

INTRODUCTION

TOWARDS A MULTI-TEMPORAL PLURIVERSE OF ART. DECOLONIZING UNIVERSALIZED HISTORIOGRAPHIC AND TEMPORAL FRAMEWORKS

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A crucial challenge facing art history is the need to decolonize our core assumptions and methods. At its most fundamental level, the discipline must reconceptualize its temporal frameworks by addressing the effects and conflicts that stem from the universalization of Eurocentric concepts of time and history, and by responding to the world's temporal heterogeneity. Co-constituted as a “scientific” discipline in nineteenth-century Europe with the modern Western temporal regime,¹ art history conceptualizes and orders the world according to binaries such as tradition versus modernity, and self and other, in line with colonial and imperial Eurocentric power structures. Despite an enduring awareness of historiographical, temporal, cosmological, epistemological, and ontological complexities, art history, like the wider humanities, has struggled to attend to the world's entangled temporal multiplicity. Institutionalized art history continues to slot art objects into distinct temporal and spatial containers, even in the wake of post-structuralist and postcolonial critiques of historicism; conventional art historical scholarship is divided into fields bound by historical period and place and centered upon archives all too often built under conditions of colonial rule. More recent art historical discourses that critically engage with the issue of art historical time emphasize the temporal instability of artworks and suggest alternative anachronic and heterochronic models of history writing.² These approaches are

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Aleida Assmann's critical engagement with the “modern western regime” is helpful here. Ead., *Is Time Out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Western Regime*, Ithaca, NY 2020.

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See for example: Keith Moxey, What Time Is It in the History of Art?, in: id. and Dan Karlholm (eds.), *Time in the History of Art. Temporality, Chronology, Anachrony*, Abingdon/New York 2020, 26–42; Eva Kernbauer, *Art, History, and Anachronic Interventions since 1990*, New York/London 2022; Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, New York 2010. Thank you to Akshaya Tankha for reminding us of Nagel and Wood's work.

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promising, since the acknowledgment of temporal instability is the first step to thinking beyond the coevalness denied by the modern Western temporal regime.³ However, they do not yet sufficiently conceptualize the premises of coevalness, which include the social, political, and epistemological structures, inequalities, and hierarchies that constitute our shared present.⁴ They are not sufficiently theorized, therefore, to allow a pluriversal critical framework of art to emerge.

Gathering under the decolonial concept of the *pluriverse*,⁵ this special issue's authors and artists commit to critiquing universalist claims about the nature of art as exemplary of Western colonial traditions of thought.⁶ They wish to go beyond critique, however, by constructing a critical framework that attends to and examines the multiplicity of epistemologies and ontologies that constitute art and the world.⁷ A pluriverse is carefully self-conscious about the origins and shifting meanings of concepts and categories in a world conceived as relational and implicated in systems of power, and its construction will require an "epistemological turn" in the humanities as a way to mark and "repair"⁸ the violences associated with coloniality. Collaborating across subfields, we activate the humani-

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Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, New York 1983, ch. 1, Time and the Emerging Other, 1–35.

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Mark Rifkin also emphasizes that "the idea of a shared present is not a neutral designation", and that it is therefore necessary to move beyond an inclusionary approach by examining the premises of coevalness. Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time. Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*, Durham, NC 2017.

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The concept of the pluriverse plays a crucial role in the distinction made in decolonial thought between itself as an engaged thought project designed to link political activism in the present to what they characterize as the merely critical approach taken by postcolonial thought. See Walter Mignolo's discussion of his use of the term in Walter Mignolo, Foreword. On Pluriversality and Multipolarity, in: Bernd Reiter (ed.), *Constructing the Pluriverse. The Geopolitics of Knowledge*, Durham, NC 2018, ix–xvi and Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics. The Real and the Possible*, Durham, NC 2020. We note that some of the most quoted phrases associated with decolonial thought, such as Walter Mignolo's concept of "colonial difference", originate in postcolonial thought. From 1995 on, but especially in his *Local Histories/Global Designs*, Mignolo began to borrow and subtly change Partha Chatterjee's discussion of "the rule of colonial difference", in which the point is less the distinction between colonizer and colonized than the way that difference informed the practices of the colonial state. The essays in this collection attempt to juxtapose these approaches without collapsing their differences. See Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs. Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton, NJ 2000; Partha Chatterjee, *A Nation and Its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton, NJ 1994.

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This special issue was initiated as a workshop of the same title, convened by the editors and hosted by Carleton University in Ottawa, which was held on three days in March 2022. After the conclusion of the workshop, several authors joined the editors for a discussion of an initial draft of this introduction. Their comments were enormously helpful in expanding the range of resources the editors drew upon as they revised this text, as well as connecting forms of critique across art historical subfields.

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Bernd Reiter, Introduction, in: id., *Constructing the Pluriverse*, 1–24; Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics*, 26.

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In the sense of Kader Attia's concept of "repair", see: Kim West, *Repair as Redemption or Montage. Speculations on Kader Attia's Ladder of Light*, 2013 (January 4, 2023).

ties' capacity to create critical awareness and relational knowledge about the world's multiplicity of temporal regimes, including their complex mutual entanglements.⁹ We work along the grain of contemporary art that aims to “think otherwise”, while articulating how and why it is necessary not only to think in plural ways, but also to acknowledge the interconnectedness of such epistemologies of time with forms of being and of making.

The philosopher and historian Achille Mbembe argues that the plurality of times is “not a series but an interlocking of presents, pasts and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts and futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones”.¹⁰ In his Africa-centered work, Mbembe seeks to displace the dominant historicist idea of history and its respective uni-linear chronological temporal structure by acknowledging the entangled heterogeneity of historical experiences and by suggesting an anachronic mode of history writing. The durability or materiality of works of art have led art historians to attend much more closely to their particular anachronies. In her study of “big statues”, or monumental icons in India, visual theorist Kajri Jain emphasizes the *layering* of temporalities, reading icons as “dynamic assemblages” of heterogeneous processes that unfold at various speeds and take their “efficacy” from the joining of moments drawn from these different timescales.¹¹ By efficacy, Jain refers to the manner in which phenomena are linked to a “sensible infrastructure” – a term that leverages philosopher Jacques Rancière’s synchronic but unstable notion of the distribution of the sensible to explore its dynamic combination of materiality and immateriality, as well as its roles in the support of life.¹² Historian of modern and contemporary art Eva Kernbauer also builds on the work of Rancière when she conceives of anachrony as a historiographical concept that destabilizes conventional temporal order by allowing new temporal connections and respective ways of constituting meaning and identities. In contrast to “anachronism”, a term used pejoratively to describe something wrongly positioned in a stable temporal order, anachrony highlights the activating potential when things or events do not fit in or abide by the specific time categories and temporal orders assigned to them.¹³ Anachronic historiography allows and articulates the “interlocking of past, present and futures”, and invites

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Cf. Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*.

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Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, Berkeley, CA 2001, 16.

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Kajri Jain, *Gods in the Time of Democracy*, Durham, NC 2021.

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Ibid., 6. Jain builds primarily on Jacques Rancière’s *Dissensus and Distribution of the Sensible* in this part of her work.

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Kernbauer, *Art History and Anachronic Interventions*, 7–8.

experiences of nonidentical temporality through which our shared yet heterogeneously situated historical now is continuously shaped and reshaped.

We build on these attempts to capture experiences of multiple temporalities in order to examine and pluralize art historical debates about conceptualizations of art's relation to history and time. Working from art historical archives sited in Asia and the Americas, including Indigenous communities in both regions, we explore how artists have engaged materials and realms of thought and practice often dismissed as external to the canonized history of art.¹⁴ We find within those artistic works the seeds of an epistemological shift towards "theoretical autonomy"¹⁵ and the sort of "cognitive justice"¹⁶ that is premised on recognition of and across differences in thought. Cultural studies scholar and director of content of the National Museum of World Cultures in the Netherlands Wayne Modest proposes "thinking with" as a "a certain kind of collaborative criticality", an ambition that "involves reflecting on how we might live with and among others in the world in more just and equitable ways, but also in ways that acknowledge that we do so 'from' drastically different subjectivities and vantage points".¹⁷ Modest would likely agree with historian of Tribal/Indigenous communities in India Prathama Banerjee and her co-authors, who warn of the difficulties inherent to "thinking across traditions" and suggest that we can guard against the tendency to instrumentalize difference – or what they memorably describe as "shopping for concepts from a variety shop" – by asking "how" rather than "what" questions. As they suggest, "instead of approaching a tradition in

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Indigeneity is, of course, a highly contested category, with radically different affordances across the communities and societies discussed by authors in this special issue. See Mary Louise Pratt, Afterword. Indigeneity Today, in: Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn (eds.), *Indigenous Experience Today*, Oxford/New York 2007, 397–404; Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, and Michelle H. Raheja, Indigeneity, in: ead. (eds.), *Native Studies Keywords*, Tucson, AZ 2015, and Prathama Banerjee, *Politics of Time. 'Primitives' and History-Writing in a Colonial Society*, Oxford 2006.

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Prathama Banerjee, Aditya Nigam, and Rakesh Pandey, The Work of Theory. Thinking across Traditions, in: *Economic & Political Weekly* 51/37, 42–50, September 10, 2016 (June 10, 2022). Thank you to Akshaya Tankha for bringing this essay and Banerjee's work to our attention. The essay makes the claim to "move from the position of being a critic of Western theory to that of being a composer and assembler of a new theory from different sources and different histories. In order to become free theoretical subjects".

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Boaventura de Sousa Santos (ed.), *Cognitive Justice in a Global World. Prudent Knowledges for a Decent Life*, Lanham, MD 2007, explicates a term claimed by STS scholar Shiv Vishwanathan, who provides the afterword.

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Modest describes the conversation series that he organized in the Research Center for Material Culture in the following terms: "RCMC's *Thinking With* is a conversational series that makes a commitment to a certain kind of collaborative criticality. This project complements several of our existing initiatives, as well as our attentiveness to the notion of "togetherness". *Thinking With* arises out of the NMVW's mission to contribute to world citizenship. For us, this ambition involves reflecting on how we might live with and among others in the world in more just and equitable ways, but also in ways that acknowledge that we do so 'from' drastically different subjectivities and vantage points. *Thinking With* then offers a form of joined-up problem solving that imagines a future that we can only fashion together." Id., *Thinking With*, Research Center for Material Culture (January 4, 2023).

terms of its substantive concerns in the first place, we could begin by asking how thinking proceeds in that tradition”.¹⁸ This substitution has enormous potential for studies of art history, for we can look to artistic practice as past and present material traces of *how* knowledges are articulated and negotiated over time. In so doing, these papers expand the temporal structures that are understood to underlie activities of meaning making, recording alternative modes for constituting ourselves and relating to the world and to each other.

In short, we intervene in discourses of global contemporaneity and global contemporary art history that all too often name temporal heterogeneity while struggling to find methods capable of assessing its implications.¹⁹ By taking a purposely broad, cross-field approach, this volume allows for consideration of plural temporalities in multiple moments and geographical sites. It plots intersections at the most fundamental level of analysis, tracking the implications and political effects of various philosophies of time and of history writing. While each essay offers novel analyses that are of use to art historical debates bounded by time, place, and canons of artistic value, as a collection, these essays also demand new reading practices. They take temporal diversity and historical entanglements as their starting point, and employ implicitly or explicitly relational comparative methods that together establish a pluriversal critical framework for the understanding of art.

Latin American decolonial theorist Arturo Escobar conceptualizes the pluriverse as a counter-model to the modern Western idea of one universal world. Arguing for a “relational ontology” that he grounds in Indigenous epistemologies of “radical interdependency” between nature and man, he understands “pluriversality as a shared project based on a multiplicity of worlds and ways of worlding life”.²⁰ Walter Mignolo, a close colleague of Escobar working in the same field, explains how a pluriversal concept of the world is connected through a “power differential” that follows the “logic of coloniality [ongoing colonial violence] covered up by the rhetorical narrative of modernity”.²¹ For him the pluriversal approach is “not about changing the world (ontology) but about changing the beliefs and understandings which could lead to changing our (all) praxis

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Banerjee, Nigam, and Pandey, *The Work of Theory*, 47.

¹⁹

Terry Smith, Introduction. The Contemporaneity Question, in: Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee (eds.), *Antinomies of Art and Culture. Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, Durham, NC/London 2008, 1–19; Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All. Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, London 2013.

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Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics*, 26.

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Ibid.

of living in the world”.²² Carefully distinct, the pluriversal method builds on postcolonial approaches to emancipation of the world from the modern Western temporal regime by making moves that many theorists have dismissed as politically problematic.²³ When pluriversal theories acknowledge and examine the multiple temporalities that constitute the world, they risk bringing a West/non-West binary back in through the back door, and, ultimately, a collapse into cultural relativism.²⁴ Temporal pluralism is not the end goal, however, but rather the means to produce situated accounts of works of art that hold open productive differences between and within worlds of art-making. By making room for incommensurable temporalities, it is possible to evaluate their effects while avoiding neat resolutions. Overall, the project is not interested in positing “radical alterity”,²⁵ per se, but rather practicing critical art history as a relational comparative practice.

We distinguish a relational comparative art historical practice from conventional approaches that remain rooted in a teleological temporal structure and ignore Eurocentric hierarchies. Comparison has been central to the art historical discipline from its beginnings in German-speaking academe at the turn of the twentieth century. The comparative method, ingrained in such oppositions as Heinrich Wölfflin’s linear versus painterly or Alois Riegl’s haptic versus optic, was the basis of *Kunstwissenschaft*, the scientific or systematic inquiry into art’s history. Understanding art as developing over time through formal and progressive change, advocates of this evolutionary and positivist approach to the history of art employed comparisons and developed hierarchies. Art’s history became systematized according to a Eurocentric geographical and temporal organization, which in turn shaped the constitution of a canon of Western art. In this sense, following the logic of inclusion and exclusion, the method of comparison necessarily involved judgment and selection. With the advent of social art history in the 1970s and the more recent global turn, the comparative method has been criti-

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Mignolo, Foreword, x.

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Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, NJ 2000, esp. chs. 2, 3, and the epilogue; Boaventura De Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire. The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South*, Durham, NC/London 2019. Chakrabarty’s work was inspirational for some decolonial theory, even as it critiqued earlier efforts to theorize “multiple modernities” or “alternative modernities”, as understood by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, Multiple Modernities, in: *Daedalus* 129/1, 2000, 1–29 and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (ed.), *Alternative Modernities*, Durham, NC/London 2001. The conflict between decolonial and postcolonial approaches is itself an important phenomenon. See Suren Pillay, The Problem of Colonialism. Assimilation, Difference, and Decolonial Theory in Africa, in: *Critical Times* 4/3, December 2021, 389–416.

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Pheng Cheah, *What Is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*, Durham, NC/London 2016, 11–19.

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See for example: David Graeber, Radical Alterity Is Just Another Way of Saying “Reality”. A Reply to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, in: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5/2, 2015, 1–41 (March 5, 2024).

cized as decontextualizing and de-historicizing. Under the sign of critique, socio-historical, postcolonial, transnational, and transcultural approaches to art history have challenged modern Western hierarchies in the judgment and selection of canonical works.²⁶

By contrast, we advocate for grounding comparison in a shared yet disjunctive heterotemporal present. This approach conceives of art as a transcultural site,²⁷ dynamically constituted through asymmetric (power) relations: that is, contact, exchange, *and* conflict.²⁸ In order to reconsider comparison from a pluriversal perspective, we must take the world's entangled multiplicity as its starting point. With that in mind, relational comparative art history practice attends to specific regional and historical contexts and how they relate to each other, while continuously scaling back and forth between multiple and entangled perspectives. Our position is informed by the work of comparative literary scholar Shu-mei Shih, who writes,

The relational method informed by world history, I contend, allows for the scaling back and forth between the world and the text as well as along the intermediary scales, moving toward a more integrated conception of comparative literature and world literature, where the issue is not inclusiveness or qualification (which text deserves to be studied or designated as “world literature” and which does not) but excavating and activating the historically specific set of relationalities across time and space.²⁹

A relational approach therefore examines “processes through which forms [and discourses] emerge in local contexts with circuits of exchange”.³⁰ It questions and deconstructs universalized art histori-

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These are slightly rephrased formulations co-written in the context of the lecture series “On Comparison” organized at Carleton University in 2018/2019 by Birgit Hopfener and Mitchell Frank. Readings that informed the lecture series included among other publications: Jaś Elsner (ed.), *Comparativism in Art History*, New York/London 2017; Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman (eds.), *Comparison. Theories, Approaches, Uses*, Baltimore 2013.

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Monica Juneja, *Can Art History Be Made Global? Meditations from the Periphery*, Berlin 2023, 33.

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“Contact, interaction, entanglement make the transcultural field constituted relationally, so that asymmetry, as one attribute of relationships (together with categories such as difference, non-equivalence, dissonance) is an element that makes up this field.” Monica Juneja, Understanding Transculturalism. Monica Juneja and Christian Kravagna in Conversation, in: Model House Research Group (eds.), *Transcultural Modernisms*, Berlin 2013, 22–33.

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Shih Shu-mei, Comparison as Relation, in: Felski and Stanford Friedman, *Comparison*, 79–98, here 80.

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We are here referring to Monica Juneja's conceptualization of the transcultural as a tool of analysis and of epistemic critique. See: Juneja and Kravagna, *Understanding Transculturalism*, and Monica Juneja, *Can Art History Be Made Global?*, 21.

cal taxonomies, values, and hierarchies,³¹ while conceiving of units of investigation as unstable, or, as “continually defined as participants in and as contingent upon the historical relationships in which they are implicated”.³² Art enacts agency in and through this method of analysis, rather than emerging as an effect of institutional structures.³³

When combined with a relational art historical method, the pluriversal framework allows the authors and artists to carefully examine the complexity of the multiple *and* entangled temporalities that constitute our shared present and make and re-make world/s. In so doing, these essays undermine what Indigenous art historian Mishuana Goeman calls the “fixity” of colonial narratives that impose and secure spatialities of understanding on Indigenous peoples, particularly in the settler colonies in which the majority of the artists and authors live and work.³⁴ By conceiving of knowledge/s as relational and “situated”,³⁵ we attend to colonial power structures and other hierarchies, to social, political, and historical contexts, to positionalities, and to implicated subject positions.³⁶ A pluriversal framework allows us to articulate how concepts of time, art, and the world are articulated through specific choices of form, media, materials, scale, artistic techniques, and aesthetic strategies, which are themselves constituted by multiple and entangled (art) histories and concepts of time and historiography.

The last model for the pluriverse we consider is provided by philosopher Yuk Hui, most notably his conceptualizations of *tech-nodiversity* (2016) and art and cosmotechnics (2020).³⁷ Hui begins with the world in crisis, and he looks towards pluriversal thinking to counter the modern Western temporal regime and the omnipresence of Western science and technology, which, as he argues, are the root of our present dilemmas. Focusing on Chinese thought traditions, Yuk Hui shows how technology and art shaped by Chinese

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Monica Juneja, Global Art History and the “Burden of Representation”, in: Hans Belting, Jacob Birken, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel (eds.), *Global Studies. Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, Ostfildern 2011, 281.

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Ibid.

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Ibid.

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Mishuana Goeman, *Mark My Words. Native Women Mapping Our Nations*, Minneapolis 2013. Thank you, Carmen Robertson, for bringing Goeman’s scholarship to our attention.

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Donna J. Haraway, Situated Knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective, in: *Feminist Studies* 14/3, 1988, 575–599.

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Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject. Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*, Stanford, CA 2022.

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Yuk Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China. An Essay in Cosmotechnics*, Falmouth 2016; Yuk Hui, *Art and Cosmotechnics*, Minneapolis 2021.

cosmology and Daoist philosophy are *cosmotechnics* that offer an alternative way of relating and making sense of the world. Understanding art as embodiment and as the interpretation of human-world relationships, he argues that analyses of the varieties of experiences of art can help us to rethink technology today. He focuses on how the experiences afforded by Chinese landscape painting (*shanshui hua*) operate through the immanent cosmological principle Dao, which he describes as a structure of “oppositional continuity” and recursivity.³⁸

Hui demonstrates that history writing that takes different cosmotechnics as its starting point does not follow the logic of progress and is not written according to stages or periods.³⁹ As in the decolonial models we have discussed, Hui’s model rejects history as a unified project in favor of a historically constituted, entangled pluriverse. Unusually, however, Hui champions what he calls the “individuation of thinking”, in which we continuously rethink our frames of meaning making as we perform historical analyses of different thought traditions and cosmologies. He champions “fragmentation as the path towards a possible recomposition”.⁴⁰ To Hui, fragmentation relates art to its locality, which is conceived not as an essentialist category, such as a nation or a people, but rather as a “knowledge system” that is part of a pluriverse of knowledges that can be made generally available.⁴¹ Such “recosmicizing”, to use Hui’s word, does not mean trying to recuperate pre-modern, pre-colonial pasts. It is not traditionalist.⁴² It means instead to pluralize the archive of meaning making, in order to “search for extant resources for reworlding the world”,⁴³ as Pheng Cheah calls it, in order to “find new ways of coexisting that will allow us to transform modern technology”.

The papers in this special issue identify and bring together scholars from areas of particular strength in debates about tempo-

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Hui, *Art and Cosmotechnics*, 44.

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Anders Dunker, *On Technodiversity*. A Conversation with Yuk Hui, in: *Los Angeles Review of Books (LARB)*, June 9, 2020 (February 6, 2024).

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Yuk Hui, “On the Varieties of Experience of Art”, keynote lecture in the context of our workshop “Towards a Multi-temporal *Pluriverse* of Art. Decolonizing Universalized Historiographic and Temporal Frameworks”, March 10, 2022.

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Ibid. And in this respect, Yuk Hui’s perspective and our project differ from Walsh’s and Mignolo’s approach to decolonization which “see[s] a radical opposition, indeed a chasm, between decolonial thought and European ideas of modernity, progress, and freedom, with Latin American Indigenist movements as their model for where freedom is to be found”. See Arjun Appadurai’s review of *On Decoloniality* by Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh: Arjun Appadurai, *Beyond Domination. The Future and Past of Decolonization*, in: *The Nation* 312/6, March 22, 2021, 52–54.

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Dunker, *On Technodiversity*.

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Pheng Cheah, *What Is a World?*, 13.

rality in art and art history. We begin with two fields that have been the site of important disciplinary critique: the historiography of modernism and the display of Indigenous art in museums. The critique of the historiography of modernism – so stubbornly tied to a linear historical narrative of technological progress and artistic “innovation” – has been crucial to rethinking the discipline.⁴⁴ In her essay, [On the Impossibility of Global Modernisms](#), Tatiana Flores rejects models of global art history that might mistake the difficulty of telling a more inclusive story. She finds a revealing moment in the reception of French Impressionism in post-revolutionary early twentieth-century Mexico, decades after it was supposedly superseded by several other stylistic movements. As she argues, Mexican artists reflected upon Impressionist approaches both to practices of painting and Indigeneity that sit uneasily within existing Eurocentric historical frameworks of modernism. The “broken brushstrokes” were politically loaded and Impressionist plein-air painting in Mexico became “a democratizing project that gave people from marginalized communities the tools to represent themselves”. Carmen Robertson’s [Beading Back and Forth. Upending Temporality through Knowledge Transmission](#), is equally critical of art history’s categorical rigidity, highlighting its exclusion of the non-linear, cyclical temporalities and material agencies associated with the glass bead as an active, agentic “being” from the museological approach to North American Indigenous art. Robertson’s paper at once critiques the museological paradigm – its “denial of Indigenous temporal sovereignty”⁴⁵ – and finds in the work of contemporary Indigenous artists an alternative temporal paradigm that collapses the distinction between living and ancestral knowledge. “Locating beadwork beyond the confines of a linear temporal structure,” she argues, “shifts discourse from objectification to an intersectional one of process, activation, and relationality.” Such pluralization of time rejects a definition of coevalness defined in non-Indigenous terms and facilitates self-determination.⁴⁶

Both papers ask us to rethink chronological temporal frameworks of art and conceive of artworks as temporally unstable agents of intersectional, entangled, or inter-generational history writing. They require authors to appreciate the “productive temporal discrepancy of an action, an event, a thought, or a subject with its

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Of particular importance to this group of authors is Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism. Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*, Delhi 2000; Ruth B. Phillip and Elizabeth Harney (eds.), *Mapping Modernisms. Art, Indigeneity, Colonialism*, Durham, NC/London 2019; Ming Tiampo, *Gutai. Decentering Modernism*, Chicago 2011. Both Phillips and Tiampo were actively involved in the workshop as respondents.

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Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 2.

⁴⁶

Ibid., 3.

assigned position in a chronological order”⁴⁷ as a productive way of anachronic history writing.

In the course of their critique of the strictly linear historiography of modernist art history, Flores and Robertson identify sites that, in Rancière’s words, “are given the capacity to define completely original points of orientation (*les aiguillages*), to carry out leaps from one temporal line to another”.⁴⁸ They recognize the *habitus* of artists and their viewers, whether understood through embodiment, proprioception, or ideas of the sensible, as having sufficient disruptive power. Not coincidentally, those same confounding analytical sites become the explicit focus of other papers, as the urgent rereadings of modernism by art historians find their echo in the practices of contemporary artists.

Our next two papers examine the manner in which contemporary artists project pluriversal thinking in their works of art, by harnessing materials, knowledge sources, and forms of imagination that layer or interlock models of time. An artist project by Sahej Rahal presents the artist’s experiments with artificial intelligence (AI) technology for the production of images, through which he attempts to counter the subjugating effects of both Hindu nationalism and algorithmic capitalism. In an interview [Against Extinction](#), Karin Zitzewitz engages the artist in a productive conversation about the employment of the Sufi and Bhakti concept of *anhad*, or “without limit”, and its resonances with Arturo Escobar’s decolonial approach of pluriversality, in its countering of naturalized, one-dimensional political ontologies through a radical commitment to multiplicity and an understanding of “life as limitless flow”. Similarly, art historian Peggy Wang’s [Animating the Inanimate](#). Qiu Anxiong’s [New Book of Mountains and Seas](#) examines Qiu’s radical commitment to the exploration of perception and the constitution of knowledge in light of the possibilities held open by pluriversal thinking. Wang examines the artist’s trilogy of animations, *New Book of Mountains and Seas*, which refers to a second-century CE encyclopedic bestiary and imagines the contemporary world through the eyes of someone living in that earlier moment. Qiu’s animations, like Rahal’s, harness the power of estrangement with and through technology, grounding Western colonialism, extractive economies, and environmental exploitation in a discourse of materialism that the artist opposes to an animism that reclaims and reanimates inert forms.

As Wang and Zitzewitz make clear, Qiu and Rahal share a preoccupation with the status of media, experimenting with forms of animation in which the former directly leverages its connections to the history of painting, while the latter does so indirectly, through

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Kernbauer, *Art History and Anachronic Interventions*, 7.

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Jacques Rancière, *The Concept of Anachronism and the Historian’s Truth* (English translation), in: *InPrint* 3/1, Article 3, 2015, 21–52, here 47.

publicly available AI tools that have learned how to build images from existing data sets. Both papers consider the productivities of artistic practice as a form of knowledge-making. Their juxtaposition with the previous two interventions in historiographical and museological practice are meant to demonstrate the project's commitment to considering questions of *how* knowledge traditions are continued and/or interrupted by contemporary actors. As Zitzewitz and Wang make clear, both Rahal and Qiu knowingly engage the differential understandings of temporality of their audiences, slipping among conventions associated with gaming and animation as well as more authoritative and freighted forms of artistic tradition.

To this constellation of forms of knowledge, the experience of time, and the capacities of medium, Birgit Hopfener adds questions of exhibitionary experience by focusing on a non-representationalist concept of how art and reality, art and the past relate to one another. In her essay [A Group Dance that Never Ends. A Pluriversal Approach to *Continuum – Generation by Generation* \(2017\)](#) Hopfener explores artist-curator Qiu Zhijie's mobilization of endlessness, or *buxi* 不息, as a traditional concept central to Chinese process cosmology and philosophy that Qiu identifies as a forgotten key "operating mechanism in Chinese art".⁴⁹ Qiu's exhibition engages a concept of art that understands, articulates, navigates, and mediates a world conceived as an impermanent and endless transformational process. Hopfener evaluates the engagement with *buxi* – and the respective alternative ontology and temporality of art and world – as a useful mode of decolonizing the discipline of art history. Arguing that a dynamic pluriversal approach can retain the situatedness of the multiple and transculturally entangled perspectives that (re)shape critical discourses around the exhibition, she seeks to understand the criticism leveled by colleagues in and outside of China who see the exhibition's reference to *buxi* as too close to the official nationalist agenda and as dismissive of individual freedom.

A similar engagement with the political status of aesthetic difference is found in Akshaya Tankha's [Monuments, Temporality, and the Aesthetics of Indigenous Presence in Postcolonial South Asia](#). The memorials Tankha describes were erected to honor soldiers lost to the armed movement for political autonomy in and from India on behalf of the Naga people, an Indigenous group that crosses India's northeastern border with Myanmar. Tankha demonstrates how the monuments escape the secular historicist temporality associated with the modern war monument through their association with the Naga stone monolith. Foregrounding the layering of meanings and temporal and physical scales, Tankha notes the retention of the animist qualities of stone and provision of a common space for respite typical of Naga monoliths, even as the memorials' roadside form provides passersby an experience of

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Qiu Zhijie's curatorial statement.

visual monumentality and enframing of the landscape. The essential point, for Tankha, is how the monuments' "slippage across domains of practice that are co-constituted as separate and opposed exemplifies the plural and layered temporality of Indigenous presence amidst its marginalization by the state in postcolonial South Asia".

Our last two papers engage the domain of ecology, which remains one of the most important sites for rethinking temporality within the humanities. As in that literature, these authors oppose the temporalities found in the natural world to the historical horizons associated with extractive capitalism and nuclear war. In her "Not the End". [Artists on and against Nuclear Closure](#), Kyveli Mavrokordopoulou considers "the violently slow pace of the bodily manifestation of nuclearity", a term that marks the ontological shifts between the nuclear and non-nuclear in all sites associated with the production of nuclear power and weapons. She tracks the slow and recursive effects of radiation exposure on Indigenous and First Nation communities in North America through the work of artists Eve Andrée Laramée and Bonnie Devine, exploring their "practices of endurance" as a practical politics of opposition to settler temporalities. Emilia Terracciano's essay, [Of Scales and Times. Planetary Friction at Play in the Work of Simryn Gill](#), explores the artist's considerations of the materialities of Malay rubber plantations in light of their central role in the colonial economy. Gill muses on the "possibility of life" amidst the ruins of capitalism through her choice of materials and process: time-consuming record-making activities. Drawing from her immediate surroundings she creates records of found things through the act of "rubbing". She covers the object with ink and superimposes sheets of paper, which she then rubs through an up-and-down or circular repeated movement.

In an analysis that resonates with many of these essays, Terracciano identifies differences in pace, rather than simply temporal direction or form, as crucial to the effects and affects of Gill's works. That point is crucial to Mavrokordopoulou's work, which registers the extraordinary timescale of nuclearity, which operates at such a slow pace that it is nearly impossible to square with human experience. Both authors ground their analyses in specific histories of colonial and capitalist extraction, joining together consideration of human and ecological devastation with an attention to cosmology and histories of representation. Through these papers, this collection intersects with the discourse of ecological humanities, but it subsumes what often posed as a new urgency brought on by climate crisis within a broader, and more enduring concern with coloniality and the limitations it places on both thought and political action.

In addition to their provision of a common critique of progressive historicity, these papers make careful and specific interventions in their own geographically bounded art historical literatures. These pointed commentaries emerge particularly in the authors' treatment of the different status of religion within modern and contemporary art, the opening up of the question of art through explorations of alternative cosmologies, or of the politics of Indigeneity

or the conditions for artistic expression in the societies in which art is produced and/or exhibited.

Recognition of such differences among the social contexts for art is crucial to retaining the specificity of the analysis, and to prevent a collapse into mere generality. In maintaining this discipline, this collection presents itself as a model for relational comparative analysis within an art history that all too often finds methodological innovation only within a common, and typically Western geography, history, and/or canon. It calls for an “exploded global art history”⁵⁰ committed to critical and relational historiographical research of the multiple and entangled temporalities that constitute art, and its different concepts of how to relate to history and time in specific social, political, epistemological, and cosmological contexts.

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