I had *felt* the need to *change supervisors* for months, yet somehow my supervisor's response to hearing my decision reconfigured the outcome of our meeting and the *change I had in mind*. Perhaps, like my colleague, I too became trapped as I was left "with no real destination".

In graduate school I seemed to hear more and more stories of scenarios where expectations of academic mentorship seemed to misalign or reconfigure in the playing out of various relationships between professors and graduate students. My curiosity about what the experience of mentorship—something *I assumed* and *expected* to be part and parcel of supervision—might be like, was piqued. I began to wonder if, as graduate students, we have a tendency to conflate the role of supervision and other institutionalized forms of guidance with desires or hopes for some kind of mentorship. How do the ideas evoked by our expectations of mentorship impact our actual experiences? Are we all talking about completely different phenomena when we use the word mentorship? Is there something different about the experience of academic mentorship that sets it apart from something like coaching, teaching, counseling or graduate supervision?

Arriving at the Phenomenon of Academic Mentorship

My time as a graduate student has been transformative and my academic relationships continue to shape the person I am becoming. Yet I find myself struggling to discern the ways in which

mentorship has actually influenced my course of life and those around me. This led me to ask what is the experience of academic mentorship actually like? I ask and re-ask this question since I want to better understand how to navigate my own mentorship relationships and because I want to contend with the larger question of what is at stake for all of us who engage in academic mentoring relationships?

For van Manen (1997) phenomenological reflection demonstrates a will not to explicate but rather to describe in order to understand the human experience in situ (1997). In other words, it is about how people go about understanding the worlds in which they live (van Manen, 1997; 2014). In this way phenomenological questions can bring us closer to the meaning of the phenomenon we are called to by drawing us sensitively toward the bodily meanings of the lived-throughness of the experience by holding multiple stories together to flesh it out (van Manen, 1997). It is in this way that I endeavor to show the phenomenon of academic mentoring by drawing upon personal experiences, in conversation with stories offered by those who have variously lived it. I seek to open up to it and the surprises it reveals by being with it. Beginning with my own experiences, by making them explicit, helps to reveal how they shape my understandings. From there, we can embark on a journey to understand how mentorship is variously interpreted and lived so that we can begin to see what of the phenomenon is covered over.

Merleau-Ponty writes in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962/2005), "the phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears" (p. 28). Similarly, I came to wonder about mentorship in relation to my own and other fellow graduate students' stories about striving for, desiring and questioning its elusive

possibility. A doctoral student, having been mentored as a masters student and ever seeking mentorship, I was called, out of deep concern, to the mysterious and evasive possibility of academic mentorship and the forms it might take. I came to the phenomenological method as an activist/scholar with a community engaged creative research/practice. Through collaborative research I engage with youth through artivism, an attitude that takes an any medium necessary approach to creative being and doing in the world (artivists 4 life, Robinson, & Cambre, 2013; Asante, 2008). My artivist pedagogical practice is guided by the proverb each one teach one, thus my interactions with Others always hold simultaneously the possibility of giving/receiving mentorship. I chose phenomenology because I take up artivist Asante's (2008) credo, "to make an observation is to have an obligation" (p. 203). I felt obligated to question and reflect on the potential of academic mentorship. I engage phenomenology because it offers me an avenue for reaching out to the academic community by creating a text that brings readers to a sense of wonder about the phenomenon that obligates me, inviting them to resonate with it. Phenomenology holds the possibility of moving toward new possibilities of understanding mentorship because it involves the search for fullness of living, for ways we can possibly experience the world (van Manen, 1997), and in this case, how graduate students might experience mentorship relationships.

Attending to the Mentee Experience

Following an elaborate review of literature on mentorship Roberts (2000) discerns that the concept of mentorship is intangible and that the experience of the mentee is consistently overlooked and rarely attended to: It is the role of the mentor that is emphasized and as a result we have very little understanding of what actually takes place in mentoring relationships and

how the mentee experiences them. Indeed, studies that examine the experience of mentees in the academic mentoring process are not prevalent (Gibson, 2004). Widespread promotion of mentoring has served to normalize practices and programs by endorsing expected outcomes and goals, believing naively in a well-intended *feel good* practice (Gomez Riquelme, 2012). More research is necessary to understand the possible negative impacts of mentoring scenarios (Simon & Eby, 2003). Colley (2003) calls for the demystification of mentorship by calling into question the discourses and assumptions that circulate around mentoring rhetoric so that we can see past them and reconsider the potential of mentoring relationships from multiple perspectives. Why is the mentee's experience so often left out of the literature on mentoring? What might we uncover by attending to this experience? And what about those who have *missed out on that chance of being mentored*, what might we learn from their experiences?

By focusing on the experiences of mentees, particularly graduate students, I aim to engender dialogue and reflection that emphasizes the perspectives of those who have been overlooked by dominant discourses around academic mentorship. I hope to uncover aspects of the mentee experience for what it is rather than what it is so often claimed to be. Phenomenology brings with it an ethical stance that encourages a change in practice for the benefit of people or groups (van Manen, 1997). It is in this sense that my *being* as an artivist intersects with a phenomenological stance: The ethical *obligation* manifests as reflection/action upon academic life—to open up new pedagogical possibilities that might help us become more fully human (van Manen, 1997).

Wandering with Possible Mentorship Moments

Acknowledging that the elusive word *mentor* may indeed get in the way of doing phenomenology, I wandered in multiple directions with particular lived experiences around the

possibility of mentorship. To glimpse at what phenomena around mentorship might be like, while remaining sensitive to its elusiveness, my wondering drew me to lived experience descriptions that involve reaching toward, hoping for, or somehow recognizing or misrecognizing mentorship. Examples of graduate student experiences where expectations of mentorship were brought into question seemed to offer insights for bringing us closer to what actual experiences of receiving mentorship may be like.

Mentorship Mistaken

A fellow graduate student shared a description of an interaction with her supervisor that may offer us one way of considering how expectations of academic mentoring are variously experienced:

> I recall the day, during my first year of doctoral studies, when my supervisor commented about the growing numbers of students who fail to complete their PhDs. She explained that she had learned, at a recent Faculty meeting, that some students have even attempted to sue their supervisors for not "pushing them through". In light of this, she told a fellow graduate student and I that she would be expecting official reports from us to track our progress. She added assertively: "following your first committee meeting I expect a formal report summarizing your progress and the plans and commitments that are agreed upon". I froze, completely stunned, not so much by what she said about other students, but how she seemed to relate it to us. Not sure how to respond, I kept quiet as other matters were discussed, anxiously waiting for the moment I could leave the room. As I walked home that day I could not get her comments out of my head. Does she even trust me, believe in me? Am I just a number that she plans to *push through* the program? I was worried: this was not the kind of relationship I had been expecting.

This student's understanding of her place as a graduate student is altered as her supervisor's comments leave her "stunned". The student feels that the topic of those who "fail" and others

who “attempt to sue” is somehow related to her, through the supervisor’s demand for a “formal report”. After the encounter, the supervisor’s comments remain with the student as she calls into question the very nature of their relationship. The demand to write a report about her “progress” seems to signal a relational binary akin to an employer-employee relationship or some other kind of transactional arrangement. The context of increasingly corporate-style administration of universities challenges faculty members to maintain student-centered relationships, even encouraging them to see their relations with students in ways that are anti-pedagogical. In this sense the “individual is denied his or her uniqueness and individuality” (van Manen, 1991, p. 211) in a collective effort to shift the purpose of education toward training students to serve the economy. Perhaps then, the student’s experience should not come as unexpected: her supervisor was doing her job to *push her through* for the sake of a greater societal whole.

Or we may recognize the student’s experience as a moment lacking pedagogical tact: Often “we may become aware of tact only when we experience situations where tact was sorely missed” (van Manen, 1991, p. 137). If this experience and other experiences of seeing one’s self/being seen as “just a number” suggests a pedagogical failure, concerning the “personal relational and ethical aspects of the pedagogy of teaching” (van Manen, 2013, p. 14) we may wonder then what *kind of relationship* was this student *expecting*? What would mentorship that instills *trust and belief in one’s self* actually be like?

The following anecdote describes another graduate student’s encounter with her supervisor: one we might also recognize as an example of what is *not* a mentorship *kind of relationship*:

> I am sitting surrounded by professors and fellow graduate students at a routine meeting. We had gathered like this for years since I was an undergrad. At one point my PhD supervisor announces that one of his students was offered a tenure track job. After a bit of

> conversation around this, he concludes, “yes, all the amazing ones are getting snapped up”. I choke out a few words and the meeting carries on. I wonder what this says about me and I feel my blood boil and my heart sink.
>
> When we finally finish, I go straight to my office and the tears begin to fall. As I try to process what all this could mean for me, the questions pour out: Do I even want to become a tenure track professor? Do I even want to begin applying for jobs? I try to recall why I wanted to do a PhD. Did I even ask myself these questions four years ago? I don’t have answers and my sobs and tears intensify.
>
> My supervisor’s words from the time I was an undergrad come flooding back: “of course you are going to do your masters” and from the time of my masters “of course you are going to do your PhD”. Just then I hear a knock on the door and he comes in asking me what is wrong. Looking at him in the doorway I recall how he was once my cherished mentor, the person I wanted to be just like, in a career I imagined myself in. I tell him I don’t know if I want to seek a position in academia. “Well of course you are going be an academic” he replies. In that moment my perception of him shatters and my heart falls to my feet. Crushed.

The supervisor’s announcement somehow functions to interrupt and re-set the graduate student’s awareness of self. The comment about the “amazing ones” is not *about* the student, yet it penetrates her. As self-doubt arises so does her temperature. Not “snapped up” herself, she feels indirectly marked as *not* among “the amazing ones”. She manages to contain her emotions until *finally* she reaches her office where they *pour out* in the form of a self-interrogation. She calls into question the career path she finds herself on, wondering if it is in line with what *she* wants. But what actually does *she* want?

A chorus of accolades echo in the student’s head: “of course” she will pursue an academic path, “of course”. We may wonder how often students internalize a taken for granted plan for their education and their future. It feels like there is a set of standard expectations and justifications

concerning who should and shouldn't pursue an academic career and how this trajectory should unfold.

Mentors, ahead of us in their journeys, can help us to prepare for what is to come. Yet for this student, it may be that her expectations are not in line with those of her supervisor who makes an assumption (again): "of course you are going be an academic". The affirmation seems to rupture the student's affinity with the person who once held an exemplary position in her imagination, "in a career I imagined myself in". Yet through this dissonant encounter her own views appear to change as she calls into question her supervisor's role in her life and his idea for her future. Indeed her conception of her supervisor "shatters".

For the student, her once "cherished mentor" is no longer, yet we may wonder what has changed in reality. The student's supervisor may recognize her potential: certainly in some way, "over the years", the student has been shown and supported along an academic trajectory. Yet we may wonder what kind of relationship is being modeled in this scenario. Perhaps the relationship experienced here is more in line with that of role modeling or coaching. Or perhaps like the notion of *pushing through* graduate students, the underlying intention here is aligned with the institutional expectations of graduate student supervision. It may be that the supervisor has the best intentions in mind. Van Manen (2012) reminds us that even though teaching is generally approached with good intentions, teachers cannot avoid pedagogical failures at times. Unfortunately, such failings often occur in those instances when the teacher assumes he is acting "out of caring responsibility" (p. 15).

We might wonder then if a professor can be a supervisor, even a "good" one who successfully *pushes students through* the academic trajectory, but still not actually a mentor. It seems we can

misrecognize mentorship or conflate it with other relational paradigms. Perhaps we tend to accept too quickly or eagerly a relationship as one of mentorship: Longing for the cherished experience or relation, we attach to it prematurely. It seems we can even be deceived into assuming we are in a mentoring relationship when in reality the relationship is of another kind. Or, could it be that one's yearning for mentorship is contingent upon a certain maturity or readiness for growth? At times along our life journey we may be contented by the kind of support that moves us along a given path, yet other times we desire to be supported in the creation of a new path. Perhaps the student is "crushed" not by a major change in her supervisor's comportment, but rather by her own shifting desire for the kind of guidance—guidance that is not about becoming like someone else, but being supported in becoming her true self.

Mentorship versus Supervision

The following anecdote was offered by the student who shared her experience around the issue of *pushing through* graduate students. It offers us a different example that may take us further toward possible experiences of recognizing what may and may not be mentorship.

> Almost immediately following my first committee meeting my supervisor sent me an email reminding me to submit a detailed report. Feeling very uncomfortable with the idea I resolved to send her a very short point-form summary. She responded by asking for something "more formal … a word file that I can save for my records with the exact date". This was going too far: I felt like she was bossing me and that I had little input in how the structure of our relationship was unfolding. The next day I dragged myself to her office to confront her in person. After the usual small talk, which was now awkward, I expressed that I was not feeling comfortable with the arrangement she was imposing. She responded by asking me to be sensitive to the fact that she is not only working with me in

> this capacity but with several grad students—with more to come—along with the many other responsibilities that come with her position. She added that this requires of her certain strategies "in order to manage all of you"
>
> After mustering up my courage I admitted to her that I felt as though the process was a "butt covering strategy" and a "one size fits all" approach. I explained that it made me feel as though she didn't trust me or believe in my capacity to achieve the degree. As I sat there sweating and awaiting her response, it was becoming clear to me that I could no longer trust her. After a long silence she sighed and said: "I can appreciate you are highly motivated based on your ideals … I wish I could say the same, but alas, I am just a cog in the University wheel". Those words were the final blow, I lost my respect for her.

The student's account describes a certain degree of tension and frustration around the "structure" and "unfolding" of her supervisory relationship. She seems to resist the "formal" procedures her supervisor attempts to put in place and the prospect of being *managed.* Yet the technical and rationalistic arrangement the student describes seems to align with the definition of supervision, including the process of directing what and how someone does something ("supervision", n.d.). We might ask then: Is it the formalities themselves that unsettle her or is there something more? While her account may offer us a glimpse at what it may be like to receive some kind of direction, we seem to be no closer to accessing what it may be like to receive mentorship. We may wonder then what is the correlation, if any, between mentorship and supervision, or even "management".

The Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGSR) at the University of Alberta offers guidelines and protocols for graduate students and Faculty including a "Presentation on Supervising Students". The document offers the following advice to supervisors: "develop a system for tracking the progress of your students up to completion" ("tracking progress", FGSR). In the above account, the student's supervisor seems to be working toward this goal through her intention to "manage"

all of her students. Yet the student perceives this as a "one size fits all" strategy. We might wonder then how such institutional frameworks cover over the complexities of actual lived experiences of being or not being supervised or mentored. The same FGSR document includes a "tips for success" section, advising supervisors to "provide mentorship by providing guidance on such matters as scholarship applications, presenting at conferences and getting published, and on general professional development;" the supervisor is counseled "to facilitate the development of the student as a junior research colleague". In such discourses, mentorship is construed as inherent in supervision, perhaps as a synonym for guidance. We might then ask if mentoring can be institutionalized? Or perhaps there is something that sets mentorship apart from just another entity or "cog in the University wheel".

Tracing some Meanings of Mentorship

If our supervisors are not necessarily or always our mentors, how then can we recognize mentorship in our academic lives as graduate students? Looking to the etymology of "mentor" may offer us an opening for considering mentoring experiences from a vantage that is not necessarily bound to contemporary discourses around supervision and other institutionalized framings. Dictionary sources refer to Homer's *Odyssey* when discussing the original meaning of "mentor" (see for example "mentor" (n.d.)). Such sources adopt the supposition that the character Mentor, a friend to the King Ulysses, was protective, guiding, and a counselor to Telemachus, the king's son. A critical look at the Odyssey, however, reveals that it was the goddess Athene, sometimes disguised as Mentor, who embodied the qualities that we sometimes associate to mentorship today—particularly the notion of mentor as wise counsel *in the course of life* (Homer, 2009; Roberts & Chernopiskaya, 1999). We might then consider how the

characteristics of a Goddess have been subsequently appropriated into a vocabulary for describing mortals. Perhaps the widespread definition of mentor as *an experienced and trusted advisor* has always carried with it a certain susceptibility toward idealization or exaggeration.

A popular reconfiguration of mentorship rooted in mythology seems to be the re-appropriation of the term to suit more specific and often short-term purposes. Coinciding with current market forces, a prescribed interpretation of mentorship proliferates: one that might be seen as an attempt to accelerate certain human relations toward immediate outcomes and achievements (Johnson & Huwe, 2003). Indeed some discourses around mentorship construct it as a sort of catch-all remedy for the various symptoms of an increasingly mechanized and individual-outcomes driven education system. Current terminology, such as *mentoring-to-the-task,* suggests a streamlined reconfiguration of mentorship in the service of *professional excellence* or some other marketed rhetoric of individual success. Yet it appears that, while the notion of mentorship seems to be applied to short-term relationships focused around particular goals such as the completion of a degree, the qualities associated with the origins of mentorship are assumed possible and promoted: even at times to be expected as a return on investment. In this way, it is as though the already god-like attributes of Homer's Mentor are simply being re-sold three millennia later in a newly packaged highly visible ready-to-use format.

Yet it seems that graduate students have inherent senses of what they expect from the mentor-mentee relationship. Some find themselves disappointed by the formal structures they actually come to experience: they are seeking more, or something other than what they receive. But what is this *more*? What type of relationships, of the lived kind, are graduate students looking for? Perhaps we hope for mentorship like we yearn to fall in love: We desire to experience it not knowing what it will actually be like, only that it will be "good".

Mentorship that Goes Beyond Duty

The next set of anecdotes takes us further toward accessing what possible experiences of mentorship—as something somehow distinct from other phenomena such as supervision—might feel like.

> I had been having a terrible time getting my proposal to work so I sent it to my supervisor to take a look. He agreed to read it and we proceeded to set up a meeting to discuss it. When I met him a week later in his office we settled in around a small round table. After chatting briefly, my supervisor began taking me through the proposal page by page, section by section, offering his feedback. I soon realized that it had taken way too long to get to my question. He even made a light-hearted joke when *finally* we reached my research question. He said, "this should be up front. Keep everything else prior to this for your dissertation". Yes, he's right, I thought, and I wondered why I didn't see that before. Just to be sure, I asked: "so I should move that forward?" "Yes! Within the first two pages" he assured me.
>
> After a pause, he asked, "Are you okay with this direction?" I was, and I told him so. We then turned to the rest of the proposal. After discussing a few more points, we both suddenly realized our time was up and we quickly wrapped up the meeting. "Thanks so much" I said, packing up my stuff, adding "this *really* helps". I left with a clear sense what to do.

Acknowledging that she had hit a roadblock in her writing process the student turns to her supervisor for help. He attends to her call by reading the proposal and offering concrete advice: the extraction of a significant section of her proposal. The student accepts her supervisor's feedback with only the slightest hesitation. Yet, we may wonder how often this may be the case among graduate students: are we always so ready to accept such a drastic change to the fruits of our labour? Perhaps there are certain conditions that must be in place for the student to be "ok with this direction?" She may be simply looking to be told what to do, or perhaps her ability to

"see" his point made it easy to trust her supervisor's guidance. We may ask at this point if the student's experience with her supervisor is one of being simply supervised, or is she simultaneously being mentored? The student's consequent experience takes us further.

> Immediately after my meeting, as I was walking down the hallway and thinking about the work ahead, I heard my name being called from behind. I stopped and turned to see my supervisor running toward me. Had I left something behind? I wondered. But a quick check revealed I had my bag, coat, scarf, gloves, and hat.
>
> When he reached me I could see his face was full of concern. "Are you okay?" he asked. "Are you okay with what I said in the meeting?"
>
> "Yes. I'm fine," I replied, a little confused, not knowing why was he asking me this. I wondered if I did I not look okay.
>
> "I don't just want you saying that. … If you are *not* okay with it …" he trailed off. I was surprised that he was worried—there was no need to be—and I tried to assure him. I explained that I knew my proposal wasn't working and that was why I asked for help. "Your feedback was good. I now know how to begin to revise it," I told him.
>
> "Are you sure?" he asked again, as if not quite trusting my response. "Yes" I asserted. After a pause, he said "Okay..." still not looking convinced, so I nodded. We wished each other a good afternoon and I continued on my way. I was comforted to know that my supervisor was that attentive.

The supervisor's expression of concern for his student, immediately following their encounter, confuses and surprises her. Although she felt ok with "what was said in the meeting," she perceives in her supervisor's response that he needs affirmation. We can only guess why he was concerned: perhaps to him she did "not look okay" or maybe he was second-guessing his direct and consequential feedback. Whatever the case, his gesture of checking on the student seems to impress upon her some level of concern for her well-being. Indeed the student was struck by his

running after her: a gesture that for some might exceed the norms and expectations of supervisory role. Without having taken this extra step, had the supervisor not *already* responded to his duties? He read her proposal and offered concrete feedback, arguably guiding her toward *professional development*. Yet we might wonder how the student's trajectory of "thinking about the work ahead" might have begun to unravel differently without this interjection that "comforted her" and somehow heightened her perception of her "attentive" supervisor. We may also ask if this gesture may have brought the professor and student somehow closer together, perhaps beyond supervision toward some other relational configuration such as collegiality, or even mentorship. For the student, her supervisor's *attentiveness* was unexpected, yet we might wonder out of what kind of intention did it emerge on the part of the supervisor. Van Manen's (2012) understanding of practicing pedagogy as modes of contact may offer us one way of reading this experience: "pedagogical contact means both that the teacher is 'in touch' with the student and that the teacher 'touches' the student in a manner that is experienced as encouraging and respectful" (p. 28). In this sense we might think of the gesture the student described as one that nourishes closeness, a kind of familial contact that is built on and conditioned by trust (2012). We may see this experience as one that goes beyond the technical notion of supervision toward the relational and pedagogical. This might lead us to consider the potential of mentorship to take us somewhere beyond candidacy, graduation or other indicators or *metrics* of academic success.

Mentorship that Recognizes Us for What We Might Be or What We Might Offer

In University life today, with the popularization and promotion of mentorship strategies and discourses, graduate students are led to expect or anticipate some variation of a mentor figure in

their academic life. Still some students may never have been or may never be mentored—indeed some *miss out on that chance of being mentored.* Others may not even be aware that such a possibility exists. This later scenario was the case for the central character in John Williams' novel *Stoner* (1965/2003). William Stoner, born into poverty in the late 1800's in Missouri, knew only a hard farming life until his father sent him away to study agriculture at university. In his first year of studies Stoner approached his courses much like he approached the farm chores he was required to do at his home stay in exchange for his room and board: with neither passion or disdain, nor ease or difficulty. His first year English class, however, proved to be an exception to this pattern of complacency and indifference. The course challenged and unsettled his sensibilities. One unforgettable day Stoner's teacher, Arthur Sloan, reads aloud one of Shakespeare's sonnets and asks the class what it means. Receiving only blank expressions, he recites the sonnet word for word again, this time without even looking at his book. His exasperation turns to anger and he directs an outburst at Stoner. Recounted, in what follows, this particular moment signaled the beginning of a new trajectory in Stoner's life:

> "Mr. Shakespeare speaks to you across three hundred years, Mr. Stoner; do you hear him?"
>
> William Stoner realized that for several moments he had been holding his breath. He expelled it gently, minutely aware of his clothing moving upon his body as his breath went out of his lungs. He looked away from Sloan about the room. Light slanted from the windows and settled upon the faces of his fellow students, so that the illumination seemed to come from within them and go out against a dimness; a student blinked, and a thin shadow fell upon a cheek whose down had caught the sunlight. Stoner became aware that his fingers were unclenching their hard grip on his desk-top. He turned his hands about under his gaze, marveling at their brownness, at the intricate way the nails fit into his blunt finger-ends; he thought he could feel the blood flowing invisibly through the

> tiny veins and arteries, throbbing delicately and precariously from his fingertips through his body.
>
> Sloan was speaking again. "What does he say to you, Mr. Stoner? What does his sonnet mean?"
>
> Stoner's eyes lifted slowly and reluctantly. "It means," he said, and with a small movement raised his hands up toward the air; he felt his eyes glaze over as they sought the figure of Archer Sloan. "It means," he said again, and could not finish what he began to say. (Williams, 1965/2003, p. 13)

Following Stoner's response, Sloan dismisses the class. Stoner moves slowly out of the room and onto the school grounds. He seems to perceive the world around him as though he is in some sort of haze or altered state:

> He looked at [his fellow students] curiously, as if he had not seen them before, and felt very distant from them and very close to them. He held the feeling to him as he hurried to his next class, and held it through the lecture by his professor in soil chemistry, against the droning voice that recited things to be written in notebooks and remembered by a process of drudgery that even now was becoming unfamiliar to him. (Williams, 1965/2003, p. 14)

What meanings can we uncover from this encounter, which seems to alter and shift Stoner's embodied existence? For Daloz, "Mentors give us the magic that allows us to enter the darkness: a talisman to protect us from evil spells, a gem of wise advice, a map, and sometimes simply courage. But always the mentor appears near the outset of the journey as a helper, equipping us in some way for what is to come, a midwife to our dreams" (2012, p. 18). When William Stoner is confronted by his teacher about the meaning of Shakespeare—for which he has no words—his sensory awareness is heightened, he *holds his breath*. "It means …" is all he can say. It might seem as though he is momentarily paralyzed by some *dark* unknown. Indeed it may appear as

though Stoner is being called out or put on the spot. A closer look, however, shows that his response is not one of fear or embarrassment. Instead, as his fingers *unclench* he seems to be preparing to move toward a response. As he marvels and *feels the blood flowing,* he may be surrendering to the unknown, toward a dream that he cannot yet imagine, but one he seems to be called to. Indeed it may be that Sloan's access to some other knowledge, and his passionate rapport, move Stoner. A new "feeling" overtakes him as he re-enters the world of the school grounds transformed, with a new lens, a new curiosity. The "process of drudgery" that he had so long been accustomed to is interrupted as Stoner awakens to a new way of seeing the world. Perhaps just as he is unable to discern what the sonnet means, he can't know where his teacher's passion and understanding is coming from or where it is going, but he feels drawn to the "figure of Archer Sloan". Here at the *outset* of Stoner's journey, Sloan's speech invites his student into the *darkness*, and a new journey is born. What then might we learn from Stoner's experience, one he was perhaps unable to name, but one that he sensed and felt? Can it tell us anything about mentorship?

In the following semester of that first year of studies, Stoner changes his major from agriculture to English. It seems that the "feeling" instilled in Stoner that fateful day opened him up to this dramatic turn. Indeed he comes to excel in his English courses. Looking further into the trajectory of Stoner's academic life and into his relationship with Sloan offers us a way of considering the possibility of mentorship as the accumulation of interconnected moments. In the following interaction, four years later, Sloan calls Stoner to his office to inquire about his future plans. After admitting to not having thought much about his future, Stoner finds himself realizing, deciding, that he has no plans to return to the farm. He is then confronted by an entirely unthought possibility:

> "If you could maintain yourself for a year or so beyond graduation, you could, I'm sure, successfully complete the work for your Master of Arts; after which you would probably be able to teach while you worked toward your doctorate. If that sort of thing would be of interest to you at all."
>
> Stoner drew back. "What do you mean?" he asked and heard something like fear in his voice.
>
> Sloan leaned forward until his face was close; Stoner saw the lines on the long thin face soften, and he heard the dry mocking voice become gentle and unprotected.
>
> "But don't you know, Mr. Stoner?" Sloan asked. "Don't you understand about yourself yet? You're going to be a teacher."
>
> Suddenly Sloan seemed very distant, and the walls of the office receded. Stoner felt himself suspended in the wide air, and he heard his voice ask, "Are you sure?"
>
> "I'm sure," Sloan said softly.
>
> "How can you tell? How can you be sure?"
>
> "It's love, Mr. Stoner," Sloan said cheerfully. "You are in love. It's as simple as that." (Williams, 1965/2003, p. 20)

The young Stoner leaves the office in a dream-like state with an acute sense of his surroundings:

> He went out of Jesse Hall into the morning, and the greyness no longer seemed to oppress the campus; it led his eyes outward toward and upward into the sky, where he looked as if toward a possibility for which he had no name. (Williams, 1965/2003, p. 20)

No longer "mocking" but "gentle and unprotected," perhaps through a recognition of Stoner's transformed self, Sloan opens up another door for Stoner, toward a life of teaching. Indeed he comes to "see" Stoner in a way that is beyond or unrecognizable to Stoner himself. Stoner receives the suggestion at first with a sense of disbelief, even *fear*, asking for clarification. But

for Sloan, it is clear: he recognizes a dedication bound up with feeling, with "love". He guides Stoner in a completely new direction, toward the life of an academic. As Stoner takes in a new way of seeing himself and his future he becomes "suspended"—as though in transition between what he once was and what he could be. Once again, Sloan points Stoner toward "a possibility for which he had no name" yet one that Stoner is inclined to embrace: perhaps offering that *magic* that shows one toward undreamed *dreams*.

At this point we might wonder what is the significance of Sloan's offer to guide Stoner into academic life? How might this scenario be different from the common practice today of assigning academic supervisors?

The Latency of Mentorship

As we have seen, institutionalized arrangements such as graduate supervision can offer frameworks that may lead to mentorship. Yet mentorship can be sparked before such relationships are assigned, such as in the case of Stoner, or in other ways somehow adjacent to the supervisor-student paradigm. A professor of mine spoke to me about her one and only mentor. She admitted that he was never her official supervisor and added that "I think it was actually better that way!"

Often a mentor has already been in our life for some time, perhaps as a professor, a colleague, or an employer, and over time we begin to see him or her as a mentor. In the story of William Stoner "the figure of Archer Sloan" gradually appears as Sloan becomes Stoner's mentor over years of academic life. For many of us it is easy to name our professors, our supervisors and our bosses, yet when it comes to identifying our mentors, we often find this more difficult. Whereas

we may recognize the very moment a teacher became our teacher, such as the first day of classes, it seems to be only in hindsight that we come to see someone as a mentor. In this sense mentorship is a phenomenon that has latency; its full meaning can only be (partially) understood and felt afterwards.

Through the consideration of various interpretations of mentorship in relation to students' actual lived experiences we have considered the question of what receiving mentorship may be like. In many ways we moved away from conceptualizations of mentorship as a means to an end or a strategic formula for channeling students toward some fixed achievement by shifting our attention to instances of living through mentorship relations. Indeed some of the experiential descriptions around academic mentorship have uncovered that there is often a rift between our expectations of mentorship and the various ways these and other related relationships are actually experienced.

The disjuncture of our various expectations of mentorship and the ways it is actually experienced begs the question, how do we come to know that we have been mentored? Are there unique feelings specific to the experience of mentorship by which we might recognize it? Again, following van Manen (2012): "We may recognize the consequences of pedagogy [in this case mentorship] when we become aware of the latent, lasting, and lingering effects of the events that make up the innumerable often-forgotten experiences, foggily fragmented and half-remembered pedagogical happenings" (p. 9).

In *Tao Mentoring* (1995) Huang and Lynch respond to popular discourses on mentoring by calling for "individualized, tailored, one-to-one environments for giving and receiving the gift of wisdom—the time-honored process of mentoring" (p. xi). These authors encourage a paradigm

for a patient mentorship that is about guiding mentees to discover their own capacities and to "help them follow their integrity as they reawaken to the inner truth of who they are what they can do. … [through] a process of instilling mentorhood rather than embodying it" (p. 14). Mentorship in this way entails letting go of control and guiding without pushing one's agenda, while creating a space that encourages mentees to "think and accomplish for themselves" (Huang & Lynch, 1995, p. 103). This understanding of mentorship is akin to the pedagocial teachings of renowned educational philosopher Maxine Greene and her legacy of mentoring countless academics and other teachers throughout her prolific life. Recollections written by those whom she touched share a common theme of encouragement. They attest to Greene's way of supporting and validating emerging scholars to become who they could be (Lake, 2010). Many stories from Greene's mentees describe how she *instilled mentorship* by awakening them to their own possibilities, or as she has written: "to go beyond where they are" (1995, p. 173). In most cases, these testimonies by Greene's mentees were written after life-long relationships. How then do we discern such an intangible (yet known through its effects vis-à-vis the context) phenomenon?

In recognition of the evasiveness of mentorship I shift the focus to points of traction where we can understand there is a becoming mentored in progress as revealed through moments where awareness of certain aspects of the mentorship reveal themselves. From here we can begin to imagine how the layering of such moments might come together to conjure up a larger whole of a possible mentoring relationship.

One of my professors recently shared an insight about mentoring relationships that has stayed with me. He said that to truly encounter another one should not seek to describe the person in his or her taken-for-grantedness. Instead, one should encounter that person in his or her difference

and singular otherness. Reflecting on my relationship with my own mentor I recall a vivid moment 15 years ago:

> I am seated in the class among fellow students around a bunch of tables jammed into a large square. She enters the room with gusto and exuberance in her usual frenzied yet composed manner, juggling a stack of books and assignments. She is wearing her typical dress: long skirt and a cardigan, something more akin to what I'd expect a kindergarten teacher to wear, yet this is contrasted by what seems to me to be rather outlandishly bright pink lipstick. With much enthusiasm she begins briefing us on the day's program. Then suddenly, her feet captivate me!
>
> I lose track of what she is talking about as my gaze becomes fixed on her two different shoes. Both are slip-ons, but otherwise distinct in every way … one is blue the other red. I pass a curious note to my neighbor and soon others are also looking at her feet. Eventually she catches on to our growing sense of distraction. She looks down past her long skirt and notices the miss-match. An animated and genuine laugh escapes her; she then goes on with her lecture seemingly unfazed. I am held in a trance-like state, aware of my own heartbeat. As I leave, taking the feeling with me, the corridor and the halls shine with possibility.

As I was *held captive* by the magic animating my then instructor. Eventually she'd be my masters supervisor; unbeknownst to me, she was already becoming my mentor. Her response to her "miss-matched" shoes altered my awareness. My taken-for-granted conditioning of what is important ruptured, shifting my consciousness. Perhaps like Stoner I surrendered to the unknown, or unthought, toward a way of seeing and being in the world that was entirely new to me, one that was *shining with possibility*.

Teachers have the ability to touch students pedagogically with their gestures, idiosyncrasies and outlooks on the world, or in short, their ways of being and thinking (van Manen, 2014). This recalled moment resonates with what van Manen describes as *pedagogical love* (2012): I fell for

her. When we encounter someone who *captivates* us, we can't help but feel moved by their presence: "We recognize something in this other person that is uniquely special and that we must respect and protect—not for ulterior motives but for the sake of self and this other" (van Manen, 2012, p. 30).

It took years for the experience I have recollected to strike me as a possible mentorship moment. Perhaps the moment in isolation is not a mentorship moment at all. Yet if mentorship has latency, how might we come to discern mentoring moments? It seems that mentorship is not a one-time experience, but a conceptualized relationship out of which we can only refer to examples. The experiential moments we have reflected upon throughout this paper are not descriptions of mentorship as a phenomenon itself, but rather certain aspects of it; moments that open us toward it, and even instances of (mis)recognizing what mentorship may or may not be. Moments such as these seem to be only partially accessible and discernable. They take on new and changing meanings as our perspectives evolve and shift in correlation to the student-mentor relationship as a greater whole. Perhaps I have described a moment of inspiration, while other anecdotes have related moments of feeling comforted, awakened or supported.

How then does mentorship arise from the amassing of moments? It is only in retrospect that I can relate the blue/red shoe moment to the relationship I now consider to be mentorship. Yet, perhaps like in the case of Stoner's moment of becoming drawn to his English teacher, such experiences open us up as students toward the possibility of receiving mentorship. Indeed the power of the mentor to influence the very identity and future of the student—when a formal mentor-mentee relationship hasn't been established—is important. This is imperative to pedagogical relationships: students are attuned to the teacher's presence, whether they realize it

or not. Pedagogical moments that precede mentee-mentor relationships can set the stage for the becoming of a mentorship relationship.

Van Manen (2012) describes ways of practicing pedagogy through modes of contact. The mode of *devotional contact* can shed light on one way we might distinguish mentorship relationships from other pedagogical ones. Like my falling for my mentor, devotional contact describes a relationship that ignites a kind of falling for the mentee, in this case the student, who feels special: She is chosen, she has captured the mentor's care. This may be the "most complex and subtle way" (van Manen, 2012, p. 29) a pedagogical relationship can manifest.

Mentorship by Being there for Me as I Grow

The next experience description shows us one way that mentorship relationships hinge on other interconnected pedagogical moments, those prior and those to come:

> I thank the other presenter and the audience and then they all proceed to exit the room. Now the only person left in the room, I feel a sense of relief. As I pack up my laptop, my script, and my notes, I ask myself: Did I really do this? Did I really just present my very first academic presentation? That's it? It's finished? Yet, how was it? Suddenly, my supervisor peeks her head in the doorway and re-enters the room. With a smile, she approaches me: "That was great. Even the professor next to me leaned twice toward me saying you are great". Looking into my eyes she teases: "See, it is not enough that I say you are good; but when others notice too, then you know it was *really* good". Some easy words, but they strike me deeply. I am speechless, barely believing what I have heard. But her face is so genuine and proud. It convinces me and clears my long-standing self-doubt.

How many of us, after giving a presentation, have found ourselves in a similar state of mind: somehow suspended between disbelief and "relief" about having *really* done it? Indeed we live

through such intense moments, but we do so *through* ourselves and out of a headspace that is entirely different from that of the onlooker. Such moments can leave us yearning to know "how was it?"

Almost immediately following the presentation, the student receives a response. The answer comes not only from someone in the audience, but from someone she knows, who knows her, and the source is "genuine". Indeed, the student's supervisor was there.

What can this story tell us about the power of "some easy words" to attest that "it was *really* good?" And what can the potential of one gesture to erode abiding "self-doubt" tell us about mentoring? Mentors can help mentees by instilling self-reliance and confidence through their capacities to both validate and affirm (Huang & Lynch, 1995). Indeed when a mentor asserts something, it can carry more weight, than if said by another.

The following excerpt from a letter to Maxine Greene takes us further. William Reynolds (2010) recalls an experience, 15 years after it occurred, of eleven words Greene said to him after an educational research meeting. He was with his own graduate students when an opportunity arose to meet Greene:

> When I turned to notice the entrance to the courtyard, I saw that you had arrived. I had read your works, of course, but had never met you. I decided I would introduce myself and my students … I walked up and introduced us. I noticed you were looking at me and thinking. After the introductions, there was a pause, and then you looked straight at me and pointed your finger at me and said words that echo in my memory. Here is how I remember it: You said as you gently waved your finger, "Yes, I know your work, and your writing keeps getting better." Then you walked on to meet and talk with other people. I will never forget those 11 words. Not only did they encourage me, but you said

> them in front of my graduate students. Maxine Greene actually knew my work. Those types of kind words stay with us. (p. 117)

As in the case of the previously discussed student's experience, Reynolds shows how words from a mentor figure can have long-standing impact. For Huang and Lynch (1995), a mentor has the ability to use "her influence to give her partner exposure and visibility" (p. 15). Thinking of mentorship in this regard can turn us toward considering aspects of mentorship that are contingent on the mentoring relationship's intersection with our relations with others, in this case, with other academics. We might wonder how mentorship experiences might support our passage into academic communities and the world at large.

Mentorship that Turns us Outward Toward the World

When we consider mentorship as a relational construct with the potential of supporting us in academic life, we shift away from the time-bound objectives and tangible goals that are often associated with interpretations that see mentorship as a job that can be accomplished. In doing so, possibilities around mentoring necessarily widen to encompass aspects of our existence that go beyond tangible outcomes such as research proposals, candidacy exams and graduation. The following account offers an example:

> One evening, following the class my supervisor taught, he asked if I had a few minutes to talk. After the other students wandered out he said "I want to talk to you about what is happening in this Faculty. You need to know that with the way this Faculty is going, you won't get a job here". I was taken aback by this. It was not the conversation I had expected and it seemed to come out of nowhere. I sat down and listened, fully attentive.
>
> He went on to explain the changes that he saw happening around him; changes that were antithetical to his work, the work of his students, and to his mind the purpose of

> education. He confided in me the difficulty he had convincing the Department to preserve the program he had worked so hard to develop over many years. He was certain that it was losing all sense of the larger understanding of pedagogy, becoming a market-driven institute focused on training. He was visibly distressed. I remained quiet, listening. As he pointed things out, I could suddenly see them for what they were. This place was changing.
>
> "I want you to be able to teach my class. I want there to be a space for you to do the kind of work I am preparing you for. But you won't be able to do that here. You will have to go elsewhere." He looked genuinely upset by this, possibly angry, and I was surprised. Not so much by his reaction, but by the fact that he had confided this to me. I was struck by how his consideration of my future prospects was steps ahead of my own planning. He is genuinely concerned, I thought. He *really* cares.

The student is "taken aback" by her supervisor's "out of nowhere" illumination of a subject with both political and personal connotations. The serious tone of his account compels her to sit down. As he divulges his assessment of the department's current state of affairs, the student notices his *distress* and "suddenly" her own grasp of the situation appears to have shifted. For Daloz (2012), mentoring involves the sharing of wisdom in a way that helps open us up to new ways of seeing, "inviting a more spacious consciousness" (p. 252). Mentors, in this way, are able to discern a given reality "that we recognize to be true but for which we have somehow lacked the language" (Daloz, 2012, p. 252). Indeed as the supervisor shares his view of the "way this Faculty is going," he unleashes a warning with a disposition of "you need to know". As graduate students, many of us may be unprepared for the type of warning that hits so close to home. By relating his criticism of the Department to her own future prospects—with repeated emphasis on "you"—he is, to a certain degree, "enabling ideas to root in the mind of his student, which is a caring act not without risk" (Daloz, 2012, p. 242). The construct of mentoring promoted within universities is one of helping the student, and in turn, the organization (Roberts &

Chernopiskaya, 1999). Perhaps in this regard his gesture may suggest a violation of his professional allegiance to the university and an overstepping of the boundaries of a supervisory relationship. Indeed the student, seemingly aware of this tension, is surprised that he *confides* in her. The student's account suggests that her supervisor may feel compelled to guide her, through a kind of warning stance, about what lies ahead—something that she *ought* to know. Indeed he offers her an opening, "a way of knowing just ahead of where we are" (Daloz, 2012, p. 252).

We may wonder what such a gesture of forewarning implies about their relationship. That the supervisor revealed his own vulnerability seems to insinuate that he respects and trusts his student. We might even get the impression that he feels a responsibility to advise his student that the "purpose of education", including her education, is somehow being undermined and that this may impact her.

Huang and Lynch (1995) suggest that a sign of good mentorship is the mentor's willingness to risk taking a stance to advocate for the sake of the mentee caught in a hard place. Here, the scenario seems to be one that threatens the student's prospects of doing a certain kind of work. While the supervisor's account of the circumstances is arguably cause for concern, one that calls the student to "see them for what they were", it also serves to communicate something else. The student comes to see that "he *really* cares". Indeed the student's account impresses upon us that she recognized her supervisor's sense of care for her and for her future. For van Manen (2012) pedagogical relations nurtured by familial contact *spark* feelings of care: the student experiences trust and being worried about.

While the anecdote seems to show a caring attitude toward the student, we might wonder if the care is also intrinsically wrapped up in something more. What might we make of the particular

political or ideological stance of which both parties have a stake, “the purpose of education”? Considering the political opens us to an interpretation of mentoring not as action orientated toward some form of return on investment, such as successfully supervising a student through her degree. Rather, it presents mentorship as an opportunity to share one’s own gifts toward some sort of contribution to larger society such as enhancing the “larger understanding of pedagogy”.

For David G. Smith the first quality of a mentor is to be someone who is also engaged in the work, which is different from the concept of an expert. For him, not all experts can be mentors: Indeed for an expert or another to go beyond their duty, this requires making a turn: recognizing that it is not about *you*. When it comes to mentors, for Smith, there are no experts, no shortcuts (personal conversation, January 10, 2014). In this sense we might consider how the mentor-mentee relationship is focused on “the work”. In what ways is mentorship comparable to the notion of apprenticeship, where novices learn a trade or an art through practical experience (“apprentice”, n.d.)? The one-on-one aspect of mentorship distinguishes it form apprenticeship, which is often more group oriented, yet what might we learn from the emphasis apprenticeship places on working together?

Rogoff (1995) has shown how a metaphor of apprenticeship can help us to understand sociocultural activity focused on work and learning. She describes apprenticeship as a scenario where newcomers to a community are encouraged to develop skills and understanding through participation with others, including those with specialized skills. In the process, they become more responsible participants. In this sense apprentices engage in the work through culturally/institutionally-oriented activities—toward certain purposes that connect those involved to others outside the group (Rogoff, 1995). This interpretation of apprenticeship, which

acknowledges that interpersonal relations and the social are contingent on each other, can inform how we think about graduate student mentorship. Indeed we might consider mentorship as more than a binary relationship between two individuals and, rather, as a synergetic and expansive relationship, interconnected to something larger. Mentoring relationships with graduate students, in this sense, are embedded in academic culture, and by extension involve a responsibility to the greater human condition. We might understand mentoring relationships of this nature to be about sharing one's common humanity with another, as a "gift of birth, not of training" (Daloz, 2012, p. 241).

The following anecdote explores the interpretation of mentoring as gifting a bit further.

> I met with a former professor and member of my supervisory committee to discuss possible directions for a paper I was working on. After an hour or so, feeling satisfied with the insights he offered, on a whim I changed the subject. I asked him how, in this current moment of the university's history, emerging scholars like myself might respond to the consequent turn away from intellectuality toward training. After a rather long pause, he emphasized discernment and the importance of "reading the Western tradition". He also spoke of fear, both his own and the fear he recognizes in others, when it comes to challenging the institution. He called this "a moral failure". And then looking at me in the eye and nodding slowly and pensively, he suggested that I organize an open session for talking about this important issue. And he offered to "kick it off"! I was both surprised and inspired by this gesture. I walked away from that meeting motivated, head spinning with ideas. I promised myself I would work to make this thing happen.

The student, "satisfied" with the "insights" she gathered from her interaction with her professor, takes the opportunity to seek a different kind of help or advice from him. She lays before him a philosophical question about the changing nature of academic life, including herself there within. As she opens up to him, an opening emerges for the professor. He falls into a speech, engaging

with her by speaking to the problem that he too recognizes and that he too falls within. In a moment—"after a long pause"—he moves from the role of teacher to one of guide in the journey of life. He recognizes a seed and turns it into something else by calling upon her to act, to "organize an open session". Yet he does not simply suggest what to do, he offers to be a part of it, to "kick it off". It is not so much his *recognition* of the problem, but his response to it *motivates and inspires* her. She leaves the meeting "head spinning with ideas," with new courage and a plan validated and supported by someone she trusts and respects. Yet what compels her to commit to making "this thing happen?"

Often as graduate students on the receiving end of mentorship, we find ourselves desiring to meet and even honour our mentors' expectations of us. We often strive to merit the wisdom and the insight offered by the mentor. In this sense we engage in the work—not out of obligation as though paying a debt—but out of respect and gratitude for the mentor's art of showing us the way (Gehrke, 1988). Perhaps the student desires to rise up and be that person her professor imagines her to be, one capable of acting and indeed intervening in the problem at hand. It seems that her recognition of having received a gift inspires her to "commit" to actually responding to the "moral failure" with a newfound *way* of doing so. This exchange is in line with Tao mentorship, where the mentor responds to advice sought by giving "a blessing and permission to 'fly' when one is ready" and in turn, the mentee "trusts that it's safe to move forward" (Huang & Lynch, 1995, p. 15).

We might now draw a parallel between this encounter and the one described previously—"what is happening in this faculty". It seems that, in both scenarios, at stake is a "moral failure" with regard to the "purpose of education", whereby all parties are somehow implicated. Surely mentorship does not occur independent of the political context in which we struggle. In this way,

mentorship becomes a moral endeavor. Even so, it is a subjective one: one can be mentored into the Tea Party, the Green Party, the ministry, the local community league, "a market-driven institute focused on training", and so on.

In both of these encounters, the professors offered openings for their students to see not only beyond the status quo, but to dare to act upon the world toward more just circumstances. They not only offered advice or counsel, they themselves intervened toward change. Implicated in the political circumstances their students are facing, the professors' mentorship seems to arise through "an embodied knowing of the radical interdependence of all life" (Daloz, 2012, p. 261). This kind of mentoring relationship might be seen as a partnership, a form of solidarity, whereby both parties—in and through their contingency with the political—come together to confront a profoundly endangered world. In this way, the line between learning and healing blurs as "the passage of the gift binds people to each other … [and] becomes a vehicle of cohesiveness in the culture" (Gehrke, 1988, p. 191).

So what can we learn from the gift-giving interpretation of mentorship? Much as in the case of more structured mentoring relationships, it is the student's future prospects that seem to be of interest. The concern is not only with education in the formal sense: it becomes more widely about the cultivation of wisdom in the student: wisdom about navigating the precarity of academic life. These lessons aren't only reserved for the protégé: they also and necessarily include the mentor (Daloz, 2012). Mentorship may be understood in this sense as a relational experience where support and other human offerings can flow in multiple directions. Still, if the relations between student and mentor can be likened to aspects of a gift exchange economy, then the process does not end with student's own *awakening*. The gift is necessarily passed along to another or others, otherwise it loses its nature as a gift that gives (Gehrke, 1988). In this way

mentorship holds the possibility of "self-transcendence"; the mentor-mentee dyad becomes a partnership that helps both parties "to cultivate an open heart-mind, enabling us to experience our interdependence with the world" (Huang & Lynch, p. 21).

Toward Concluding: Mentorship as Beyond and Becoming

As Merleau-Ponty (1962/2005; 1948/2008) has shown, the ways we come to understand our relationships—most of which are *master-slave* relations—and thus conceptualize our world are reflected in the way we see ourselves and other selves as human beings interacting in the world. Although conceptions of mentorship hold many promises, even the possibility of horizontal relations premised on genuine reciprocity, these ideals—when superimposed on an institutional structure predicated on corporate style management—are at risk of being stillborn. As graduate students move into academic mentoring relationships—with those ahead of them, those sometimes called their "superiors"—they enter a power differentiated terrain. This territory is already structured to disable them from exerting their rights with the same degree of power as their more privileged counterparts. As it appeared in various scenarios of mentorship mistaken, some graduate students are seeing or being seen as subjectivities "lost", "trapped", "disconnected", "dumbfounded", "stunned", "crushed" and otherwise held in static positions, as one student put it, with "no real destination in mind". In this way, like van Manen's (1991) notion of pedagogical tact, mentorship is a phenomenon that reveals itself more readily in situations where we experience that it was greatly lacking.

The student anecdotes shared in this paper describe moments of interaction with academic supervisors and/or professors. It cannot be said that all were about or exemplary of mentoring. Indeed, as these anecdotes show, it cannot be assumed that anyone tasked with mentoring or who

wants to mentor can actually do so. Nor is mentoring what necessarily happens to mentees, at least not all of the time. Perhaps it may have been more accurate to entitle this paper "experiences of academic supervision or guidance". Yet, graduate students' actual experiences of supervision (and other comparable academic relationships) reveal the expectation of some kind of mentorship, despite not necessarily knowing what it is like. The experiences described in this paper also seem to suggest a tendency toward some kind of lack or even excess of those various expectations of mentorship. Mentorship escapes, in each unique encounter, as something other than simply expectations met. Sometimes mentoring moments fall short of our expectations, in other instances they go beyond the call of duty. At times they reveal openings that "shine with possibility". Such excesses hold the potential to take us toward the unknown or the not yet, "as if toward a possibility for which [we have] no name".

It seems that distinguishing mentorship from graduate supervision (for example, by calling out those institutional claims that position supervisors as distributors of mentorship) is an appropriate response to what has been revealed through this exploration of students' actual experiences around mentorship. Thinking about mentorship as a relational paradigm rooted in pedagogical intent rather than a set of more technical duties may help us to avoid conflating our expectations of a supervisory relationship with those we can only hope for or welcome from a potential mentor. It is in this sense we might interpret mentorship as having some sort of capacity to guide us to become the best we can be—even if this means along a pathway that is not like that of the professor or institution or some other predefined existence. In this way we might consider mentorship not as a static relationship we enter into, but rather, as the layering and intersecting of various relational moments through which we see ourselves, and are seen, becoming.

Thus, considering that mentorship may not be an experience we can simply orchestrate, anticipate or expect to achieve, it may be impossible to distinguish it in concrete terms. Rather, we may be better served to consider its potential to manifest in the beyond ordinary, in the realm of the exceptional: in those special relationships that build around mentoring moments that we recognize as such only in retrospect. Mentorship from this heuristic angle becomes fluid, holding the potential to impact one's life journey, but not always explicably or even recognizably so and often in ways we cannot foresee. It does not seem to arise out of obligation or duty, but freedom, through encounters that somehow transport us out of ourselves toward someone or something that calls to us. In such instances we need not know where we are going, yet we are compelled to follow. In such mysterious ways, two souls in the making come together, creating what seems to exceed the sum of what was shared. It is in this sense that mentorship might indeed carry an aura of magic and mystery, defying any tangible or held meaning, each special manifestation singularly different and other.

If indeed mentors are special kinds of teachers who can show us who we are, what we can become and how we are seen or regarded (Greene, 1995; van Manen, 2012), then an emphasis on perception is particularly pertinent when it comes to guiding these pedagogical relationships. Following Merleau-Ponty (1948/2008), to better understand the potential of academic mentorship, let us "not find excuses for ourselves in our good intentions; let us see what becomes of these once they have escaped from inside us" (p. 68). It is with this in mind that I do not conclude with a well-intended list of ways to develop mentorship scenarios. I opt instead to offer a final point of reflection for those of us who might be, or might come to be, in positions to do the mentoring. I do this from my own mobile state of becoming academic and from my artivist stance, that is, from a vantage that is interested in shifting power through the creation of new

relationalities premised on the possibility of harmonious co-existence. My understanding of graduate student mentorship is informed, as always, by only partial and fragmented understandings of the phenomenon in question. I have not studied the lived experiences of academic mentors, and am not one myself (certainly any phenomenological study from this vantage would be beneficial). Thus my vantage is one that comes from below. With my biases, now re-thought and re-made, stated again, I offer a final provocation from this moment and place where I think and do.

Since the situational particulars of each pedagogical moment with graduate students hold simultaneously the possibility of mentorship and mentorship missed, it seems imperative to me that aspiring mentors attend to the challenge of shifting academic desire away from the standardized and standardizing tendencies of institutionalized relations. To this purpose, I propose a passage to reflection on mentorship premised on an ethic of responsibility toward those who are in positions of less power. Such vigilant reflection might bring into view that which the corporatization of academic life has masked and normalized. It is to see the singularity of graduate students, our/their agencies and vulnerabilities, and to accept to be guided by our/their perspectives toward re-imagining what mentorship could be; It is to reflect upon those instances of mentorship that have escaped us, and allow them to inspire us to become pedagogues who can guide and be guided.

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Artivism 4 Life:

Between the Lines and in the Excesses of an Academic Project

Leslie Robinson

There is not a world that is represented,

but a world that is constantly invented in the enunciation.

—Mignolo (Interview with Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014, p. 198)

Through the interconnected pieces of *Becoming artivists: Artivist Inter-Actions Toward Creative Re-Existence* and all the necessary adjacent artivist enounters, artivism was brought to scholarship and scholarship to artivism through a dual process of translation through which academic discourse was re-appropriated by artivist epistemology, re-made and re-turned. Fostering inter-cultural learning spaces opened up artivist inter-spaces for young artists to engage through differences, similarities and contradictions toward relationalities not yet in existence. Oscillating between practices of becoming artivist/becoming academic unfolded tactics for community-engaged creative scholarship committed to decolonial futures. Dwelling at the borders and sensing the power differentials—from either side of the colonial divide—unfolded a collective artivist consciousness as decolonial aesthetics/aesthesis took form. Fixed relations prescribed by modernity/coloniality—including those of the researcher-researched and the teacher-learner—were re-imagined through the reconnection of creative practices to collective action, responding to Mignolo's (2011a) call to "articulate new politics of knowledge rather than new contents" (p. 58). Taken together these *becomings* worked to provoke conversations hospitable to a pluriversity of enunciators and enunciations. Artivist inter-actions in this way sought to go beyond mere inclusion of differences by shifting emphasis toward the co-creation of new modes of inter-human relation premised on mutual understandings (Papastergiadis, 2011) and the goal of mutual recognitions (Fanon, 1952/67). Artivism, not an action in and of itself, must necessarily de- and re-centre itself as new observations and thus obligations enter its radar. Neither applied method nor mode of representation *our* artivism was *constantly (re)invented in the enunciation* as *being artivists* opened up the possibility of new beings and becomings. This set of contributions to scholarship *and* academic life was thus only made possible by *our* artivism acting upon the world in each and every artivist inter-action. Through the intersection of

art and action we re-configured the research practice on *our* own terms, engaging in change processes legitimized by *our* own communities.

Through the *becomings* of my doctoral experience I engaged with members of the *artivists 4 life* collective, other young people, fellow graduate students and others in processes of problem-identification. Issues addressed included youth apathy, youth unemployment, sexual exploitation, (mis)representation of Ugandan culture and the (im)possibility of graduate student mentorship. Rather than dwelling on these *contents* I will conclude instead with a discussion addressing the greater *contexts* for which these issues are symptomatic. In other words, I shall offer points of reflection for guiding *new terms of conversation* for artivist/academic projects and others that share the goal of communal re-existence. To end with imagination is a necessary response for any project with the goal of de-linking from the current quick fix model of today's corporate university. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013a) reminds us of the *politics of knowledge* we are up against:

> The privileging of quantification of complex human phenomena cascaded from the belief that "major problems of social life have been solved and that all that remains is a few minor problems of adjustment which do not call the foundations of the society into question, but rather require merely technical solutions." Within this type of a university the knowledges produced are for equilibrium. Large scale and radical changes of a revolutionary nature are not envisioned and tolerated. (p. 49)

Ndlovu-Gatsheni's concern is in line with educational philosopher Lewis Gordon's (2006) critique of contemporary academic life. Gordon (2006), like Maldonado-Torres (2008), Mignolo (2011a) and other decolonial thinkers, understands that we must build decolonial options that are epistemological and hence culture-systemic for responding to global coloniality. For Gordon (2006), the perpetuation of adjustment research is symptomatic of *disciplinary decadence*. He describes some of the implications of this tendency:

> Many disciplines lose sight of themselves as efforts to understand the world and have collapsed into the hubris of asserting themselves *as the world*. Locked in their own subscribed regions—beyond which is quite simply the end of the world—they shift from articulating their own limits and conditions of possibility to the assertion of their legitimacy in deontological terms—in terms, that is, that are categorical or absolute, in terms that do not require purpose. (p. 8, italics in original)

Gordon's critique is pertinent here because he is addressing the issue of disciplinary scope. Failing to call into question the limits of one's discipline through voluntary forgetfulness of what other disciplines (and anti-disciplines) can offer leaves only the application of disciplinary knowledge, which can only lead to the kind of *knowledge for equilibrium* that Ndlovu-Gatsheni describes. For Gordon (2006), "[s]uch work militates against thinking" (p. 5).

It goes without saying that artivism occupies the very lowest of disciplinary ranks. Yet, it is precisely because of this status, and *through* this subterranean perspective, that it "invites us to see familiar things in different ways" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012, pp. 1–2). For Maldonado-Torres (2008), hope for radical change lies in the struggles of the marginalized, the acceptance of their agency, and the willingness to be guided by their perspectives. Extending this *thinking* to address intellectual coloniality we can see that the artivist vantage offers a fitting response to the perpetuation of various forms of academic stagnation—away from the prospect of *adjustment* research toward *purposeful* engagement with humanity's most pressing problems. It is in this spirit—through an invitation to learn from the struggles *and* agency of a handful of *becoming artivists*—that I will conclude. But first, I will pause: to re-visit my changing role as an academic; and, to shed more light on the limitations of artivism.[1]

[1] The following two sections were written after my defense, in response to the request by my committee members to describe the limitations of artivism and to further expound my positionality through a discussion entitled "Researching the Researcher".

Re-Searching the Co-Researcher Relationality

Fanon's pedagogy is particularly instructive for the intellectual seeking to reject individualism in favour of a different vocabulary. Through his diagnosis of colonial thinking he refutes "the idea of a society of individuals where each person shuts [her]self up in [her] own subjectivity, and whose only wealth is individual thought" (1961/2001, p. 36). Following this reasoning, I amended the suggested title for this section from "Researching the Researcher" to "Re-Searching the Co-Researcher Relationality" to shift emphasis away from the fallacy of compartmentalized thinking. Because my role as a *(co)researching* academic is contingent on my simultaneous *becoming* artivist, it would be an artificial exercise to attempt to sever my subjectivity and the relationality of the collective: aspects that are mutually informing and intersecting. What is relevant, however, is a discussion of *who I am supposed to be* in relation to *who am I am becoming because we are becoming artivists together*. The colonial matrix of power (Mignolo, 2011a) prescribes who I am—white/female/heterosexual/Canadian/educated/somewhat privileged, with some authority—along with corresponding allotments of power and an expected trajectory for my use of it, all in the grand scheme of maintaining unequal power divisions. Following what Sartre wrote in his preface to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1961/2001), I contend that "we only become what we are by the radical and deep-seated refusal of that which others have made of us" (p. 15). Refusing to be locked to modernity/coloniality's prescriptions I have chosen an artivist subjectivity and sociability.

Yet how do I—made in and through my relationships with fellow artivists and members of my academic community—describe my unique role, or my way of being, within this artivist/academic relationality? How do I show, for example, that my collaborative research isn't actually doing harm?

The short (and epistemically incorrect) answer to both questions is: *I* can't.

Through experiencing and reflecting upon the possibility of mentorship, I have come to understand that only the mentee can name her mentor, that is, one can not claim to be someone's mentor. I contend that this logic also holds true for research with communities: it is the very communities for whom the research is *for* that are best positioned to validate the effects that our artivism is producing in the name of *creating for a better word.* As Ibrahim (2014) has discerned, "intentions matter only in their final effects, in how they make people feel and in how they are read" (p. 10). Thus coming closer to uncovering some actual impacts of my inter-actions with *artivists 4 life* and our contributions to scholarship and, in turn, scholarship's contributions to artivism, requires more than my well calculated and articulated claims. You, the reader, would have to *feel* the light that artivism is spreading and accept to *read* my words as ideas emulating from a greater artivist consciousness.

In this way I cannot explain who I am as researcher and how I conduct myself in the everyday sphere of living artivist/academic life. I can only offer examples. By sharing about three *final effects*—one artivist message and two graduation events, I hope to move us closer to experiencing the kind of effects that artivism is capable of producing.

Becoming artivist/academics: Supported/supporting

Figure 7.1. Help for equality: Prosperity for all by *artivists 4 life*, 2014, Mukono

I speak to this one image, among thousands of available *artivists 4 life* images because, to me, it embodies an artivist consciousness, one that is becoming *nuanced* by salient scholarly insights. This mural was created by members of *artivists 4 life* in the summer of 2014. The provocation was to imagine a world where peace and diversity would flourish. At the time I was pregnant and literally and emotionally elsewhere. I will never forget the moment I first saw this image. I had never seen anything like it, yet immediately it resonated with me, as something communicating an idea I also held, but had not yet imagined in this way.

Leading up to this moment, in my academic writing, I had been using the term decolonial aesthethics, words fellow *artivists 4 life* don't actually use, but a theoretical understanding I sensed accurately describes our approach to doing art. I had also been reading the work of Frantz Fanon and was citing him to help articulate what I observed was emerging as an artivist consciousness: a commitment to an ethic of responsibility toward those below, that is those categorically positioned by modernity/coloniality as somehow less-human.

In this image (figure 7.1), recognizing one's own mobility, the graduate is taking a step ahead. Despite facing a precarious future, she turns to an Other worse off than herself in a radical gesture of love, encouraging her to also step ahead. Here, akin to Fanon's conception of a new humanity, space is created for ethico-political movement from subject to subject.
Moving from the vertical toward the horizontal, this kind of relationality epitomizes traction toward decolonial futures where a multiplicity of ways of knowing and doing can inter-act.

As I amend this conclusion, on the cusp of achieving my highest degree, I am moving one step closer to the powerful places of academia, and also to the possibility of being in a greater position to teach or mentor others. It thus seems fitting to me to fixate on this image as a reminder to my future self, and as an offering to other selves. It is a provocation to see the singularity of those subjectivities below—students, youth, or anyone else ranked by modernity/coloniality as somehow less-than-human—their vulnerabilities and agencies. It is to accept to be guided by their perspectives toward re-imagining community-engaged research, pedagogy and human relations at large. In what follows I bring us closer to this kind of relationality through two inter-connected examples of stepping ahead together.

Leading up to my defense on July 7, 2015, with the help and support of others, I intervened to change the structure of the exam from closed-door (the convention at the University of Alberta) to public. I felt obligated to open up the exam because I believe that having a public present changes the terms of the conversation. Not only what I had to share that day, but how I shared it, was contingent on the presence of a small group of academics (fellow students and professors) and members of *artivists 4 life* who attended via video conferencing. It meant a great deal to me to have these two groups there with me, becoming artivist and becoming academic together. As part of my public presentation I asked the following questions:

What if those for whom the research has been with and for could have considerable say in the outcome of the examination?

What if the artivist public and the academic public could both ask questions?

What if the questions and answers flowed in multiple directions?

Speaking/acting in this way I hoped to respond to the Fanonian (1961/2001) understanding that:

> the more the intellectual imbibes the atmosphere of the people, the more completely [s]he abandons the habits of calculation, of unwonted silence, of mental reservations, and shakes off the spirit of concealment. And it is true that already at that level we can say that the community triumphs, and that it spreads its own light and its own reason. (p. 37).

Acting at my candidacy exam by speaking directly to *those for whom the research has been with and for* (not only to the examination committee) and challenging the underlying logic of the examination proceedings was an effort to *spread artivism's light and its own reason*. Even though neither the academic public nor the artivist public had any official say in the outcome of my examination, together I believe we succeeded, at least to some extent, in *shaking off the spirit of concealment*.

Figure 7.2. Certificate of Appreciation awarded by *artivists 4 life*

On August 3, 2015, I was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation (figure 7.2) by *artivists 4 life* at a lunch held in Mukono in celebration of the successful outcome of my examination and my return to Uganda. This day my efforts as a co-researcher were validated by the community best positioned to do so.

Figure 7.3. Artivist Joseph Kalungi' graduation ceremony (September 2, 2015)

Two weeks later, I was invited by artivist Joseph Kalungi to attend his University graduation celebration (figure 7.3). It was an honour to be a part of this moment of stepping ahead in which Kalungi acknowledged how becoming an artivist showed him the way to getting a degree, declaring "this degree is not for me, it is for *artivists 4 life*" (September 2, 2015).

I invite you to *read* and *feel* the artivist relationality at work in these inter-secting experiences. It is to participate in a critical/creative process that works to undo colonial prescriptions and trajectories by looking beyond the false logic that suggests Kalungi was out of his *proper* place at my defense, and I out of mine at his graduation. Here the objective is not to accept to live together peacefully in the confines of modern/colonial prescriptions, but to imagine re-existing in a relational space where all subjects can freely support each other.

Artivism with/without Limitations

Because artist reasoning does not subscribe to individualism and competition the artivist does not spend energy contriving arguments of how artivism is more-than/less-than other anti-oppression or decolonizing methods/pedagogies or any other approach that shares the goal of "creating for a better world" for all. Indeed the artivist recognizes that

> it's going to take all of us, mothers, daughters, sons, fathers, scientists, rappers, painters, filmmakers, nutritionists, entrepreneurs, teachers, et cetera, each one of us, loving each other, which is only possible by loving ourselves, affirming our own self-worth, and realizing that we are all connected. (Asante, 2008, p. 72)

In this sense answering the question of artivism's limitations becomes a paradox. Artivists can face infinite limitations, including any and all abuses to the human condition. Thus, on one hand artivism only knows working in the sphere of limitation. Yet artivists work from an open field of possibility through the understanding that creative imagination has no reservations. Further, any and all persons are eligible to become artivists because artivism is open to all backgrounds, all races, all genders/sexes, all classes, and all ages. In short, there is no VIP pass required for entry into artivism's inclusive club. Yet accepting to become an artivist means accepting "to think and plan with no limitations as the only way of creating a better world" (Kabanda, archival document, 29 March, 2012). This openness, however, should not serve to exempt artivism/artivists from criticism, especially self-criticism, nor does it place artivists in an artistic la-la-land. Rather, artivism *is* criticism and its land is a broken land. While it is often claimed that a certain artist (or academic) is ahead of the times, this cannot be said of the artivist: As Asante (2008) reminds us, "[i]t is essential that we realize that we, the budding artivists of today, are bound by the times we find ourselves in" (p. 208). Indeed the synergy of art and activism infusing one another binds artivism to the everyday realities calling artivists to remake the land.

Yet, this urgency does not prevent artivists from imagining the world ahead of our times: indeed as Fanon instructs us, our action requires an understanding of history, traction in the present and a vision of a new humanism.

So here, out of the limitations imposed by assaults on humanity, artivism becomes a force of possibility as artivists seek freedom through critical/creative reflection/action toward a better tomorrow. The limitation is thus *always* that the work of artivism is perpetually beginning: until we live in a decolonized world where all people are free from subjugation, the work of the artivist remains unfinished.

Toward Purposeful Engagement

What follows is a set of observed problems, or *diagnostics*, along with corresponding tactics, not necessarily solutions, for confronting them. These thinking points have the shared goal of shifting academic desire away from the hegemonic tendencies of dominant scholarship toward creative new ethics and forms of social relations premised on the creation of affinities with those from below.

For those of us committed to *radical change* we must confront the ways in which graduate student programs and University life in general are reproducing parasitical subjectivities confined to fixed relations. Following Ahmed (2012), it is no longer sufficient to make institutional claims without performing them: we must denaturalize our complacency in the rhetoric of institutions and disciplines and the false separation of theory and practice that supports inaction. An artivist tactic for de-linking from academic mimicry is to look outside of academia to other communities in search of modes of inter-relationality that support collaboration, multiple forms of enunciation and other terms of conversation that are generally *not envisioned and tolerated* by academia. Creating affinities with communities from below,

particularly those actively engaged in change processes toward alternatives to modernity, not only allows for a more implicated epistemic vantage, it obligates *purpose.* This shift way from *academia as world* to *academia with the world* demands epistemic disobedience: It is to *choose* to engage in decolonizing projects where the aim is decolonization not success according to academia's prescriptions (Mignolo, in interview with Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014).

Genuine encounters with communities of practice that reside outside of the academy and on the fringes of modernity/coloniality (on the fringes because there is no outside) have the power to challenge and provoke taken-for-granted constructs of what it means to do research while creating traction for imagining alternative (and better) options. Research practices in the academy have become increasingly de-politicized through their absorption into the kind of disciplinary logic that leads to the denial of social realities through "self-preservation that militates against living in a social world" (Gordon, 2006, p. 7). Partnerships with communities resisting dominant culture and the mechanisms of global coloniality can help to open up inter-spaces for imagining new modes of inter-action premised on community self-determination. As academics we are trained to make claims, yet rarely are we held accountable to transform them into action. Establishing adjacent partnerships with communities where it is acknowledged that the communities themselves are best positioned to legitimize the work (or at minimum be actively involved in this process) is a tactic for shifting academic desire toward creative new ethics and forms of social relations. This requires shifting away from the normalized practice of *using* communities to advance disciplinary research toward co-creating horizontal community-academic relations where it is understood that each party brings something to the process. In a presentation at the 2014 John Douglas Taylor Conference: Contemporary Orientations in African Cultural Studies at McMaster, Ugandan artivist Nalubowa (May 30, 2014) had something to say, and a way of saying it, that demonstrates this kind of horizontal inter-action:

> With our (artivist) approach of each one teach one, we create open learning and unlearning spaces where each one is special and has something to bring to the table. All our members come from different backgrounds with different stories, different sets of skills, different levels of Western education from as low as High school drop outs all the way to PhD students and we have collaborated with and developed messages for scholars and people with no Western education at all.

To follow this kind of inter-action requires us academics to accept to re-educate ourselves by unlearning in order to relearn (Mignolo, 2011a): That is, it demands unlearning much of our academic training when it comes to hierarchical research relations in order to relearn modes inter-human contact. Accepting the agency of community partners is imperative to this shift toward horizontal inter-action. Following artivism, a tactic for such relearning is to transition emphasis away from representation toward enunciation and the enunciator: It is to take seriously the capacity of community members, by making space for their articulations, even if it means stepping aside. What Artivist Nalubowa (2014) had to say to a community of academics at McMaster, and that a place was made for her to say it from, is instructive:

> We (artivists) understand that as African youths or youths anywhere, it is our responsibility to effect social justice in our communities, country and continent by creating free open spaces where we can interact with scholars, community leaders and other youths across the globe to unlearn our colonial beliefs and tendencies that everything Western is superior or "cool" and everything that is not is inferior or "uncool".

In demonstrating her agency Nalubowa is calling attention to the reality that so many "African youths or youths anywhere" are being denied the chance to take part in the discourses that shape their lives. This begs the question: why are *we* academics denying their perspectives at conferences among other academic spaces? Nalubowa's thoughts are a fitting response:

> What normally happens is we [young people] are viewed as troublemakers and always associated with chaos. But just like the youths from *artivist 4 life* Uganda have opened up these spaces and made exchange of knowledge and experiences possible, it is only fair that more spaces and opportunities are created and opened up for more young Africans to represent fellow youths and respond to their own and other problems. Because let's face it, the youth too have the knowledge, ideas, they have time and up to date solutions to current problems so give us a chance to have a voice.

As a *becoming academic* I have taken seriously the call to listen to the voices of youth. Making possible such inter-spaces with Ugandan youth in Paris, Hamilton, Ottawa, Edmonton and beyond required pushing enunciatory boundaries, reconceptualizing aesthetics, authorship and knowledge dissemination in order to shift power. I did not come to enact these spaces through the options available to me within the structure and guiding principles of my University or the academic system at large. In part, my responses manifested through my *becoming aware* that it is no longer acceptable to pretend to be the *one* with the knowledge while young talented and articulate youth remain invisible at conferences and other places where the futures of African youth are discussed and debated. Also, the deep affinity and sense of belonging that artivist relationalities have imparted me, required processes of deindividualization. This transformation points to another artivist teaching or tactic: uprooting our investment in the construction of heroes in favour of the nourishment of a dialogical ethics (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) where both the invisible and visible can dialogue and imagine together new social relations for a collective re-existence. Openings toward such horizontal inter-actions thus require the will to *restore receptive generosity* by transcending colonial binaries. Here, by extending one's self to the subordinated other, one suspends her identity through inter-actions that are at-risk (because power is at stake) and bi-directional (because recognition requires seeing and being seen) (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2011a). Preferential treatment premised on proximity to modern Man is dismantled in favor of the recognition of shared colonial histories and the

willingness to be guided by the outcasts toward a world orientated by the logic of the gift where all subjects can freely give of themselves to anOther (Fanon, 1952/67; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Sandoval, 2000).

Conclusion

Reflecting a commitment to an ethics where the end is the means artivism is "made by the ideological intervention that [it] is also making: the only predictable final outcome is transformation itself" (Sandoval, 2000, p. 157). The artivist projects that carry on are subject to continual reformulation by communities and co-researchers. The transformative potential of artivist epistemes and actions require adjacent spaces to the academic project in order to support the co-creation of new relationalities premised on community self-determination (Zavala, 2013). In the *excesses* of the academic project we are able to discern the imposed limits of colonial logic from an outside perspective that sees differently. In this adjacent space we can creatively reposition, re-imagine and re-construct the social bodies of our own communities toward more adequate modes of inter-human contact, beginning with our own personal change. Since this process requires oscillating between languages, knowledges, and modes of being it can only lead to transformation as both the community and academic sites are re-made. In this way our relationship to social reality changes because it is a kind of dual action on the social whole and on oneself.

For academic outsiders looking in at *our* artivism, these transformations may be elusive. Recognizing the transformative manifestations of artivism demands "reading" beyond the academic text, into the margins and artivist pages in-between. It is to accept to *see* the artivists and *our* artivist work that is making a palpable impact in the real world. In this sense our agency is recognized by its effects. This implies a monumental paradigm shift—the acceptance of the

intellectual/creative capacities of invisible enunciators/enunciations and the willingness to be guided by their/our perspectives toward re-imagining and re-organizing academia's encounter with the world *out there*. Accepting that "art possesses the remarkable ability to change not only what we see but how we see" (Asante, 2008, p. 12), we can begin to imagine the possibilities that become available by embracing the plethora of ways of being, knowing and doing that are in the *excesses* of academia's prescriptions. Thus the invitation is to participate in a process that works to undo disciplinary norms and other forms of intellectual coloniality by looking beyond the false certainty of established research protocols and other taken-for-granted conventions that mask academic stagnation and the fallacy of *disciplines as the world* (Gordon, 2006).

What artivism offers academia is *inexact.* As one participant put it, it is to "be comfortable when you are uncomfortable" (December 20, 2012) in the inter-spaces where academia meets real world. Or, as Ogonga (2011) puts it, it is "to walk into the space where others walk, or are afraid to walk" (p. 235). Entering into the unknown in such a way encourages thinking about the widest implications of pedagogy. What artivism can offer then, drawing on the ideas of Gordon (2006), is an approach for transcending *academic decadence* through acts of *teleological suspension*—by de-centering artivism through a commitment to concerns that go beyond its scope. In many ways my artivist response to the crisis of academia has been in this spirit. Unexpectedly, this attempt to think beyond artivism to broader questions about pedagogy has, in turn, fueled my artivist appetite for new understandings of the world, with the world.

Out of the collective change-experience of becoming artivist/academic an *artivists 4 life* collective consciousness emerged as decolonial aesthetics/aesthesis took form. This capacity of artivism to transform subjectivities and sociabilities was no different for the writing of this thesis. While my graduate student experience necessarily comes to a close the processes of

learning from/with each other and the consequent relationships that were forged, forge on. The *artivists 4 life* collective lives on and will no doubt continue to transform and evolve in relation to new observations, circumstances and challenges that enter into its periphery.

At this contemporary moment of unprecedented assaults on intellectual thinking, there are many pressing questions with which we must seriously engage for those of us committed to *radical change* both in/outside the academy. These questions are epistemological as well as ethical: they speak to questions of ontology and what lies beyond and below, and they that stem from a goal of "generous and receptive interhuman contact" (Maldonado-Torres, 2008, p. 18). The question of how we participate in the decolonization of the mind that Fanon (1963/1968) and Thiong'o (1986) called for and Nalubowa (May 30, 2014) reiterated, is among them. Perhaps more important than the questions themselves are the ways *we* engage them. Since action is an articulation of human relationality and thus has the capacity to push limitations and move across all boundaries (Arendt, 1959) we can consider the ongoing action of questioning as a principle point for engaging in the work of decolonizing our minds: where the questions and the answers must necessarily be epistemically incorrect.

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Appendix A: Questions

Individual Questions

(asked by myself while waiting for artivists to join through skype)

1) what is your understanding of artivism and *artivists 4 life*?

2) Has your participation in *artivist 4 life* activities changed your perception of life and people in other societies with different backgrounds? (Please explain)

Storytelling and Introductions

(facilitated by co-researchers)

3) Please share a story of a lesson learned through your experience exchanging with *artivists 4 life.*

Group questions and responses

(facilitated by study team through the presentation of their squares)

4) What is your favorite *artivists 4 life* activity?

5) Do you see any changes in your community as a result of *artivists 4 life* activities?

6) Which *artivists 4 life* activity do you think best lives up to the motto of "creating for a better world"?

7) What challenges do you see *artivists 4 life* facing in their efforts of "creating for a better world"?

8) What question would you like artivists 4 life to respond to?

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate in artivist Intervention

Dear friends of *artivists 4 life,*

Please join *artivists 4 life* members and myself next Monday and/or Wednesday evening for a collaborative art-making workshop to brainstorm around our inter-cultural experiences. The informal workshops will be facilitated by myself in partnership with artivists in Uganda through skype and will inform a study we are doing together. Your participation would be very much appreciated and will help us to support our shared vision of "creating for a better world".

What: **art, collaboration, dialogue, snacks, fun**
When: **Monday December 17 and/or Wednesday December 19 at 8h30 pm** (early morning in Uganda!)
Who: anyone who has been involved in any exchange with *artivists 4 life*
Where: **2-38 FAB** (Fine Arts Building) University of Alberta

Kindly confirm your attendance and your chosen date(s).
Please see attached invite!

Hope to see you!

Leslie Robinson
artivists 4 life
doctoral student, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta

ARTIVISTS 4 LIFE INVITE YOU

TO JOIN US FOR AN ART WORKSHOP TO SHARE IDEAS AND STORIES

MONDAY DECEMBER 17 OR WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 19 AT 8H30 PM IN FAB 2-38A, U of A

PLEASE R.S.V.P. TO LESLIE (llrobins@ualberta.ca)