Irony's Subversive Bite

Destabilising Colonial Legacies in Contemporary Art

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Abstract

In literature and linguistics, irony has been studied extensively; however, this is curiously not the case in the visual arts. This thesis attempts to transpose the largely textual conceptualisation of irony into a more holistic understanding that accommodates its enunciation in the visual realm. It expands on the literary origins of irony by exploring its Duchampian emergence with the introduction of the readymade and proceeds to trace irony's trajectory across art historical movements such as Surrealism and postmodernism. On delineating the broader contexts of its usage in the visual arts, the thesis focuses specifically on the critical role of irony in contemporary artistic practices as a powerful mechanism that subverts the legacies of colonialism. Cultural imperialist, European and American narratives that expand power by erasing or marginalising others have been subjected to forms of irony by many contemporary artists. This thesis examines irony as a subversive tactic in the works of Black British, African-American, Indian, Samoan-Japanese, Cuban-American and Chicano contemporary artists that express a critical disposition toward Eurocentric narratives, racism, systemic violence, gender inequality, epistemic oppression and other enduring effects of colonisation. Tracing the stimuli of contemporary art's ironic anti-colonial practices, I contend that they have been largely informed by postcolonial and decolonial literature and influenced by postmodern subversive practices, culminating in the rebellious flavour of resistance we encounter in the postcolonial artist.

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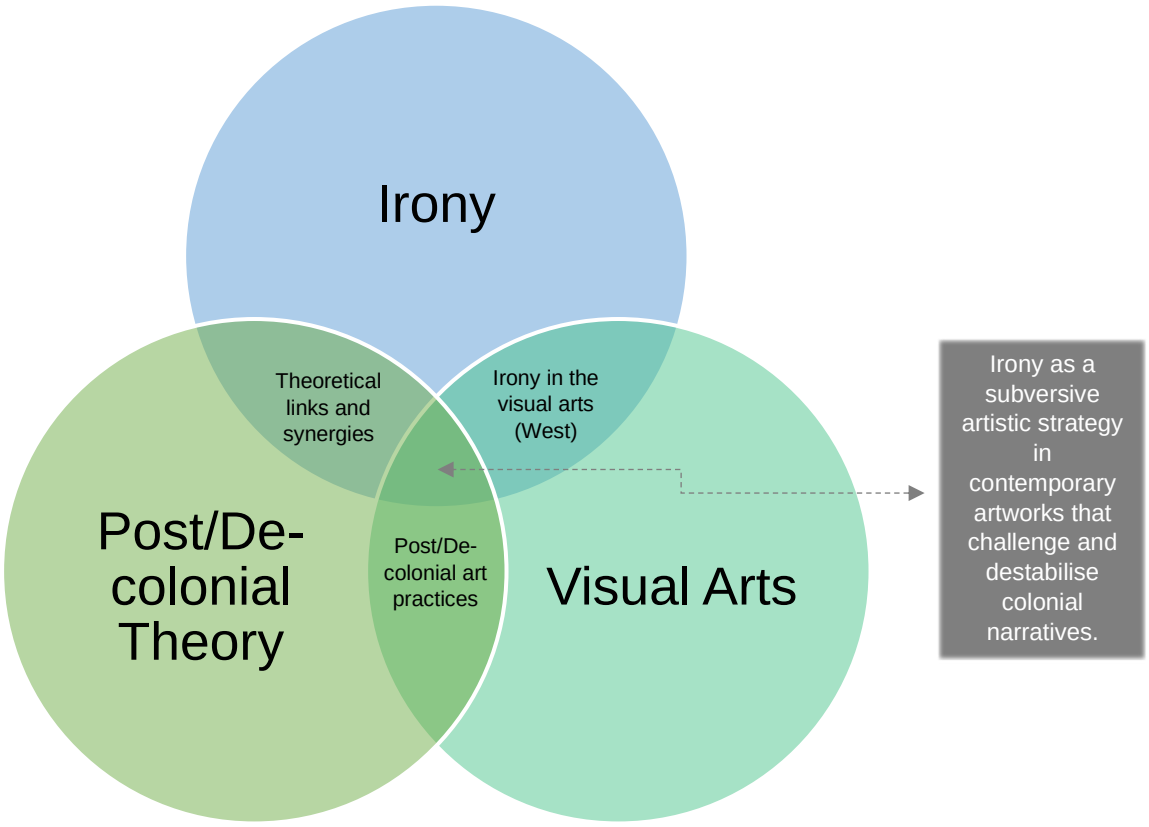
Introduction

Publications that study the significance of ironic strategies in contemporary art are limited, severely so in contrast to the surfeit literature that examines it as a rhetorical device in literature and linguistics. There remains the lack of a nuanced exploration of the sensory, spatial and experiential aspects of irony in current scholarship. This gap is significant and one that I intend to address through this thesis. While artists have employed irony for a wide range of purposes, my study will focus on its critical role specifically in contemporary art practice that addresses the legacies of colonialism.

A Venn diagram helps to visualise the scope and structure of the thesis while highlighting its original contributions to scholarship. The three broad areas of concern are—irony, postcolonial/decolonial theory (combined only for the ease of explanation), and the visual arts. In the overlapping area between irony and post/de-colonial theory, the thesis analyses volumes of literature in both areas and presents key findings on the synthesis of the two kinds of literature. No prior study has brought these areas together and analysed them in detail.



In the overlap between irony and the visual arts, I look at the transgressive deployment of irony in the visual arts, particularly in the West, across different art movements. Beginning with Marcel Duchamp and his introduction of readymades, I trace the roots of ironic postmodern appropriation and continue

examining irony's trajectory across the art historical movements of Surrealism, where irony was employed as a critical strategy. I then move to Postmodernism and end with the Contemporary space. Setting aside the postcolonial and decolonial angle, the broader subject of irony in the visual arts, is curiously and conspicuously absent in the field of art-historical writing. Several art historians mention irony as an aspect of their analysis of an artwork, but there is no deeper theoretical exploration of the same, except for Allan J. Ryan, who has written on a related topic. *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (1999) explores irony in contemporary Native American art, inspired mainly by the mythical "trickster" figure of Native traditions. In his work, we see a culturally inflected exploration of irony. However, noting the lack of scholarship in the broader context of irony in the visual arts, a global approach is pursued in my writing.

With regard to the overlap between post/de-colonial theory and the visual arts, several authors have keenly noted postcolonial strategies in contemporary art. However, the intersection of all three, which remains yet to be researched in detail, forms the heart of my thesis—where I look at irony as a subversive artistic strategy in contemporary artworks that challenge or destabilise colonial narratives. Allowing for a hybrid approach to the analyses of artworks, linking ironic subversion and anti-colonial expression, this method of analysis will enable me to group artists who have not come together in this way before, either through any extant text or exhibition.

My approach towards the selection of contemporary art offered is transnational, with the aim of bringing together anti-colonial, anti-racist and anti-Eurocentric transgressional discourse, the organisational thread being their engagement with irony. Often constrained by context, culture and individual factors, irony is heavily reliant on human inference; therefore, interpretation and self-reflexivity will be central elements in the attribution of irony and the analyses of the conceptual, critical and reflective strategies employed by the artists. The thesis cannot and does not catalogue all examples of anti-colonial visual discourse that engage with irony but offers in-depth case studies from which it is possible to infer a widespread but understudied visual and artistic technique. It is by no means a comprehensive list but rather, a contemplation on a particular kind of transgressive solidarity across national boundaries.

The first chapter briefly touches upon the Western heritage of irony in literature and linguistics. Engaging with volumes of literature on irony, from Plato and his writings on Socratic irony, through to the periods of Romantic and Postmodern irony, the thesis also offers a glimpse into the immense taxonomical labour undertaken by previous scholars. The existing framework of irony is essentially rooted in literature and linguistics; therefore, one of my objectives is to broaden this framework. By transposing the textual understanding of irony into an account of its non-verbal iterations, the thesis will accommodate aspects that encompass the visual, haptic and experiential realms of the visual arts. Existing literary and linguistic theories pertaining to irony and related concepts will be examined for epistemological, structural, and historical analyses. Depth and detail will be restricted as there has been much historical writing on the same, and also because our concerns are with the visual. However, it is important to contextualise and reinforce the interest that irony has elicited over the centuries. In addition,

I have touched upon concomitant terms such as parody and satire and examined their differences and intersections with irony. The visual enunciations of these literary concepts are illustrated by modern and contemporary artworks. I have also analysed the performative functions of the irony that these examples employ and have gauged their subversive bite by applying Linda Hutcheon's diagrammatic illustration of the functions of irony.[1]

A section on the premises that shaped Eurocentric and colonial bias follows irony's historical and theoretical trajectory. Biologically-based racist discourse that drafted the authority of science to justify racial bias flourished in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. An elucidation of this scientific racism lays the foundation for the subsequent sections that undertake literature reviews of postcolonial and decolonial studies, which respond critically to the legacies of these claims. Accounts of these two systems of thought on structures of power, the impact of colonial rule and its enduring effects provide important contexts in which to situate the motivations and strategies underlying contemporary art practices that attempt to critique colonial ideologies.

An important angle that warrants focus is the way in which irony seems to lend itself so peculiarly and wonderfully to the postcolonial condition. While colonialist grand narratives are univocal in nature, irony is a well-oiled hinge that swings between multiple interpretations; it is wary of formulated truths and is interested in diversification and polyvocal expression. In the thesis, connections are explored between the characteristics of irony and terms or concepts used by postcolonial and decolonial authors such as Homi Bhabha, Gloria Anzaldúa and Maria Lugones. Both postcolonial and decolonial traditions unsettle the insularity of the Eurocentric narrative, and when irony is added to the arsenal, it serves to potentiate both systems of thought.

Chapter one, therefore, analyses literature on both irony and postcolonial and decolonial theory, providing a synthesis of the literatures while discovering previously unexplored, implicit synergies. Specific terms or vocabulary used by postcolonial and decolonial authors, that link to the working dynamics of irony are highlighted in a tabular format which concludes the section. The chapter primarily builds a theoretical foundation for a deeper analysis of ironic anti-colonial expression in the visual arts while engaging multiple disciplinary fields, (not just the history and theory of irony and postcolonial and decolonial theory), but also philosophy, literary and cultural theory, racial science, anthropology and psychology.

The second chapter examines irony in European and American art history. Beginning with an exploration of irony's ostentatious entry into the visual arts with the iconoclastic work of Marcel

[1] As Hutcheon states, these terms have been gleaned from centuries of writing on irony by various authors and she is only responsible for organising them into this schema. Therefore one could view these terms as a reservoir of insights on irony. While the functions labelled may have been rooted in literary theory, the table also lends itself to analysing the visual, and was translatable across these verbal and visual realms.

Duchamp (1887-1968), we register the massive impact of his Dada readymades, seen also in Surrealism. Relations between the Freudian uncanny and irony will be explored in this section. This is followed by an examination of the ironic subversive practices characteristic of Postmodernism, illustrated through the works of Susan Dorothea White, Sherrie Levine and Barbara Kruger. This chapter ends with a brief look at the contemporary examples of the Guerrilla Girls and Banksy, both of whom, protected by their anonymity, are notable manipulators of irony. Together, these sections provide insights into the broader contexts of irony's usage in the visual arts (for purposes other than anti-colonial expression), whether it be to critique consumer culture, capitalist greed, or the patriarchal values of institutions. This chapter also serves as a contradistinction to the final chapter, which concentrates on the employment of irony for the singular purpose of anti-colonial expression.

The third chapter focuses on selected artworks that employ irony as a means of resistance to the varying kinds of oppression originating from imperialism. These include works that engage in postcolonial and/or decolonial dialogues. Irony involves the communication of an indirect message that often requires a fair knowledge of the context as a prerequisite. In the case of artworks that resist, counter, or subvert colonial narratives, this context is delineated against the backdrop of the colonial history of the particular nations dealt with by the artists. Postcolonial and decolonial studies encompass significantly differing cultural forms aimed at subverting colonialist oppression, and this gives us a view of a rich cultural and epistemic diversity. The artistic practices of Yinka Shonibare, Kara Walker, Pushpamala N., Yuki Kihara, Tejal Shah, Fred Wilson, Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña deploy irony through a variety of media. The final chapter examines the work of these artists in four broad sections: 'Global Systems of Circulation,' 'Challenging the Archive,' 'Curating Irony,' and 'Performing Irony.' While the first two sections reflect a thematic constancy and include multiple artists, the last two are based on the medium of expression of specific artists.

These examples of contemporary art represent a selection of artists from various colonised cultures and are grouped by thematic and material links. The first of the two sections organised thematically is "Global Systems of Circulation," where the works of Yinka Shonibare and Kara Walker are analysed. The common thread is that both their works engage with labour histories of production and how one can be oblivious to the history, context and ontology of a commodity.

The second thematic section is titled 'Challenging the Archive.' Three artists feature here: Pushpamala N., Yuki Kihara and Tejal Shah. The first two artists explore the imperial cataloguing culture that led colonisers to accumulate vast archives of ethnographic photographs, where the native was regarded as a specimen to be studied. With Shah's work from the *Hijra Fantasy Series*, her ironic premise is a Ravi Varma portrait from the 1890s, which she sees as representative of colonial India's fraught modernity. Kihara and Shah's work also challenge colonial binary notions of gender and its heterosexual norm. All three artists resurrect and recreate dominant narratives, only to subvert them through subtle and/or explicit ironic details expressed through imitation, mimicry, and intertextuality, which register as popular postcolonial ironic practices.

The third section is based on the medium of expression of a particular artist: Fred Wilson. The title ‘Curating Irony,’ refers to his practice of using curation as his artistic medium, wherein he examines and reveals the politics embedded in the display strategies of museums. These images are from his exhibition *Mining the Museum*, created in collaboration with the Maryland Historical Society, involving a radically reimagined display of the Society’s collection. Part of Wilson’s strategy is the very explicit juxtapositioning of objects that contrast symbolically, allowing for fresh perspectives. But a large part of Wilson’s irony comes from strategically locating his critique of the politics of museum culture within the site of the historical museum itself.

The fourth and final section titled “Performing irony” refers to the performance piece by Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Pena, a satirical commentary on the historic dehumanising practice of human zoos. The performance was also documented as a 30-minute video that recorded audience reactions. The medium of performance allows us the opportunity to understand the play of irony in a volatile and unpredictable environment. The possibility of mis/alignment between the audience’s interpretations and the artists’ initial intentions are explored in this section.

A material, visual, contextual, structural and conceptual analyses of these works will allow for a deeper understanding of irony’s critical role in anti-colonial art practice.

CHAPTER ONE

Theoretical Framework

1.1 The Historical and Theoretical Trajectory of Irony

"The word 'irony' does not now mean only what it meant in earlier centuries, it does not mean in one country all it may mean in another, nor in the street what it may mean in the study, nor to one scholar what it may mean to another."

D.C. Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, 1970.

The word 'Irony' is derived from the Classical Greek word *Eironeia* meaning 'simulated ignorance,' which in turn originates from the root term *eiron* or 'dissembler'. *Eiron* was a typical character in Greek comedy that was always set in opposition against the *alazon* or the braggart. The *eiron* wittily feigns incompetence and, in due course of the narrative, eventually triumphs over the self-assured *alazon*. Aristotle (384-322 BC), in *Nicomachean Ethics*, attributes the qualities of the *eiron* to Socrates: "Mock-modest people, who understate things, seem more attractive in character; for they are thought to speak not for gain but to avoid parade; and here too it is qualities which bring reputation that they disclaim, as Socrates used to do."[2] Although Aristotle seems to extoll these 'attractive' qualities, other parts of the *Nicomachean Ethics* draw out the underlying pretence or falsehood that is inherent in the exaggeration of 'truth' through boastfulness and, likewise, the underestimation of 'truth' through modesty. Aristotle does not commend either exaggerating or underplaying one's merits, but he does seem to hold the deceptive talents of the *eiron* in higher esteem than the ostentatious demonstrations of the *alazon*. Although classical drama bears clear evidence of ironic situations and engagements, it was only around the end of the eighteenth century that the term irony was attached to them.[3] Until then, the words 'mockery', 'tragic' or 'humorous' were often used to substitute an ironic situation or event.

Socrates (c. 470-399 BC) features prominently as an enigmatic character in his student Plato's (428-347 BC) dialogues. It is important to note that Plato's dialogues form the primary and enduring account of his personality, for Socrates never penned his thoughts down and has left no writing behind. What has come to be known as 'Socratic irony' refers to Socrates' ability to challenge assumptions and time-honoured certainties. He uses it as a rhetorical device and, through clever inquiry, weakens blind reckonings and foregone conclusions. Charged with irreverence to the gods and the corruption of the youth of Athens, Socrates is eventually condemned to death. The works of Plato and Xenophon describe an account of Socrates' legal self-defence in which he employs irony to challenge his allegedly

[2] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. William David Ross and Lesley Brown (Oxford University Press, 2009), 77.
[3] D.C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (Methuen & Co., 1969), 47.

shrewd interlocutors and contest their charges against him. Plato's Socratic dialogues inaugurate the beginning of the association between the mental agility of Socrates and the practice of irony.

The German philosopher and literary critic Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829) writes of Socratic irony in *Critical Fragments*—"Socratic irony is the only involuntary and yet completely deliberate dissimulation. It is equally impossible to feign it or divulge it. To a person who hasn't got it, it will remain a riddle even after it is openly confessed. It is meant to deceive no one except those who consider it a deception."[4] Schlegel's statement is itself riddled with irony but reveals to us the complex nature of ironic intent. Irony is an inherently contested concept and is intrinsically problematic to define, but its most common and casual definition is 'saying one thing and meaning another'. There have been many attempts over the centuries to tame and contain this word within a definition, but none have fully succeeded in capturing and condensing its mutable temperament.

The Roman rhetorician Quintilian (c.35-c.100 AD) commented on the use of irony in oration and that it was "made evident to the understanding either by delivery, the character of the speaker or the nature of the subject." [5] He goes on to say that "if any one of these three is out of keeping with the words, it at once becomes clear that the intention of the speaker is other than what he actually says."[6] Quintilian underlines the effort in locating ironic intent and highlights the finer sensibilities required of an audience to 'catch' the nuances of an ironic statement. With the communication of verbal irony, the tone or manner of delivery, prior knowledge of the speaker's character and the topic of discussion might provide clues to the presence of irony. Still, the same rules don't always apply while locating other types of irony, such as the non-verbal kind—the complexity of its discovery and the chances of misinterpretation increase.

Romanticism, characterised by its opposition to the Enlightenment emphasis on rationality, included a period of intense fermentation of theories regarding irony which emerged with the German Romantics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Some of the major contributing theorists were the Schlegel brothers—August Wilhelm (1767-1845) and Friedrich (1772-1829), Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger (1780-1819), Novalis (1772-1801), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), and Danish philosopher Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-1855). The substantial theorisation of romantic irony was expounded by Friedrich Schlegel, while Hegel remained highly critical of it.

Athenaeum, a short-lived periodical established by the Schlegel brothers in 1798, laid the foundations for German Romanticism. Friedrich Schlegel, in several of his works, adopts a fragmentary writing style characteristic of Romantic irony. His collection of aphoristic fragments—*Lyceum* (1797), *Athenaeum* (1798), *and Ideas* (1800) discuss diverse subjects and are self-reflective, suggestive, paradoxical, open

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[4] Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 155.
[5] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. H.E. Butler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), VIII. vi. 54.
[6] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, VIII. vi. 54.

and incomplete. Romanticism afforded individual sensibility greater importance than objective universality. For Hegel, this subjective sovereignty was the slippery slope towards the ruin of ethical life, truth and morals.

In Romantic irony, the author tends to punctuate the illusion of a fictional narrative by revealing the process of its fabrication. American literary scholar, Peter Firchow, in his introduction to a translation of Schlegel's *Lucinde and the Fragments*, writes on the philosopher's famous description of irony as "permanent parabasis":[7]

> In Schlegel's mind, the idea of interruption or parabasis was intimately connected with the idea of irony. Indeed, in one of his fragments he states that "irony is a permanent parabasis." In other words, irony consists of a continual self-consciousness of the work itself, of an awareness of the work of art as a fiction and as an imitation of reality at one and the same time. In this respect, the irony of a work of art corresponds to the ironic attitude which Schlegel saw as mandatory in actual life. Only through irony could man achieve simultaneously a closeness to reality and a distance from it. Only the ironic attitude enabled man to commit himself wholly to finite reality and at the same time made him realize that the finite is trivial when viewed from the perspective of eternity.[8]

Romantic irony extends the perception of irony as a mere literary device or trope and perceives it as an integral part of the human condition. Kierkegaard remarks that "as philosophers claim that no true philosophy is possible without doubt, so by the same token one may claim that no authentic human life is possible without irony."[9] Our existential predicament is shrouded in irony because of the fortuitousness of birth, the unpredictability of death, the strife of ambition, and the hypocrisies of organised religion. Schlegel articulates that "irony is the form of paradox."[10] An acceptance of the normalcy of the unresolved contradictions and paradoxes of human existence was characteristic of Romantic irony, elements of which were also found and examined in earlier writers such as Shakespeare and Chaucer.

Irony as a Master Trope

Irony is identified from the perspective of literature and linguistics as a trope or a figure of speech. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a trope as "A figurative or metaphorical use of a word or expression." The word's etymological origins describe it as a 'turn', indicating a shift in meaning—from literal to non-literal. This literary device is divided into several types based on usage. Most theorists regard the four master tropes as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony, which were expounded and made

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[7] 'Parabasis' with reference to ancient Greek comedy, is a particular moment in the play where the chorus addresses the audience directly devoid of the actors on stage. This delivery interrupts and abandons the theatrical plot or narrative.

[8] Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 29-30. In *The Concept of Irony*, a transcription of Paul de Man's lecture from 1977, he borrows from Schlegel's famous declaration that "irony is a permanent parabasis" and offers to complete it with "irony is the permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes." De Man notes that irony interrupts the narrative coherence of the allegory of tropes. He defines 'parabasis' as "the interruption of a discourse by a shift in the rhetorical register."

[9] Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates*, trans. Lee M. Capel (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 338. A translation by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, mentions the importance of doubt for scholarship and substitutes "philosophers" and "philosophy" with "scientists" and "science," 326.

[10] Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 149.

popular in the twentieth century by American literary theorist Kenneth Burke (1897-1993). These four tropes are identified and illustrated as follows.

Metaphor: A metaphor compares two seemingly disparate subjects that share a commonality. One is used as a substitute to refer to the other subject.

E.g., “She was a force of nature.” (Nature has often been used as a metaphor for the attributes of a person)

Metonymy: A word used as a substitute for another that is closely associated with and shares a likeness.

E.g., “The underground is closing soon.” (A lyric from *A Poem on The Underground Wall* by Simon & Garfunkel. *Underground* refers to the subway station)

Synecdoche: A word or phrase in which a part is used as a substitute to refer to the whole, or vice versa.

E.g., A suit is only interested in profits. (*Suit* refers to a businessman)

Irony: A word or phrase taken to mean the opposite of its literal meaning.

E.g., Verbal irony in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*:

“Yet Brutus says he was ambitious; and Brutus is an honourable man” (Spoken by Julius Caesar when he is aware that Brutus is far from honourable)

The literal and figurative usage of these devices tend to overlap and shift, but we shall attempt to isolate irony for the sake of clarity. Metaphors employ a lexical substitution through similarity. Synecdoche uses a part for the whole or whole for the part, while metonymy tends to substitute based on close association or proximity. While these three tropes involve comparisons and associations that are but a harmonious extension of the same semantic connotation, irony, on the contrary, employs dissimilarity and an aggressive reversal that induces incongruity and veiled connotations. Sperber and Wilson, in their book *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (1986), offer a useful distinction between metaphor and irony—“Metaphor plays on the relationship between the propositional form of an utterance and the speaker's thought; irony plays on the relationship between the speaker's thought and a thought of someone other than the speaker.”[11] The tropes, however, share a commonality in terms of their interpretative nature.

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[11] Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication & Cognition* (Oxford; Cambridge: Blackwell, 1986),

The simple semantic definition of irony illustrated above points to a 'turn' or change in meaning. It seems to engage in a more radical transformation than that of the other tropes. In A Map of Misreading (1975), literary critic Harold Bloom adds hyperbole and metalepsis to the master taxonomy. Hyperbole lays emphasis through exaggeration, while metalepsis refers indirectly to a commonly used figure of speech, but within an original and innovative context, trope within a trope. Most figurative expressions layer additional meanings to the text, and their comprehension is aided through comparison or association. On the other hand, Irony proposes an inversion of intended meaning, thus requiring a reconstruction or an unmasking of a hidden sense by analysing the surface value of the statement. It is also interesting to note that other tropes could be expressed ironically, for instance, hyperbole.

In an essay on the four master tropes in *The Kenyon Review* (1941), Burke professes that his principal concern with the four tropes is not of their figurative usage but rather their ability to discover and describe the "truth." He prescribes substitutes for each trope: "For metaphor we could substitute perspective; For metonymy we could substitute reduction; For synecdoche we could substitute representation; For irony we could substitute dialectic."[12] He warns us of the playful nature of their putative boundaries and their inclination to shade into the other at various instances. He makes specific mention of irony and how it tends to encompass the other tropes: "A dialectic, for instance, aims to give us a representation by the use of mutually related or interacting perspectives - and this resultant perspective of perspectives will necessarily be a reduction in the sense that a chart drawn to scale is a reduction of the area charted."[13] It is evident that all four tropes have common features in that they are all non-literal uses of language and require varying levels of interpretation. Irony, however, can be distinguished by its characteristic attitude of dissociation toward that which is literally expressed.[14]

Classifications of Irony

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines irony as "The expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect."[15] As its definition suggests, irony is essentially located in language. Although irony is frequently anticipated to involve the comic or the humorous, it varies in its usage and could be tragic in its tone. One notices this often in classic drama, where tragic irony is used to obscure and deepen the plot. It has been nuanced into several categories: cosmic, dramatic, and tragic irony, which foreground the relation between human intention and conflicting outcomes of events.

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[12] Kenneth Burke, "Four Master Tropes," *The Kenyon Review* 3, no. 4 (1941): 421, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4332286.
[13] Burke, "Four Master Tropes," 421.
[14] Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson, "On Verbal Irony," *Lingua* 87 (1992): 60, https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-3841(92)90025-E.
[15] "Irony", *Oxford English Dictionary*

Cosmic irony refers to the dissonance between expectation and predicted outcome caused by an entity beyond the estimates of human understanding or control. Often Fate, God, Chance or the universe are seen as such powers that could will an outcome or destiny contrary to a man's course of actions.

Dramatic and tragic irony are typically stylistic devices used in literature. In dramatic irony, the audience is in an omniscient position, well aware of the plot about to unfold. The twist in the plot is subtly or tacitly expressed so that the audience are cognisant of the fate or fortune awaiting the unwitting character/s. The actions and utterances of the characters take on a different meaning to the audience than they would indicate to the intended individual/s ignorant of their own destinies. Dramatic irony within a tragedy—where the predetermined plot brings about the twisted downfall of the unsuspecting character—indicates tragic irony. It leaves the audience feeling complicit and invested in the character's tragic fate; they know the fate that must befall her despite the most valiant efforts to control the course of destiny.

Situational irony involves an unexpected change of events, which may prove to be comic, tragic, cosmically wrought or might even bring about the betterment of unhappy proceedings. These unforeseen turns within a story help to intensify the plot and induce intrigue. Since these deviations are hard to predict, they cause the account to remain dynamic and vivid in the minds of its audience. The incongruous plot that defeats logical and common assumptions excites us—we are bought.

The twentieth century witnessed several American literary critics such as Kenneth Burke (1969), D.C Muecke (1969) and Wayne C. Booth (1974) develop and review the concept of irony, thus making it central to literary criticism in the Anglophone world. From the perspective of literary studies, much systematic writing of the many taxonomies of irony has been undertaken. These have been based on period, context, modes and grades, situations, the relationship between the ironist and audience or victim; the list is exhaustive. Muecke dedicates a chapter to the basic classifications of irony in his book *The Compass of Irony* (1969).

Muecke begins with broad distinctions between Verbal and Situational Irony. Where Verbal Irony requires an ironist to write or speak an ironic expression, Situational Irony engages Fortune, Fate or Chance to influence an ironic situation or outcome of events. On the one hand, the ironist is being ironical, and on the other, the situation is ironic, and the ironic outcome is beyond human control.

In an effort to account for the extensive range of the subtleties of irony, Muecke further divides ways of being ironical into three grades and four modes:

> into grades according to the degree to which the real meaning is concealed, and into modes according to the kind of relationship between the ironist and the irony. The three grades of irony I call Overt Irony, Covert Irony, and Private Irony. The four modes I call Impersonal Irony, Self-disparaging Irony, Ingénu Irony, and Dramatized irony.[16]

[16] Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 53.

When the irony is made explicit to the reader or victim, the usage of Overt Irony is implied. This could be achieved through the tone of voice or stylistic indications in writing or the nature of the subject itself. The receiver of Covert Irony would have minimal access to such clues and would need to probe deeper to detect the subtle irony. However, a Private Ironist would delight in the obliviousness of their victim to the irony aimed at them. The success of their irony is not necessarily reliant on its communication to the intended target. Sometimes, Private Irony may be enjoyed by two or more people of a group while the victim remains unsuspecting. The classification of the four modes is divided according to the part played by the ironist in relation to the irony produced. Muecke then proceeds to present an exhaustive list of sub-classes distinguished by techniques that appear to be dominant aspects in assorted cases of verbal irony.[17]

Diverse varieties of irony have been examined and isolated based on numerous variables. Muecke recognises the accretion of numerous 'kinds' of irony and identifies that "some have been named from the effect, others from the medium, others again from the technique, or the function, or the object, or the practitioner, or the tone, or the attitude."[18] He proceeds to attempt a systematic classification and provides five factors that a feasible taxonomy of types of irony should follow. Norman Knox builds upon this and provides a classification taking into consideration four significant variables:

1. the field of observation in which irony is noticed

2. the degree of conflict between appearance and reality, ranging from the slightest of differences to diametrical opposites

3. an inherently dramatic structure containing three roles—victim, audience, author

4. the philosophical-emotional aspect.[19]

Knox disagrees, though, with one of Muecke's classifications of irony pertaining to the relationship between the ironist and the irony. Knox argues that the ironist cannot be wholly or partially removed from any type of irony she employs and thus replaces it with the author-victim-audience factor.

The field of observation in Knox's classification applies predominantly to words, events and life or fate. He writes that these could range in form from the semantic unit of a pun to the cosmic irony of a life event. While this defined "field" has already yielded detailed taxonomies of irony, with the visual arts, it is further extended as it may consist of not just words or events but might additionally include the pictorial, the material and the conceptual. It could also be communicated performatively or through a particular technique or even via the site of its location.

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[17] Read chapter IV from Muecke's s *The Compass of Irony* for an elaboration of the four modes of irony.
[18] Muecke, *The Compass of Irony*, 4.
[19] Norman Knox, "On the Classification of Ironies," *Modern Philology* 70 (1972): 53-62, http://www.jstor.org/stable/436505.

The numerous forms of irony, its functions, effects, methods and subtleties; its intimacy with satire, sarcasm and parody challenge a singular definition. This will be explored subsequently by identifying their differences, exploring broad definitions and examining their mechanisms as they appear in artworks. The classifications of irony may not necessarily enable one to instantly tag ironies with corresponding labels. Still, it would undoubtedly help appreciate the protean nature of the word and the mutability of its concept and connotations.

Irony and Concomitant Terms

Irony is often seen in close conjunction with a constellation of concomitant terms: satire, parody, pastiche, sarcasm and paradox or incongruity. These forms of humour vary in their degrees of comic intent and sometimes function as a form of critique. A combination of these is often found in the visual arts, and it is an arduous task to separate their connotations. In an effort to disambiguate, it would be prudent to remember that their putative boundaries shift with context and are often porous and overlap.

Incongruity or paradox is central to the concept of irony. Schlegel states, "Irony is the form of paradox,"[20] suggesting that it is one of irony's defining attributes. The presence of irony does not simply signal the opposite of what is being articulated but simultaneously expresses both sides of a tension, thus creating a dynamic space for oscillating perceptions and incompatibilities to co-exist. Paradox in the visual arts is achieved by juxtaposing images, ideas, image-text, material or techniques that seem self-contradictory or incongruous. An incongruous juxtaposition could induce ironic contrast and alert the audience to the presence of irony as it flouts common expectations. By presenting an alternative to the dominant narrative or projected reality, it could induce pause to ruminate and cause us to reassess our assumptions or preconceptions.

Sarcasm, known as the crudest form of irony, is often sharp and cutting and is used to mock or insult. These two concepts are closely related, and it is hard to differentiate them as many utterances can be understood as sarcastic or ironic or both. The delicate difference lies in that sarcasm is less subtle than irony, and it makes its presence evident to the hearer or the audience. Therefore, when the intended meaning is the apparent one, irony may be lacking.

Sometimes referred to as a spoof, parody involves an imitation of the original but with a variance, usually comic exaggeration to satirise or ironise. It could suggest or evoke another work of art with one or more of its aspects relating to style, material, content, context, composition or form. It is commonly found in the visual arts where iconic works are partially imitated to gently mock, scrutinise, or even pay homage. An older work is referenced in the creation of a new work of art. Margret A. Rose comments that parody has been used as a device in the visual arts to induce irony or humour and has been used to transform both images and genres, for example, heroic imagery into the mock-heroic and pastiche into comic

[20] Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 149.

pastiche.[21] For the observer, recalling the specific context or setting is essential to fully appreciate both the imitations and changes within a parody. However, while imitation is the central feature of parody, the 'change of meaning' lies in the domain of the ironist.[22]

The term 'pastiche' is derived from the Italian word *pasticcio* and refers to a work of art containing an amalgam of different styles or ingredients. In the original sense, the word *pasticcio* refers to the manner of a pasty or pie dish, apropos of its composition of several ingredients.[23] Pastiche could be broadly applied to architecture, painting, musical compositions or literary work. The term 'parody' is often confused with that of 'pastiche'. Rose states that "whereas parody can be described as the comic remaking or refunctioning of an older work, pastiche has traditionally been understood as the imitation and even 'counterfeit' of one or more other works and has its origins in the visual rather than the literary arts."[24] A more recent term than parody, pastiche is descriptive of a process of compilation that is impartial to critique, revaluation or comic effect. Certain recent definitions conflate both terms to incorporate a humorous aspect, but Rose suggests a distinction between pastiche and comic pastiche—where the former is in closer association with its older usage as a derivative of *pasticcio*, while the latter, owing to the ongoing practices of artists and writers, has developed its comic connotation via the addition of parodic juxtaposition.

Satire, a literary genre, applicable also to the visual and performing arts, employs irony, humour, exaggeration or wit to ridicule or expose human hypocrisies, corruptions or shallow aspirations. [25] Satire is used to critique societal vices by drawing attention to the failings of men and society in order to instigate a positive change. Satire can vary widely in its tone from playful teasing to undisguised contempt. The visual satirist is a keen observer and may use caricature, wit, irony and other tools to produce political and social criticism.

While there are differences between parody and satire, such as the mocking nature of satire versus the possibly more sympathetic stance of parody, the visual satirist might use parody to evoke the subject of her mockery while the parodist might pursue satirical or comical purposes. In satire, the object of its attack is explicit, while with parody, the object is both part of its structure and the aim of its criticism or tribute. Rose opines that parody in its most sophisticated form "is both synthetic and analytical and diachronic and synchronic in its analysis of the work it re-functions, while satire alone is usually less ambiguous about that which it is criticising, and less reliant upon the artistic merits of its target for either

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[21] Margaret A. Rose, *Pictorial Irony, Parody, and Pastiche: Comic Interpictoriality in the Arts of the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2011), 5.
[22] Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson, "Irony and the Use-Mention Distinction," in *Radical Pragmatics*, ed. P. Cole (New York: Academic Press, 1981), 311.
[23] A. Rose, *Pictorial Irony*, 86.
[24] A. Rose, *Pictorial Irony*, 86.
[25] In the introduction to Schlegel's *Lucinde and the Fragments*, Firchow writes of Schlegel's conception of wit and its relation to his understanding of irony—"When he uses the word "wit" he is not using it primarily in the present-day sense of joking or punning; for him wit is rather—as it was for most of the eighteenth century—the capacity to discover similarities and to form ideas: wit in the sense of intelligence rather than of simple humor." Refer page 30.

itself or its reception."[26] Canadian scholar Linda Hutcheon, a prolific writer on irony and parody, offers useful definitions of satire and parody as forms that use irony to structural and evaluative ends:

> *satire*: the art of diminishing a subject by ridiculing (with intent to discourage) its vice or folly by the use of irony, sarcasm, humour.
>
> *parody*: imitation characterized by ironic inversion; repetition signalling ironic difference at the heart of similarity.[27]

Irony, understood initially as a literary technique, creates complexities or nuances in a narrative for comic or emphatic effect and is often present in satirical literature or artistic satire. While satire is more focussed on 'man', his thoughts, desires, needs and interests, irony adopts a subjectivity above the narrative of 'man', rejecting singular notions and characterisations.[28] This elevated and detached position is already ironic and problematic as one cannot achieve a sterile separation from context when reflecting on the world. Nevertheless, it is irony that enables us to question not just content but also helps recognise the ability of a voice or an artistic position to generate multivocal subject positions. As Derrida indicates, the finite totalitarianism of the sign and its determining nature must be resisted, but one must also guard against perpetual interpretation, which would then render things meaningless. He remarks, however, that "Infinity cannot be violent as is totality," suggesting that subscribing to a singular notion that rejects and represses all other possibilities of thought or discourse is the "worst violence."[29]

To transpose our understanding of the literary conceptualisation of these terms into their enunciation in the visual arts, I have chosen three artworks, modern and contemporary examples, which serve to shed light on the workings of pictorial irony, parody and satire. *Purification by Muddy Water* by Gaganendranth Tagore (1867-1938) is a good example of political satire that employs irony, while *Une Moderne Olympia* by Yasumasa Morimura and *Olympia's Boyz* by Renee Cox are both parodies of Manet's *Olympia*, that also engage with irony.

Gaganendranath used caricature, irony and satire in several political cartoons and his themes also included the impact of colonisation on the natives.[30]

Purification by Muddy Water (Fig. 1) is a printed lithograph from 1917. The Brahmin priest who is supposed to lead a virtuous, non-materialistic lifestyle on a strict vegetarian diet is seen caricatured here as an enormous, overbearing character, well-fed and prosperous with a potbelly. He holds a bag of money with the Bengali inscription "Rupee Goddess," most likely gained through donations from the

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[26] A. Rose, *Pictorial Irony*, 85.
[27] Linda Hutcheon, *Double-Talking: Essays on Verbal and Visual Ironies in Contemporary Canadian Art and Literature* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1992), 36-37.
[28] Claire Colebrook, *Irony: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2004), 119.
[29] Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Routledge, 1978), 133, 146.
[30] Gaganendranath Tagore, an early modernist painter from India is also known to be an excellent cartoonist. Born into colonial India, a period whose visual culture was composed of an intoxicating mix of styles, Gaganendranath studied Japanese brush techniques and even assimilated the stylistic elements of Cubism in his work. His artistic journey propelled him through several phases and eventually, he took up caricature. His satirical images appear from 1917 onwards, published in a series of books and magazines.

three devout, unsuspecting women, bowing their heads in prayer. He is also found to be sprinkling dirt into the container of holy water meant for ritual purification. Viewers, consequently, are made wise to the pretences of the priest. Our perception of this new evidence remains unavailable to the three naive women in the image who remain oblivious to this alternative reality. The scene is offset by a striking black, flat, geometric background.

Gaganendranath's satire highlights the hypocrisy of the Hindu priest and the pervasiveness of his unmarred hierarchical status within society. The irony he uses is made visible in the contradiction between the expectation of a pious individual and the image of the opportunistic priest, fattened through his ill-gotten gains. Furthermore, the holy water is muddied and made physically impure by the very priest responsible for its consecration. The irony found in the piece summons our preconceived beliefs and presents a contradiction of them, thus forcing us to question their veracity.

Contemporary Japanese artist Yasumasa Morimura uses photography to reinterpret, appropriate and parody iconic art historical subjects, artworks, artists and celebrities. Similar to the techniques and methods of American artist Cindy Sherman, Morimura inserts himself into his images using props and digital manipulation in his photographs. One sees the collapse of cultural boundaries and the unrestricted exchange of artistic influences in his works.

In *Une Moderne Olympia*, 2018 (Fig. 2), Morimura parodies and reinvents the iconic historical masterpiece *Olympia*, 1863 (Fig. 3) by Edouard Manet. Manet's *Olympia* modelled after Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, which was inspired by Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* of c. 1510, illuminates a long line of imitation involving the modernisation of older works. [31] Rose sees this ironic modernisation as an understated form of parody, "… to create a new and modern work from the old that plays on the ambiguities of the latter rather than undermining them."[32] Deviating from the idyllic landscape of Giorgione's Venus, Titian places her within the domestic interior setting of a Renaissance palace; Manet further transforms the classical goddess into a bold, modern courtesan while *Une Moderne Olympia* offers an explicit, comic parody.

Masquerading as both the figure of the white female nude and the black maid Laure[33], who presents a bouquet of flowers from an admirer, Morimura's subversive use of parody challenges notions of race, ethnicity and gender. Through his own identity as an Asian male, he exposes the politics embedded in traditional Western models of portraiture by inserting himself within the trope of the reclining female nude. Morimura's use of Camp further queers and critiques the canon. Camp sensibility celebrates theatricality, flamboyance, artifice, role-playing and an exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personal style. It is playful and undermines commonplace aesthetic judgement by insisting on "a good

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[31] The *Sleeping Venus* is partially attributed to Titian as well, for the painting was incomplete at the time of Giorgione's death in 1510. The sky and landscape are said to have been completed by Titian.
[32] A. Rose, *Pictorial Irony*, 83.
[33] The figure of Laure was reclaimed from anonymity by Griselda Pollock in the chapter "A Tale of Three Women: Seeing in the Dark, Seeing Double, at least, with Manet" from her book *Differencing the Canon: Feminism and the Writing of Art's Histories*, (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 281-306.

taste of bad taste."[34] Susan Sontag writes that "The androgyne is certainly one of the great images of Camp sensibility… Camp taste draws on… going against the grain of one's sex."[35] Morimura's masquerade in cultural drag presents us with a simultaneously virile and feminine body; using the ironic strategy of camp, he intervenes and revises gendered, racial and aesthetic expectations set by the art historical canon. In Sontag's exposition on Camp, it is easy to identify its several characteristics that align with those of irony. She describes Camp as being "alive to a double sense in which some things can be taken," and as a mode which employs "gestures full of duplicity, with a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders."[36] It is interesting to note, however, that Sontag sees irony as a "traditional means" for going beyond seriousness, while Camp, she opines, introduces "a new standard: artifice as an ideal, theatricality."[37] Camp and irony often seem to go hand in hand; Camp is largely ironic and could be considered as yet another one of irony's modes.

Morimura's restaging of *Olympia* contains several ironic elements that highlight social, canonical and cultural ambiguities. The recreation of the iconic masterpiece does not conform to the representational politics of the genre and presents several contradictions and incongruities. A disguised Morimura replaces the two female figures and alters both their genders and ethnicities—the servant is transformed into a bearded man in a top hat donning a pale pink dress, while the reclining nude adorns an elaborate headdress, similar to that of a geisha while lying on a plush red and gold bed cover, in stark contrast to the muted tones of the embroidered silk shawl of Manet's *Olympia*. The black cat on the edge of the bed, originally meant to serve as a symbol of prostitution, is replaced with the *maneki-neko* or the waving black cat that is indicative of good fortune in Japanese culture.

These ironic alterations affect many unanticipated outcomes. For instance, the male gaze typically invited by the figure of the reclining female nude is subverted, and the implied viewer of this piece might be distinctly different from the likely spectator of Manet's Olympia due to a change in the sexual orientation and ethnicity of the subject represented. Morimura's presence has undermined the dissemination of stereotyped representations of women by art historical canons. Additionally, his cosmetic alterations serve as a good illustration of American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler's theory on the performativity of gender.[38] The normative sexual positions that heterosexuality prescribes are redefined; the relationship between the viewer and the subject may now be homosexual and remains open to further interpretation. The black-gloved gentleman lover may represent the fetishising Western gaze of the coloniser onto the exoticised Japanese stereotype. However, his pink dress and positioning link him back to the subservient black housemaid of Manet's piece. Also

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[34] Susan Sontag, "Notes on "Camp"," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1966), 291.
[35] Sontag, "Camp," 279.
[36] Sontag, "Camp," 281.
[37] Sontag, "Camp," 288.
[38] Judith Butler in her book Gender Trouble (1990) first postulated the theory of the performativity of gender. It proposes that gender is performative and constructed through reiterative acts, displacing prior notions of gender as 'natural' or stable.

implicated within the piece is Japan's fascination with Western culture, telling of the complex exchange of cultural transactions.

While Morimura's use of irony derives primarily from his use of camp and witty juxtapositions, it is somewhat ambiguous in its political intent. A comparable parody by Cox, *Olympia's Boyz*, 2001 (Fig. 4), grants us a more committed critical irony. After several years as a fashion photographer, Jamaican-American artist Renee Cox shifted her focus to fine art photography. Central to her work is the image of the black woman and associated stereotypes. Using her own body as the primary motif in her digital portraiture, she disrupts gendered racial stereotypes, redefines the black, female body and reclaims agency.

The archival digital C-print *Olympia's Boyz* is reminiscent of the manner of a studio family portrait, staged with a flat background, with all three figures looking directly into the camera lens. Apart from parodying the reclining nude posture of Manet's *Olympia* and referring to the iconic painting in her title, Cox's *Olympia's Boyz* features many elisions and changes from the original that dismantle several tropes embedded in the image.

The much-neglected figure of Laure, the black maid in Manet's *Olympia*, draws attention to two tropes in European painting—the African woman as slave or servant and the compounded Orientalist and Africanist representation. The first emphasises class disparity and racial hierarchy, aiding in the erasure of a black woman's femininity when juxtaposed with a sensuous white female body, while the second is representative of the asymmetrically powered race/gender relations as a result of Europe's colonialist exploitation of Africa and other colonies. By ironically inserting a black body as 'muse' into the white-dominant trope of the reclining female nude, Cox disrupts the extended and elevated art historical legacy of white female nudity. She brings agency and individuality to the black female body, which is accentuated by the presence of her dreadlocks, which she regards as a symbol of Black culture.

With reference to the stereotypes of the eroticised and exoticised African female body, Cox dismantles the racialised and gendered gaze with the insertion of her two multiracial children. With a hand placed over her genital area, she is clear about restricting access to her body while her children bearing weapons behind her suggest that it would be dangerous for a viewer to 'try'. Evocative of a queen with her guards, she holds power and ownership over her own body. The voyeurism of the male colonial gaze is interrupted by a maternal gaze owing to the presence of the half-white children that guard their mother with traditional African weapons. Other cultural indicators include the bedspread, its stark geometry echoed by the patterns on the beaded armband and necklace that adorn Cox.

The complex layers of ironic framing disturb the simple binaries of Black/White, Whore/Mother as they are not necessarily mutually exclusive of each other within this setting. Cox's mixed-race children wear headwraps and carry wooden spears. The figure of the black female nude provokes a sexualised gaze from the viewer, while the identity of the 'mother' liberates the black female body from its sexualised stereotype, as she gazes defiantly at the viewer in the company of her children. The image presents a reconciliation of typically opposed positions. The irony present tends to amplify analyses and fosters

oscillating perceptions of multiple racial and social identities that coinhabit the same space. The performance of these polyvocal resistances to Manet's univocal classic image is facilitated by Cox's ironic appropriation of the supposed superiority of white art history.

From these examples, we can infer that parody and satire are but ironic modalities. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), Sigmund Freud proposes that caricature, parody, and travesty expose exalted ideas, personalities, and objects that have seized dignity through deception.[39] Applying this analysis to the three examples, we see that the first example containing satirical irony caricatures a powerful figure and ridicules him by exposing the duplicity of his actions. The parodic irony of the second example presents a more ambivalent attitude towards authority, which in this case is the power and import of Western icons of art history. Morimura humorously reproduces the original image, faithfully recalling it through his posturing and composition but induces reversals and distortions, thereby subverting canonical, racial and gendered expectations of the iconic *Olympia*. Meanwhile, Cox's image is less playful than Morimura's parody. She directly attacks the Western canon by defiantly occupying a space that has been racially exclusionary of the black female body.

It is evident that irony manifests itself in countless ways and performs very many functions; at times, it is playful and, at others, reveals a more serious, critical purpose. Depending on experiences, tastes and predilections, one may perceive positive or negative effects and may condemn or sanction its use. Hutcheon offers a diagrammatic illustration of the functions of irony (see Fig. 5), delineating the progression of its critical edge from minimal to maximal affective charge.[40] She articulates positive and negative distinctions for each function located by "descriptors." The schema that Hutcheon provides is useful to examine variations in terms of the strength of ironic affect in diverse artworks.[41]

Gaganendranath's work is easily identified as **satiric** and falls in the higher register of ironic affect. This ASSAILING type of satirical irony is unambiguous in intent as it is a direct attack on a religious personage traditionally perceived to be of high moral standing in society. The object of the attack is present and made explicit in the lithograph.

The two parodic examples of Morimura and Cox demonstrate irony's basic REINFORCING role; by re-presenting the Western canon of the reclining nude, they communicate a particular attitude toward it. Morimura's use of irony is **playful**, witty, self-reflexive and performs a LUDIC function. The incongruity of a nude Asian male in the place reserved for a white female body presents an alternative perspective that also locates it in the realm of the DISTANCING descriptor. It is also **subversive** as it challenges the power differentials of the gaze. Still, one could argue that it presents an overarching open-ended, PROVISIONAL tone, while Cox's piece is more **emphatically** OPPOSITIONAL and polemic.

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[39] Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton and Company. Inc., 1960), 200-01.
[40] Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 47.
[41] In further writing, I refer to Hutcheon's table using capital letters to signify the descriptors while 'bold' signifies the functions on either side.

This difference in critical edge could be linked to the degree of conflict between the original and the parodic imitation. The original presents the white female nude of a courtesan and her black maidservant, while Morimura duplicates himself as two light-skinned Japanese men—a nude male courtesan with a feminine Japanese hairdo and his gentleman lover outfitted partially in Englishman's accessories. While Japan had to negotiate Western colonialism beginning in the mid-nineteenth century constantly, it was never formally colonised and was a coloniser itself. Therefore, both figures of Morimura, identifiable as Japanese men, can still be located in relative positions of privilege in terms of both race and gender. Morimura references the complex cultural construction of Japanese identity that is entwined with its semi-colonial past.

One can sense a PROVISIONAL tone as Morimura is more commentative rather than critical of the profound influence of Western culture and its manifestations in the arts, clothing and customs of Japan. Certain ironic alterations even seem non-essential and **subsidiary** or **decorative**. He is not as polemical as Cox, who decisively eliminates all traces of European culture, replacing it with her own heritage. Additionally, Cox's piece alters the frame of reference significantly by replacing the maid with her children. One could contend that even the reclining nude pose of the courtesan that she mimics is transformed into that of a regal queen mother surrounded by her young guards.

The black identity present in Manet's *Olympia* is that of a colonised African identity, historically exploited, considered inherently inferior and that of a subservient class in a disadvantaged position of a woman with relegated social status. In contrast, the black character in *Olympia's Boyz* **transgresses** such stereotypes and is majestic and stately. She is a declaration of self-determination and presents an identity that is not subject to the patronising, gendered, racial perceptions of another. The piece can plainly be perceived as a **corrective** to gender and racial bias and, in a sense, extends itself to perform an AGGREGATIVE function. Irony is often **exclusionary**, 'performing' in theory only for those who "get" it, but it is also considered inclusive on many an occasion. This particular context of asymmetrically coded power is **inclusive** in its representation of a racial minority. Needless to say, not all irony is embedded within a satiric or parodic format.

Going forward, this thesis will examine further instances of the manifestations of visual irony across time periods and also across different media to better our understanding of its purposes and mechanisms in the visual arts. Hutcheon's descriptors of the functions of irony, along with their positive and negative interpretations, will re-emerge in the final chapter as they are applied to contemporary artworks. These artworks employ irony as a subversive strategy to undermine a Eurocentric worldview and other enduring colonial legacies. The terms featuring in the diagram will be highlighted in the analyses of the artworks of the final chapter in a similar manner as above. Hutcheon's diagram will prove helpful to evaluate the critical edge of the irony employed in these subversive artworks.

To lay the foundation for this anti-colonial resistance, the next subsection opens with the justificatory claims of scientific racism, which is followed by a literature review of postcolonial theory. Postcolonial writers highlight and undermine the racist reductionism nurtured by the scientific racism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with strategies of writing that employ irony, positive ambiguity,

heterogeneity and hybridity, amongst others. The ideological formation of 'race,' its conflation with the authority of science and the purposes of imperial conquest, form the context to understanding racial oppression. The narrative of scientific racism serves as an example of the universalising, univocal impulse that the polyvocal aims to disaggregate with the multiple meanings afforded by irony.

1.2 Scientific Racism

> "I am, somehow, less interested in the weight and convolutions of Einstein's brain than in the near certainty that people of equal talent have lived and died in cotton fields and sweatshops."
>
> – Stephen Jay Gould, *The Panda's Thumb: More Reflections in Natural History*

A fascination for taxonomy and nomenclature manifest itself most potently in the work of Swedish naturalist, Carolus Linnaeus (1707-1778). A botanist, zoologist, physician and explorer, Linnaeus, known as the father of modern taxonomy, is credited to have established a formal classificatory system for the grouping and naming of living organisms. *Systema Naturae*, his epoch-making work, published in 1735, spawned several editions and contains meticulous classifications of the plant, animal and mineral kingdoms. Through a great many expeditions and advantageous networks with European colonies and trading posts, Linnaeus accumulated and expanded his imposing list of species; his classifications are based on five hierarchical levels of kingdom, class, order, genus, and species. As God was seen to have created nature, *genus* and *species* were seen as 'natural' or God-given', while Linnaeus arranged the rest. [42] Saul Dubow, in his book *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (1995), outlines the disquieting complicity between European Enlightenment and racism. He notes the curious paradox of Enlightenment rationalism that lays import on universal classifications of man's place in relation to nature, as well as his orientation within God's creations. The implications of this, he surmises, was that scientific methods of reasoning and their assumed objectivity were in fact, drafted to authorise and sustain deep-rooted racial prejudices.[43]

'Race' as a category was firmly established through Linnaeus's geographic subdivision of *homo sapiens* into four types: American, European, Asiatic and the African Man; replete with attached character descriptions.[44] Edward Said later comments that this combination of physiological and moral cataloguing gathers strength later in the nineteenth century to build archetypal genetic generalisations that characterise much literature on the Orient.[45] Apart from Linnaeus, the mid to late eighteenth century saw in a multitude of others the burgeoning impulse to generate racial classifications of mankind. French naturalist Georges Buffon (1707-1788), German philosopher and polygenist Christoph Meiners (1747-

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[42] Prior to Linnaeus, French physician Francois Bernier, in a brief essay from 1684, divided humans into four broad races. This was the first case of post-classical thought on racial classifications.
[43] Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 25.
[44] Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, 25.
[45] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; repr., London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 119.

1810) and German naturalist and early anthropologist Johann-Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840) made eager contributions and paved the way for further attempts in the nineteenth century, which was characterised by a mounting imperialist zeitgeist.

Blumenbach's influential work, based on anatomical differences and the study of crania, proposed a division of five human groups: Caucasian,[46] Mongolian, Ethiopian, American and Malayan. An advocate of monogenesis, Blumenbach, superimposed a Christian theology onto his concepts and claimed a Caucasian identity for Adam and Eve. Unlike most of his contemporaries, however, he fervently opposed supporters of racial inferiority theories, supported the abolition of slavery and also defended the uniformity of the intellectual and moral temperaments of all peoples. Nevertheless, he believed in the concept of social degeneration and attributed it to environmental factors and diet. The hierarchy of this scheme of grouping as relative 'to' and degenerating or transitioning 'from' an aesthetically superior Caucasian standard inadvertently set the stage for the proliferation of scientific racism. His comparative descriptions of crania laid the foundation for the disciplinary field of craniometry.

In an article titled "Race Matters: Orientalism and Religion, India and Beyond c. 1770-1880," scholar Shruti Kapila notes that the English painter William Hodges's pivotal role in the emerging typologies of race, which has been largely ignored in scholarship. Hodges was a member of James Cook's second expedition to the Pacific between 1772-1775. In addition, under the generous patronage of the English statesman and then Governor-General of Bengal, Warren Hastings, Hodges also travelled to India in 1778 and lived there for six years. Known chiefly for his picturesque style of rendering landscapes and ancient ruins, Hodges also produced chalk drawings and portrait paintings of natives from Easter Island, New Zealand, Tahiti and India, amongst other places that he visited on his voyages. While Blumenbach felt that Hodges's drawings were romantically inclined, he is known to have used this visual ethnographic material to make observations on skin colour, complexion, hair and the effect of geography and climate on the degeneration of racial types.[47] Hodges then contributed not only to the orientalist portrayal of civilisations from India and the Pacific Islands but also to European racial typology.

Kapila quotes from Blumenbach's *On the Natural Variety of Mankind* (1795):

> The complexions of the people on the Coast of Coromandel and to the southward, are considerably darker than those to the northward. It is also to be observed, that the native Hindoos are generally darker than the Mussulman, who originally came from Tartary and Persia. The latter may in fact be called a fair people; and I have even seen many of them with red hair and florid complexions. It is a well known fact, that when a Tartar or Persian family has resided in India for a few generations, their

[46] Blumenbach was the first to coin the term 'Caucasian', taken from Mount Caucasus, to refer to the fair-skinned peoples of Europe and adjoining areas of West Asia and North Africa. He deemed them to possess the highest ideals of aesthetic beauty, with 'white' considered as the original colour of mankind, that had degenerated into shades of brown.

[47] Shruti Kapila, "Race Matters: Orientalism and Religion, India and Beyond c. 1770-1880," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 3 (2007): 480-81.

> complexions have considerably deepened. The Mogul family of the house of Timoor, I understand, are of a deep olive complexion.[48]

In this statement, Blumenbach observes differences in racial types within the sub-continent. Isolating conquerors as non-native from 'original' inhabitants, he establishes his theory of degeneracy through differences of skin colour and interestingly brings religion and conquest into the discourse of racial types.

Intersections between language and race emerged in the work of Sir William Jones (1746-1794). A British orientalist, philologist and judge of the Supreme court of Calcutta, he made a profound impact in the field of linguistics, which extended its effect to racial discourse. In the late 1700s, his comparative linguistic analysis proposed a linguistic kinship between Sanskrit, Latin and Greek, relating them also to Gothic, Celtic and Persian. Jones established his Aryan invasion theory by propositioning the notion of shared cultural ancestry between Europeans and Indians through Indo-European linguistic affinities. The theory was embraced by many elite Indian upper-caste nationalists as it opportunely differentiated their status from the lower castes, placing them in the 'exceptional' company of the Europeans. On the one hand, it challenged the basis of imperial authority, but on the other, the shared superior ancestry between the upper castes and the colonisers legitimised their rule, positioning it almost as a benevolent act of caring for their less fortunate, now degraded, Aryan cousins.[49] The Aryan theory was later co-opted by scholars such as French author Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882) to legitimise discriminatory ideologies.

"Cranioscopy", a method devised by German physiologist and neuroanatomist Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828), emerged in the 1790s. It was later renamed "phrenology" by his student Johann G. Spurzheim (1776-1832), who popularised the system further. This "science" purported that intellectual and moral faculties were located in specific parts of the brain, and therefore, the personality and character of an individual could be discerned by palpating the uneven contours of the cranium, upon which the corresponding portions of the brain were thought to exert pressure. Gall's theory of organology fixed the brain as the organ of the mind. He postulated twenty-seven mental traits, situating them to corresponding "organs" or "centres" of the brain.[50] Character traits such as cunning, wisdom, obstinacy and even a tendency to steal were presumed to be determined and predicted through bumps on the skull.[51] Phrenology was considered an authoritative and respected science in its heyday in the early nineteenth century and gained popularity in the United States, helping to strengthen and buttress justifications of slavery. American physician Charles Caldwell (1772-1853), for instance, deemed slavery as "natural" due to the supposedly inherent mental inferiority of all African people. Phrenology provided scientific ground to vindicate slaveholders and was applied imaginatively in the Victorian

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[48] Kapila, "Race Matters," 481.
[49] Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 3-4.
[50] Edwin Clarke and Kenneth Dewhurst, *An Illustrated History of Brain Function* (University of California Press, 1972), 92.
[51] Clarke and Dewhurst, *An Illustrated History of Brain Function*, 92.

period to aspects of criminal justice, education and even the choice of a good wife. Assisting the careful regulation of female sexuality, two phrenological organs related to affection for offspring and controlled sexual appetite were paramount in the selection of a future wife.

In 1825, a surgeon from the East India Company, George Murray Paterson, founded the Calcutta Phrenological Society in Bengal. Paterson collected, trafficked and displayed a growing number of skulls, with some assistance in procurement willingly offered by the Indian modernist, social and educational reformer, Raja Ram Mohan Roy.[52] Some of these skulls were amongst the first from the Indian sub-continent to find their way to the Edinburgh Phrenological Society, which was founded by George Combe, a Scottish lawyer and ardent proponent of the phrenological movement. These systems of exchange, of people, material objects (in this particular case, materials that reduced people to objects for examination) and ideas between empire and colony, along with the unequal nature of the terms of their relationship, coloured the articulation of new forms of knowledge ranging from science to social and political thought.[53] Kapila notes the implications of privileging typologies of 'race' in the perception or 'knowing' of India, rather than via exclusively orientalist depiction, as is commonly portrayed. Falling out of favour at the turn of the twentieth century for its flawed methodology, lack of scientific rigor and falsely attributed therapeutic potential, phrenology has since been discredited as an absurd pseudoscience.[54]

The Western concept of race was firmly established through an analysis of differences in skin colour, hair, facial features and other physical criteria. The scholarly examination of racial classifications gained momentum with the study of physical anthropology. Apparatus for the measurement of facial features were devised, protrusion of jaw from the forehead measured, and cranial and nasal indices formulated. American physician, craniologist and polygenist Samuel George Morton (1799-1851), devoted to the justification of slavery, gathered a vast collection of human skulls to 'prove' that his biased views were founded on rational grounds. In *Crania Americana* from 1839, he embarked on a comparative analysis of skulls from the Aboriginal Nations of North and South America. He proceeded to arrange a variety of skulls hierarchically, his criterion to ranking being that the larger the skull, the more substantial the brain and therefore indisputably, the superior the intelligence.[55] By way of this fallacious formulaic notion, he ranked Caucasians first, in both intellect and beauty, Indians intermediate and Blacks last. A science tangled in questions of race and "differential human worth" can never be extricated from bias.[56]

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[52] Kapila, "Race Matters," 487.
[53] Kapila, "Race Matters," 487-488.
[54] While essentially erroneous, phrenology did, however, foster interest in the brain and via false premises, arrived at the notion of localized cortical function.
[55] An article in *Science Daily* notes, that Morton did not collect data on body size, completely overlooking the correlation between brain and body size. Further to this, since brain and body size adapt to varying climates, nutrition and other factors, there can be no causal link between cranial measurement and intelligence.
[56] Paul Wolff Mitchell, "The Fault in his Seeds: Lost Notes to the Case of Bias in Samuel George Morton's Cranial Race Science," *PlosBiology* (October 2018), https://journals.plos.org/plosbiology/article?id=10.1371/journal.pbio.2007008#sec004. Mitchell remarks that even though Morton's data may have been unbiased, his science and interpretations are not.

In *The Races of Men* (1850), Scottish physician, anatomist and zoologist Robert Knox (1791-1862) sought to establish a connection between race and national character. In the preface, he states, "human character, individual and national, is traceable solely to the nature of that race to which the individual or nation belongs."[57] Amongst other publications, the commitment to the division of races into distinctive types through their mental and physical differences that were 'biologically' established as superior or inferior was sustained through works such as *The Animal Kingdom* (1817) by French naturalist Georges Cuvier (1769-1832) and *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853) by Gobineau. Gobineau's work appropriates biblical divisions of ethnic groups as a credible historical reference and is notorious for promoting Aryan racial supremacy while also holding pejorative views on miscegenation. Gobineau spoke of the quantity and quality of blood and the perils of racial mixing. He writes:

> Even if we admit that it is better to turn a myriad of degraded beings into mediocre men than to preserve the race of princes whose blood is adulterated and impoverished by being made to suffer this dishonourable change, yet there is still the unfortunate fact that the change does not stop here; for when the mediocre men are once created at the expense of the greater, they combine with other mediocrities, and from such unions, which grow ever more and more degraded, is born a confusion which, like that of Babel, ends in utter impotence, and leads societies down to the abyss of nothingness whence no power on earth can rescue them.[58]

He goes on to say that history has shown that "all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it."[59] This aspect of the 'purity' of race and 'privileged' genetics was adopted and embellished by Hitler for incendiary political purposes, which with tragic inevitability, led to the Holocaust.

With Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection presented in his book *On the Origin of Species* (1859), the Christian theological comparative basis for establishing hierarchies of race was undermined. Darwinian evolution provided 'scientific rationale' for the hierarchy of races, which further fuelled biological racism and inadvertently left a terrifying legacy in its wake. The evolutionary narrative, with its distinctions between 'savage' and 'civilised' races, was used to justify violence, extreme punishment, colonial subjugation and the mass genocide of native populations who were considered an inferior race. Native Australian Aboriginals, for instance, were perceived as a race doomed to die out; therefore, British settlers bore no responsibility and considered their extinction as 'naturally' inevitable. Some even considered it a kindness to hasten the process. Regarded by anthropologists and scientists as 'missing links' in the evolutionary chain between apes and humans, Aboriginal peoples were systematically dehumanised, their bones and body parts used as specimens for scientific

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[57] Robert Knox, *The Races of Men* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1850), 8. Knox is infamous for his involvement in the Burke and Hare scandal, in which a series of murders were committed for selling cadavers to Knox for his anatomical explorations.
[58] Arthur de Gobineau, *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, trans. Adrian Collins (London: William Heinemann, 1915), 210, https://archive.org/details/inequalityofhuma00gobi/page/210/mode/2up.
[59] Gobineau, *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, 210.

investigation. The accountability for horrific crimes was evaded on account of ‘natural law’ and interest in ‘human progress’.

English sociologist and philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) is known to have coined the phrase “survival of the fittest”. Spencer adapts Darwin’s biological evolutionary theories based on natural reproductive selection in species and applies these to aspects of the social development of the human population. According to Spencer, the process of social evolution developed similarly, through competition and the struggle to adapt, with only the socially and economically successful designed to survive. The concept of Social Darwinism found in the writing of Spencer and others moulded attitudes relating to the spread of empire, the treatment of ‘inferior’ races, ever-increasing faith in the pre-eminence of the Anglo-Saxon race and even laid the foundation for government policy when dealing with the ‘problem’ of native populations.

Eugenics, a derivative of Social Darwinism, developed in the late nineteenth century with the ideas of Francis Galton, a cousin of Darwin. Coined in 1883, *eugenics* promoted the idea of controlling human breeding in an attempt to improve racial pedigree, where the preservation and perpetuation of desirable characteristics were of paramount importance. Disease, mental illness, criminal tendencies, physical disability and even economic and social ills such as poverty were considered as inherited and were slated for elimination. Measures such as forced sterilisation of the ‘unfit’ and ‘feeble-minded’, strict immigration laws, marriage laws, social policies, segregation and laissez-faire policies were advocated. Pro-sterilisation arguments typically consisted of fears of race degeneration, inherited criminality and sexual promiscuity.[60] Darwinism, eugenics and ideas of Social Darwinism profoundly influenced Nazism. Theories were often perverted and mobilised to suit ideological motivations, as is evidenced through Hitler’s extreme acts of inhumanity that stemmed from racist nationalism.

Eugenic-influenced anxieties affected state and federal government policy, with terrible consequences for indigenous populations. In Australia, for example, for most of the twentieth century, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, specifically those with European mixed-race descent, were forcibly taken from their families as a matter of government policy of assimilation and in order to control the consequences of miscegenation. While ‘full-blooded’ adult Aboriginals were expected inexorably to become extinct, children were seen as more adaptable. Known as the “Stolen Generations”, they were seen as polluting the ‘purity’ of the white race; their actions, therefore, were closely regulated by the state. Placed in boarding schools and settler, Christian families, all ties between children and their indigenous families and heritage were severed. ‘Half-caste’ girls were encouraged to marry white men, thereby (according to colonial logic) diluting and eventually ‘breeding out’ the aboriginal blood quantum while assimilating ‘superior’ racial stock. Many today, still suffer the effects of intergenerational trauma.

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[60] Dubow notes that eugenic sterilisations became widespread in America between the late 1920s to around 1935, with similar measures endorsed in other countries such as Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Germany, while Britain took a slightly more conservative approach. 149.

The dehumanisation of indigenous peoples on account of eugenics proliferated and was epitomised in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the appearance of human zoos and public human exhibitions in Europe. American showman, P.T. Barnum known for founding the Barnum and Bailey circus, cashed in on the frenzy over the "missing link". He displayed an African American man named William Henry Johnson. Crafting a fictitious back story that he was a wild man-monkey captured in Africa, Johnson would often be revealed in a cage, playing the part in a furry suit. In 1904, Ota Benga, a young Mbuti man from the Congo in Central Africa, was acquired as an exhibit for the St. Louis World's Fair. In 1906, Benga shared a cage in the Monkey House exhibit in the Bronx zoo and was labelled as 'The African Pygmy', famed to be the hypothetical "missing link". An early example of human life being turned into a spectacle, was the case of Saartjie Baartman, a Khoisan woman from South Africa. Nicknamed the "Hottentot Venus", she was exhibited as a curiosity around London and France. Cuvier is known to have subjected her to several examinations. Even after her death in 1815, he gained permission to autopsy her body, dissect and display parts, organs and genitalia in a museum in Paris. Baartman's portrayal has been the subject of many contemporary artist's ironic treatments, and I will return to this topic in later pages.

From circus organisers to leading men of science, the portrayal of natives was consistent, as primitive savages, simian-like, sub-human, and inferior. By means of these 'scientifically established' racial divisions, the 'Other' was constructed as a subject separate from the established, dominant group, customarily comprising of European societies. Appearing in Hegelian discourse, important insights regarding the concept of Self and the Other were propounded in *Phenomenology of the Spirit* of 1807. In his chapter on self-consciousness, Hegel elaborates how our experience or sense of ourselves is contingent on and facilitated by our experience of the "other". We come to define ourselves by our relationship or difference to the Other; for instance, man as differentiated from an object or animal; the natives, of course, were systematically denied this distinction.

Frederick Douglass explains with clarity:

> the slave master had a direct interest in discrediting the personality of those he held as property. Every man who had a thousand dollars so invested had a thousand reasons for painting the black man as fit only for slavery. Having made him the companion of horses and mules, he naturally sought to justify himself by assuming that the negro was not much better than a mule. The holders of twenty hundred million dollars' worth of property in human chattels procured the means of influencing press, pulpit, and politician, and through these instrumentalities they belittled our virtues and magnified our vices, and have made us odious in the eyes of the world.[61]

The phenomenon of Othering is manifest in power relations. For instance, the imperialist must differentiate himself from the colonised subject to maintain supremacy while simultaneously constructing the fictitious inferior identity of the colonised subject. Hence the Other and its characteristics are essentially disparate from the Self. Hegel postulated the well-known 'lord-bondsman' or 'master-slave' dialectic, where a person develops an identity only by encountering and contrasting

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[61] Frederick Douglass, "The Color Line," *The North American Review* 132, no. 295 (1881): 573.

oneself with another. In this complex exchange of the demand for mutual recognition, Hegel believes that this conflict between two self-consciousness's in its extreme inevitably results in one becoming submissive to the other. Both entities become inextricably and intimately connected through their awareness of difference. In addition to phenomenology, the process of constituting difference or Otherness is a crucial area of study across varying disciplines as diverse as literature and linguistics, sociology, psychology and anthropology; a study of the same process has also been employed in queer, feminist and postcolonial theorising.

Through the nineteenth and late twentieth centuries, Western science assisted in legitimising and 'proving' the inferiority of the Other through racial determinism. The presumed objectivity of science, which in reality reflected sexist, racist and classist biases, was recruited in the construction of 'fact.' Cultural theorist and political activist Stuart Hall contests the idea of a fixed 'true' meaning. He suggests that meanings are constructed by systems of representation that are fixed by certain codes, which form correlations between our conceptual systems and language systems or in other words, systems of representation organise, construct and communicate meaning.[62] I thought it pertinent to conclude this section with an illustration from the late nineteenth century, which in its racist depiction of difference and otherness, drives home the compelling need for postcolonial and decolonial critique, and (especially aligned to the purposes of this thesis) their critical deconstructions of the enduring and damaging effects of visual regimes of representation of the Other. Titled after Rudyard Kipling's poem by the same name, "The White Man's Burden (Apologies to Kipling)," is a graphic depiction of the moral justification of colonialism (see Fig. 6).

Two elderly white men, seen as the national personifications of Britain and the U.S., have large wicker baskets strapped to their backs, overflowing with native peoples. They literally perform the 'back-breaking task of carrying groups of 'savage,' ungrateful natives in their perilous journey over a mountain towards (the shimmering golden godly personification of) "civilization," who awaits in the distance with open arms. The imperialists carry the natives over the rocks labelled 'barbarism,' 'ignorance,' 'vice,' and rather ironically, over 'slavery' and 'oppression,' all the way toward the ultimate goal of civilisation. The illustration stages the narrative of colonialism as a hard and thankless job but nonetheless, as a superior, moral obligation to civilise ignorant natives. In this visualisation dedicated to legitimising the notion of a 'civilising mission,' we see the linkage of race and progress while anything "other" than European culture was depicted as 'primitive,' wild and ignorant. It is tragically ironic that much of the pervasive ethnic prejudice that still casts its long shadow on our contemporary life was founded on this veneration of the conveniently obtuse understanding of 'civilisation,' 'progress,' and 'righteousness.'

In this telling portrayal of the mindset of white superiority, hegemonic dominance is portrayed as aid or 'help,' with no consideration of whether the help was ever asked for. Albeit more subtly, the

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[62] 'Language' here, is not restricted to linguistic conventions but is applied in a broader sense to include social, cultural and visual systems.

essentialising of difference through cultural stereotyping continues to be relayed through photography, media, film and television. As postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha suggests, stereotyping is not just "the setting up of a false image which becomes the scapegoat of discriminatory practices," it is telling of a more complex story of colonial fantasy which is an ambivalent site of projection, introjection, displacement, guilt and aggressivity.[63] He asserts that the stereotype dramatises a 'separation,' "the visibility of this separation which, in denying the colonized the capacities of self-government, independence, Western modes of civility, lends authority to the official version and mission of colonial power."[64] The bitter and deafening unintentional irony of this image is that the two men ought to have been portrayed as carrying the labelled sins and undesirable attributes (written on the stones) in their baskets while trampling over the mount of bodies of the natives; a version closer to the truth.

Intersecting paths of science and pseudo-science bred racial myths and stereotypes, cementing attitudes of white supremacy. The theorisation of the western concept of 'race' was reconfigured and transformed through different periods of history depending on ideological, political and imperial agendas. Classificatory sciences that distinguished and provided hierarchical distance from the Other, on the one hand, allayed fears of the unknown and bolstered confidence in legitimating European superiority, but on the other, also led to increased anxieties of racial contamination. The rise of evolutionary thought became a catalyst for the escalation of racism. These ideas were enthusiastically received as they naturalised slavery and justified colonial conquest. In later pages, I intend to show how this xenophobic colonialist mindset has been subjected to forms of irony in contemporary artworks.

1.3 Literature Review of Postcolonial Theory

It is important to give an account of literary and theoretical critiques of the colonialist mindset, a critical heritage that contemporary artists engage with. A number of exemplary diverse anti-colonial voices emerged in the twentieth century, creating a reservoir of critique against unjust colonial practices in many forms of art, culture and politics. Their analyses and deliberations are particularly significant to this thesis because they feed into the motivations of irony used in subsequent contemporary artistic practices which critique colonialism and Eurocentrism. These dissenting voices demonstrate fierce resistance to the univocalism of the colonial project and unravel its hypocrisies and inconsistencies. They also reflect on the ambivalence of the postcolonial psyche, the internalised inferiority embedded in native consciousness and provide insight into the harmful manufacture of discriminatory stereotypes. Stereotypical notions and essentialised understanding of indigenous peoples feature often and ironically in the work of several contemporary artists that express a critical disposition to Eurocentrism.

'The Age of Discovery,' dating from around the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, was a period of extensive geographical exploration of lands previously unfamiliar to Europeans. The word 'discovery' is

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[63] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 81-82.
[64] Bhabha, *LOC*, 82-83.

in itself a remarkably contested term as it invalidates the agency of people and cultures that inhabited these lands prior to the European invasion. The term also attributes an exclusive importance to Eurocentric experiences of the world at large. Western historiography that documents these encounters and explorations is fraught with the biased aggrandisement of the bearing of colonial empires on colonised lands. Certain key features of European early modernity such as technological innovations and industrialisation, along with the growing need for raw materials, labour, broader markets and higher profits, were the catalysts for the quests to seek new and efficient trade routes across the seas, culminating in the rise of colonialism. South America, Asia and Africa were subjected to colonial rule and were systematically exploited to provide the essential resources required to satiate the growing appetites of a globalised capitalistic economy.

The term 'post-colonial' could be identified as the period after imperialism during which a previously colonised country begins the process of decolonising its political, social and economic structures. While the prefix 'post' indicates the temporal dimensions of this period that emerges after political independence from empire rule, it is important to note that a country is forever changed by colonial intervention in myriad, intricate and enduring ways. Postcolonial theory is a method of inquiry that interprets and analyses the impact of the legacies of colonial intervention and cultural imperialism, it is applied across a wide variety of disciplines such as literature, law, arts, science, history and philosophy.

Postcolonial literary criticism locates within literary texts (primarily in the English language), customary modes of representation of natives by Europeans that encourage the preservation of western hegemony. The 1975 reading of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* by influential Nigerian novelist and poet Chinua Achebe, cautions against the canonisation of the text for its misrepresentation of Africa. He writes, "*Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as "the other world," the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilisation, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality."[65] Achebe's text uncovers encoded prejudice and reveals that the novel presents an African backdrop merely for the adventures of the European man.[66] Achebe comments on the relationship between Africa and Europe by offering an uncomplimentary but telling comparison, "Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray — a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate."[67] Further postcolonial critiques of literature produced by colonial powers are undertaken by theorists such as Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978) and Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994), which lay bare the imperialist ideologies embedded in colonial texts.

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[65] Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness." *The Massachusetts Review* 57, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 14-27, http://ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/docview/1780817843?accountid=8424.

[66] Achebe also offers his own thoughts on the psychology of the European mind. He says, "… the West seems to suffer deep anxieties about the precariousness of its civilization and to have a need for constant reassurance by comparison with Africa." 25.

[67] Achebe, "An Image of Africa," 25.

Postcolonial theory is a heterogeneous body of knowledge that also deals with the socio-psychological aftermath of colonialism and examines its sustained forms of oppression through the interactions of race and power. The long uncontested and established hierarchies of race are profoundly embedded in European and American histories and literatures. The project of postcolonialism can be seen as a critical practice that aims to revise the corruption of native epistemologies while also revealing essentialising tendencies and the totalitarian nature of colonialism. Thus, one could perhaps describe the postcolonial project as an ethical exercise that attempts to dismantle a naturalised Eurocentric grand narrative while foregrounding the voices lost to it.

Early Colonial Resistance

The nature of colonial oppression and the subsequent formation of colonial resistance to military, economic and cultural rule differed markedly between Asia, Africa and South America. The anti-colonial writings and ideas of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963), Aimé Fernand David Césaire (1913-2008) and Frantz Omar Fanon (1925-1961), on the freedom and cultural struggle for decolonisation, contributed significantly to the development of postcolonial theory.[68]

In India, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a lawyer, activist and revolutionary, was to be a major force in the world of Indian nationalist politics. Completing a law degree in England, he returned to India and struggled for a few years to establish a stable practice. He then moved to South Africa in 1893 to practice law and returned to live in India in 1915. Rising to prominence through his involvement in civil rights activism on behalf of the Indian expatriate community in South Africa, Gandhi's strategies of non-violent protest first began to take shape. Gandhi penned a modest tract called *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* in 1908 in his native language of Gujarati; this was later translated into English and published as a small book in 1909. The book contains a harsh critique of British colonialism and modern industrial civilisation, which caused it to be banned by the British Indian government as a seditious text. It also contains Gandhi's philosophies on non-violent resistance and the advocation of an idea of *swaraj* or self-rule that was devoid of the principles of modernity or the western capitalism that governed British rule.

Gandhi took to the Indian political stage as the architect of a strategy of protest called *Satyagraha*, which was based on non-violence or the practice of ahimsa. Gandhi did not see non-violent non-cooperation as mere passivity but rather as an active form of resistance. Responding to a government secretary on whether the practice of *Satyagraha* was meant to be a threat to the British government, Gandhi records his reply in his autobiography:

> This was no threat', I had replied. 'It was educating the people. It is my duty to place before the people all the legitimate remedies for grievances. A nation that wants to come into its own ought to know all the ways and means to freedom. Usually they include violence as the last remedy. *Satyagraha*, on the other hand, is an absolutely non- violent weapon. I regard it as my duty to explain its practice and its

[68] One of the critiques of postcolonial theory is the omission of South American thought.

> limitations. I have no doubt that the British Government is a powerful Government, but I have no doubt also that *Satyagraha* is a sovereign remedy.[69]

Adopting a position of moral superiority against the British, Gandhi endorsed the values and practices of a Brahmacharya,[70] disciplined abstinence, self-sacrifice and purity of mind, body and soul. He also stressed on "swadeshi" values of boycotting British goods in favour of domestic products, indigenous resources and modes of production. Recognising the link between imperialism and exploitative capitalist modernity, he directed his energies toward self-sustenance and the affirmation of cultural practices and languages.

In his writing, Gandhi periodically adopts universal, cosmopolitan and syncretic religious principles; however, his forms of resistance were problematically linked explicitly to Hindu ideals. This amalgamation of sectarian with national identity risked the marginalisation of minority communities. In the slow transition from the British Raj to self-rule, apart from anti-colonial sentiments in India, communal violence between the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority was reaching dangerous levels. The particulars of the sharing of power amongst Indians once the British had left, became the pressing issue.

The struggle ensued with Muhammad Ali Jinnah, leader of the All-India Muslim League, fighting for an equal share of power for Muslims at the all-India centre while the Hindu-led Congress's mission was to win a strong hold over the all-India centre. Gandhi's waning influence on the Congress party meant his disapproval of partition as a solution went largely ignored. With the British demarcating territorial lines in 1947 to aid in their hasty retreat, these separate and incompatible strands of nationalism led to a painful partition violently suffered by Hindu, Muslim and Sikh alike as they stumbled across the freshly drawn margins of the two postcolonial nation-states of Pakistan and India.[71] While Gandhi was irrevocably opposed to the partition, his conspicuous adoption of Hindu ideals along with the religious undertones of his political decision-making did not help assuage the fears of minorities regarding the establishment of a Hindu raj. In the aftermath of the horrors of partition, however, Gandhi was very vocal regarding the mistreatment of Muslims, even earning the moniker of 'Mohammad Gandhi' by angry and traumatised Hindus.[72] He continued to endure as a powerful dissenting voice against colonial univocalism, strongly advocating for Hindu, Sikh and Muslim unity and a return to kindness and peace.

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[69] Mahatma Gandhi, *An Autobiography, Or, The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Pub. House, 1996), 316-17. https://hdl-handle-net.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/2027/heb.02431. EPUB.
[70] In the Indian religious traditions of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, a Brahmacharya is one who leads a virtuous lifestyle of self-restraint, meditation and studies, conducive to the attainment of spiritual liberation and divine knowledge.
[71] Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 188-89.
[72] Stanley Wolpert, *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 177 and 190.

During Gandhi's years in South Africa, he began to study the abolitionist movement and was deeply interested in the Black American freedom struggle.[73] African American civil rights activist and scholar, W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) shared a reciprocal interest in the Indian freedom struggle. In February of 1929, Du Bois wrote a letter requesting a message from Gandhi to the "twelve million people… the grandchildren of slaves" struggling for liberation in America.[74] Du Bois asserts in the letter that race and colour problems were "world-wide" and that they needed his support. In a demonstration of cross-cultural solidarity, Gandhi responds to Du Bois with an inspiring message, stressing that the descendants of slaves ought not to feel shame for the dishonour belonged solely to the slave owner.

Born in Massachusetts, Du Bois trained as a sociologist at the University of Berlin and as a historian at Harvard University. Becoming the first African American to earn a doctorate degree, he later became a professor at Atlanta University. An advocate of Pan-Africanism, Du Bois co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) in 1909. His prolific writing has had enormous influence and has essentially shaped the African American literary tradition. *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), a pivotal book that shot Du Bois to literary fame, comprises thirteen essays and a short story. Containing a wide-ranging representation of black experience, the book includes poetry, historical excerpts, poignant autobiographical accounts, songs and even lines of sheet music.

Du Bois's time in Berlin brought him into contact with the Hegelian revival. He transposes Hegel's concept of the interdependent psyche between master and bondsman, to the social dilemma of the black community living in a predominantly white America. Du Bois fears that the African American will forever lack true self-consciousness, as he only sees himself through the eyes of the dominant culture. A self-consciousness ironically shaped by the lens of others. He articulates this tension through the concept of *double consciousness*, the state of being both American and black. Du Bois describes this condition as being embodied within a peculiar state of "twoness"; a fragmented psyche inhabiting a singular corporeal form, "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."[75] With regard to the visual arts, irony as a strategic aesthetic response tends to provoke an examination of these split loyalties,

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[73] In Gandhi's defence of the Indian community in South Africa, he often asserted that Indians and "uncivilised" Africans should not be subjected to the same laws, for Indians had a long history of building great civilisations while (by popular estimation at the time) Africa did not. These racist views were transformed by his study of the life and ideas of Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), who despite being born into slavery, went on to become a legendary author and educator.

[74] Lynn Burnett, "Gandhi's Connection with Booker T. Washington, W.E.B Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey," *The Cross Cultural Solidarity History Project*, https://crossculturalsolidarity.com/gandhis-connections-with-booker-t-washington-w-e-b-du-bois-and-marcus-garvey/.

[75] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: The Oxford W. E. B. Du Bois*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Oxford University Press, 2007), 3. Tunisian author, Albert Memmi, (1920-2020) also applies Hegel's master-slave dialectic in his influential text *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965). Memmi's work paints complex and nuanced character portraits of both coloniser and colonised, from his unique viewpoint as a Jew born into a predominantly Muslim colony in Tunisia, North Africa. Memmi elaborates upon the contradiction and ambiguity inherent in the binding relationship between colonizer and colonised, and of how they are both tempted and forced, respectively, to accept their roles as oppressor and oppressed. He also notes the manipulation of power in the colonizer's refusal to fully allow the assimilation of the colonised, thereby maintaining the latter's position of dependence.

critically reflecting on the unresolvable tensions embedded in the inherent duality that is symptomatic of the postcolonial condition.

Appropriating American abolitionist Frederick Douglass's concept of "the colour line", Du Bois makes the metaphor popular as he uses it in the opening line of chapter two, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line."[76] Referring to the crisis of racial discrimination and segregation, he enhances the visual and psychological impact of the divisionary metaphor with that of his own, "the veil"—"The Veil of Race" and the "Veil of Colour".[77] Through his stories and concepts that illustrate racial discrimination, one could interpret Du Bois's text to reflect a simplified Self/Other in the binary of Black oppressed and White oppressor. Yet, if one looks deeper, his metaphor of double consciousness challenges this clinical binary. The existence of both Self and Other within an individual black consciousness adds further complexities. Du Bois speaks to the paradoxical effects of this dilemma: "Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or to revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism."[78] This kind of doubling is ironic, where two entities or elements, though contradictory, seem to attain equal validity in the consciousness. Du Bois identifies this indeterminate state as the problem afflicting black consciousness, leading to a sense of unworthiness and disenfranchisement. The artist ironist navigates through the dilemma of these impossible situations and dual expressions, contesting the notion of a 'singular true self.' The perceived malady is transformed into strategic resistance by an artist's application of subversive irony.

Du Bois seeks to reconcile this affliction of the subordinated African American identity, through a merging of the two selves. American historian David Levering Lewis, who wrote Du Bois's biography, draws attention to the revolutionary method in which Du Bois turns this precarious position of a double consciousness into a potential strength. Lewis states that by affirming and owning the perpetual tension, Du Bois perceived that "the destiny of the race could be conceived as leading neither to assimilation nor separatism but to proud, enduring hyphenation."[79] Education, Du Bois believed, was the cure to the ills of social separatism, to the pressures of prejudice and poverty and a means to achieve full equality, self-respect and a healthy self-consciousness.

Ideologies and concepts developed by Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* were foundational to the Negritude movement, which was a literary, cultural and political movement that responded to the prejudicial treatment of Black people with a positive assertion of Black identity. The influential Afro-Caribbean, Francophone, poet, writer and politician Aimé Césaire from the island of Martinique is renowned for his role in the Negritude movement. Césaire, along with Leopold Senghor, contributed

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[76] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 8.
[77] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Pages 38 and 96 respectively.
[78] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 96. Du Bois felt that this contradiction was illustrated in the difference between the ethical tendencies of African Americans living in the South and North, one prone to hypocritical compromise, while the other to anarchic radicalism.
[79] David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868 – 1919* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 194-95.

significantly to the movement. Employing an engaging surrealist literary style and Marxist ideas, they called for a Pan-African unity in the face of cultural imperialism. By incorporating the pejorative term négre and transforming it into an expression of empowerment, Césaire fought to reclaim black colonised identity and consciousness.

In *Discourse on Colonialism* from 1950, Césaire launches a direct, unbridled attack on colonialism and the inherent hypocrisy of European justifications of its accompanying advantages of progress and civilisation. He calls out the barbarism and "morally diseased"[80] nature of a civilisation that justifies colonialism as an altruistic and benevolent 'Civilising Mission' espousing Christian virtues. Césaire demands an examination of the working dynamics of colonisation and labours to display the truth and terrifying reach of its savagery.

> First we must study how colonization works to *decivilize* the colonizer, to *brutalize* him in the truest sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism; and we must show that each time a head is cut off or an eye put out in Vietnam and in France they accept the fact, each time a little girl is raped and in France they accept the fact, each time a Madagascan is tortured and in France they accept the fact, civilization acquires another dead weight, a universal regression takes place, a gangrene sets in, a center of infection begins to spread; and that at the end of all these treatises that have been violated, all these lies that have been propagated, all these punitive expeditions that have been tolerated, all these prisoners who have been tied up and "interrogated," all these patriots who have been tortured, at the end of all the racial pride that has been encouraged, all the boastfulness that has been displayed, a poison has been distilled into the veins of Europe and, slowly but surely, the continent proceeds toward *savagery*.[81]

One notes the irony of Césaire's tone in his usage of the adjective "savage" to describe the imminent attribute of the coloniser, one that was so freely ascribed to the colonised native.[82] It is also interesting to note that this excerpt which forms a whole paragraph, is in fact composed of a single sentence. Césaire's style of writing is known to have been influenced by French poet and writer André Breton, a founder of the Surrealist movement, who encouraged Césaire to engage surrealism into his political arsenal. The style is effective in that it conveys a sense of urgency to action and facilitates a pouring out of raw, honest feeling that is unvarnished by diplomacy.[83]

Césaire proceeds to pull apart and dissect the uncomfortable truths of the colonial enterprise. He draws parallels between Nazism and colonialism and points out that victims of Hitler's brutality were once perpetrators of the very crime that befell them. He speaks of the complicity of the European victims of Nazism and remarks that "before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimised it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples;…the Arabs of Algeria, the "coolies" of India, and the "niggers" of Africa." [84] These inconsistencies, he remarks, reveals a 'pseudo-

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[80] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham and Robin D.G. Kelley (NYU Press, 2000), 39.
[81] Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 35-36.
[82] Michael Taussig in *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (1993), writes that the "mimicry by the colonizer of the savagery imputed to the savage" is what he calls the "colonial mirror of production." He points to the inherently mimetic structure of attribution and counter-attribution. For further discussion, see page 66.
[83] We see this influence embodied later in the writings of Frantz Fanon, who studied under Césaire.
[84] Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 36.

humanism' that is biased and racist.[85] Hitler, he deems, unwittingly inhabits the distinguished, humanistic, Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century.[86] Césaire exposes several such ruptures and ironies of the colonial project—that thieves and swindlers were given the responsibility of spreading Christian virtues and that the seemingly altruistic campaign of civilising the barbaric natives was in fact stained with the savagery of the colonisers themselves. He argued that communal societies and sustainable indigenous economies had been disrupted by imperial capitalism's idea of progress, which only served colonial interests.

Césaire also addresses the important role of psychology in colonisation. He speaks of the crafty and calculative embedding of an inferiority complex among the natives through the "idea of the barbaric Negro" which was essentially a "European invention."[87] Césaire also tackles French psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni's elaboration of the dependency complex. In the context of the Malagasy peoples, Mannoni posits that since colonisation had triggered an abandonment of routine tribal society, the resulting instability in a foreign environment had caused the Malagasies to prefer an infantile dependency on the coloniser. The underlying premise was that the psychology of the Madagascan was different from that of the European, in that he would rather abandon freedom and autonomy in favour of maintaining or even craving paternal dependency on the coloniser.[88] Césaire comments that this hypothesis completely ignores instances of the Madagascan revolution and other demonstrations of resistance to French colonial occupation.

Césaire lays out the false equations that pervade colonial ideology, "*Christianity* = *civilization*, *paganism* = *savagery*"[89] and posits one of his own, "colonization = "thingification.""[90] He says that "the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal*, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal."[91] Césaire identifies this as the 'boomerang effect of colonization.'[92] He remarks that abuse is enabled by the objectification and dehumanisation of the other; however, this process does not leave the initiator unaffected. He, in turn, becomes savage, inhuman and animalistic.

In conclusion, Césaire reminds us of the history of atrocities committed by the bourgeoisie class under the guise of human progress. At a time where America was perceived by some as liberators, Césaire is prophetic about American imperialism and dubs the American as the 'modern barbarian'.[93] Césaire's ideas sought to reaffirm pride in black identity and the cultural values of traditional African communal societies. He saw this as a way to counter the obstacle of a fallaciously imposed inferior status. His

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[85] Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 37.
[86] Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 36.
[87] Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 53.
[88] Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 60.
[89] Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 33.
[90] Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 42.
[91] Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 41.
[92] Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 41.
[93] Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 76.

work on the psychology peculiar to the processes of colonisation and its impact on both the coloniser and colonised widely influenced other writers, including Fanon.

Frantz Fanon, also a Martinican is known to have studied under Césaire. Césaire and other writers from the negritude movement were a significant influence on Fanon, though he did later turn critical toward the movement. *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) are Fanon's most influential and radical texts. Fanon, born under French colonial rule in Martinique, later pursued medicine and psychiatry at the University of Lyon in France.

The opening quote of *Black Skin, White Masks*, is taken from Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, which marks the calculative imbedding of fear, subservience and inferior status in the minds of the colonised. Fanon's introduction comments on the psychological crisis of the black man. His text employs a psychoanalytical approach that explores the dynamics of colonialism and racism on both coloniser and the colonised. Using excerpts from black writers, psychiatric case studies and channelling his own lived experience as a colonised subject along with his experiences of fighting in the war, Fanon writes of the psychopathological effects of colonial assimilation on native identity—an inferiority complex internalised through systematic dehumanisation and an imposed racial hierarchy. Engaging in a multidisciplinary approach, Fanon draws from psychoanalysis, Marxism, literary criticism and existential philosophy.

The phenomenon of language is the focus of Fanon's first chapter. The adoption of a European language, such as French, by a black native is to display an alleged linguistic superiority, a subversive tool to unlocking and accessing the privileged world of the coloniser. Fanon warns, however, that an obsessive mimicry of the oppressor could lead to a rupture in identity, causing a sense of alienation. This idea of mimicry and ambivalence, characteristic of the postcolonial condition, inspire later postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha.

"Let us have the courage to say it outright: *It is the racist who creates his inferior.*"[94] Through this quote, Fanon surmises that the feeling of inferiority is but a counterpart constructed through the correlated assumption of European superiority.[95] Applying the Hegelian master-slave dialectic to colonial relations, he is of the view that the master is indifferent to recognition from the slave and only sees value in the slave's labour. The slave, in the meantime, wishes to be more like the master in order to unlock doors of privilege and lacks the independence of the Hegelian conception of the slave.[96] He believes that the

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[94] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 69.
[95] This is a concept that later becomes vital to Edward Said, a key figure, seen as a founder of postcolonial studies. I explore this further in later pages.
[96] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 220-21. In Hegel's view, since the slave is fearful and dependent on the master for existence, the master cannot truly attain recognition through the consciousness of the slave. As true recognition can come only from another independent consciousness free of fear or favour, the master's certainty of self is weak and unfulfilled; this gives the slave a minor advantage in this play of dependency. The inherent contradiction of these compromised mediations is revealed, as the 'dominant' person is discovered to be psychologically dependent on the other for sustained submission and acknowledgement of power. Each entity ironically absorbs the master and slave into their respective subjectivity.

desire and struggle for recognition can only be fulfilled through an understanding of intersubjective dependence and mutual recognition.

Fanon makes mention of archetypal representations of people of colour who were repeatedly ascribed evil attributes in magazines and comics. The native children consuming these publications created by white authors for white children tended to internalise these stereotypes. The black man seeing himself through a European lens as savage, subhuman, animalistic, primitive and hyper-sexualised, rejects his own identity, choosing instead to emulate his antithetical, white Other. Fanon cites a personal incident of discrimination and its resulting impact on him:

> "Look, a Negro!"… "Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" … I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but… I could no longer laugh, because I already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and above all *historicity*…Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema… it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person… I was given not one but two, three places… I existed triply… I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects, slave-ships…On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object.[97]

Fanon speaks of the distressing effect of failing to be seen as simply a man amongst other men. He has his body constantly burdened with the weight of white men's assumptions of black ethnic stereotypes, along with the perpetual misrepresentation of his ancestors. "Without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood. Not yet white, no longer wholly black, I was damned."[98] These lines from Fanon echo the mental uncertainty and ambivalence present in Du Bois's concept of double consciousness. The resultant sense of displacement compels him to disengage from his corporeal existence, to become an object.

His chapters devoted to women are tendentious in that there is a rigid heterosexual framework within which the analysis of women is reduced solely to their biological sex and sexual desires. In some places, the misogyny is explicit; for instance, commenting on the fear of the Negrophobic white woman of rape by a black man, Fanon asks, "Basically, does this *fear* of rape not itself cry out for rape? Just as there are faces that ask to be slapped, can one not speak of women who ask to be raped?"[99] One notes an overpowering androcentric tenor to Fanon's analysis, as it explores aspects of sexual violence, interracial-gendered hierarchies, sexual jealousy, fantasies and the desiring gaze of colonial conquest.

In "Desire and Difference", English social theorist Jonathan Dollimore writes of Fanon's equally problematic rendering of homosexuality. In some passages, Dollimore says, "*repressed* homosexuality is construed as a *cause* of a violent and neurotic racism," while in others, "Fanon regards *manifest*

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[97] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 112.
[98] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 138.
[99] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 156.

homosexuality as an *effect* of the same neurotic racism".[100] A lengthy footnote reveals Fanon's prejudiced views on homosexuality. According to him, Martinique records the lack of an explicit presence of homosexuality; he attributes this to the absence of the Oedipus complex in the Antilles. With regards to the occasional group of transvestites, Fanon insists on the ultimate presence of a "normal" heteronormative pattern.

> But I am convinced that they lead normal sex lives. They can take a punch like any "he-man" and they are not impervious to the allures of women-fish and vegetable merchants. In Europe, on the other hand, I have known several Martinicans who became homosexuals, always passive. But this was by no means a neurotic homosexuality: For them it was a means to a livelihood, as pimping is for others.[101]

Interestingly, despite the queerphobic nature of Fanon's views, his main ideas have influenced several queer theorists and also some Black queer artists. Fanon's analysis of race inequality in colonial relations has been used as a framework for addressing gender discrimination in heteronormative societies. While there are close affinities, there is no simple equivalence between racist and sexist types of discrimination.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon records the violence inherent in the exploitative nature of colonisation and declares that the opposing process of decolonisation and liberation, too, must be violent. We find mechanisms of reversal employed as a counterstrategy, where Fanon deems proportional violence and armed struggle as a necessary reciprocal. For Fanon, the revolution of colonised peoples ironically embodies both creative and destructive qualities.[102]

Actively engaged in the Algerian resistance against French colonial forces, Fanon finds the impatience for freedom and the assertion of self-identity, underpinning the need for violence. As a vital inauguration to the process of decolonisation, Fanon calls for a pan-African consciousness (as opposed to a separatist tribalism); however, he also advocated the need for a national culture that was self-reflexive and receptive to change. He is mindful that 'national culture' could precariously metamorphose into ethnocentrism and the constrictions of a static, fetishised identity. He is also prophetic about the native bourgeoisie appropriating the role of the imperialist, as they too were beneficiaries of the colonial system. Fanon recognises the socio-economic consequences of colonial racism and emphasises that the peasantry class, who had endured the worst of colonial capitalist exploitation, were the true revolutionaries and vital to the freedom struggle.

Amidst the problematic valorisation of violence, Fanon calls ultimately for the emergence of a new humanism, not the brand of enlightenment humanism, which he saw as a pseudo-universalism essentially veiling univocal and racist exclusionism, but an inclusive humanism, transcending national,

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[100] Jonathan Dollimore, "Desire and Difference: Homosexuality, Race, Masculinity," in *Race and the Subject of Masculinities*, ed. Harry Stecopoulos and Michael Uebel (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1997), 32.
[101] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 180. See footnote 44.
[102] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld,1963), 93. See also "The Politics of Irony in Fanon and Kristeva" by Brigitte Weltman-Aron.

racial and class boundaries. For the liberated postcolonial state, Fanon advises commitment to socialist ideals and cautions against the trappings of simulating European models, as he believed racist structures were reflected in the discourses stemming from its civilisation.

For a life cut short by an untimely death, Fanon's influence has been immense. Widely read generations after his books were first published, Fanon continues to influence voices of resistance against racist attitudes, with a profound impact on postcolonial and decolonial theorists. His authentic visions of decolonisation were ahead of his time and helped to create a reservoir of critical discourse that eventually found its way into the ironic practices of subsequent theorists and artists.

Orientalism

Palestinian American cultural critic Edward W. Said further laid the foundation for postcolonial studies by providing a remarkable model of textual analysis that lay bare Eurocentric prejudice. Growing up in Jerusalem and Cairo, educated in the halls of Princeton and Harvard, Said assumed the post of a Professor of English and Comparative literature at Columbia University in the 1960s. With regard to examining the long legacy of polarising distinctions made between the East and West, *Orientalism* (1978) by Said is widely acclaimed and also contested. Said proffers several descriptions of 'Orientalism' throughout the book. He identifies it as a discipline, a "system of ideological fictions", "a form of paranoia", "an imperial institution," and a coercive Western framework through which to view Oriental subjects.[103] The practice of fashioning arbitrary geographical boundaries presumed to contain ethnic, social and cultural types, homogenised the cultures of considerably large geographical areas while nurturing the maintenance of fictional distinctions between the exotic and distant Orient from the civilised Occident.

Said makes mention of the Oriental genre of painting that was in vogue in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Visual representations of the Orient as sensual, sublime, exotic, strange, eccentric, primitive and barbaric proliferated and were naturalised. In effect, the discipline of Orientalism fashions the oriental subject through misrepresentation, biased forms of documentation, religious bigotry and negative contrast with a Euro-Christian identity. Ironically—and this is the core of Orientalism—this 'othering' binary served to shape and distinguish European identity. The logical and scientific mind of the European was attributed to Enlightenment ideals, while his good character, nobility and temperament were strongly tied to his virtuous Christian upbringing. Christian missionary organisations were also vested in the expansion of Europe, as colonial conquest accelerated the spread of Christianity amongst the pagan races.

Said flags Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt in the late eighteenth century as a formative moment for the ideological construction of Orientalist discourse. Along with the goal of military conquest, crucial instruments of western epistemological hegemony were deployed in this expedition. Napoleon enlisted

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[103] Said, *Orientalism*, 321, 72, 95.

scholars, ethnographers, naturalists, scientists and engineers to gather information on Egypt. The history and culture of Egypt, archived and catalogued through the crucible of French colonial ambition, created a comprehensive body of knowledge that irrevocably influenced European attitudes towards the Orient. Said argues that these attitudes still continue to govern our "contemporary cultural and political perspectives" of Egypt and other Islamic nations.[104] In 1798, the same year of the expedition, Napoleon swiftly founded the Institut d'Égypte. Imbued with Enlightenment ideals, it was designed to support an encyclopaedic survey of ancient and modern Egypt, its language, natural history, politics, literature and arts, amongst other aspects. In the nineteenth century, a great surge of interest concerning Oriental studies led to the birth of similar institutions such as the Royal Asiatic Society and the American Oriental Society, which abetted, what Said calls, a "textual attitude"[105] towards the Orient. The Orient was thus an accumulative construction of non-European identity under the authority of texts rather than direct contact. [106] Texts that had been fashioned by the limited visions and unopposed, privileged vocabulary of the Western perspective.

Said employs Antonio Gramsci's and Michel Foucault's respective notions of hegemony and discourse. He reveals the relationship between the structures of power and knowledge by conceptualising Orientalism as discourse, as knowledge of the Orient, framed through the authority of texts produced by a dominant Eurocentric voice. With regard to this type of text that claimed to contain knowledge on the Orient, Said observes:

> Expertise is attributed to it. The authority of academics, institutions, and governments can accrue to it, surrounding it with still greater prestige than its practical successes warrant. Most important, such texts can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it.[107]

The supremacy of the written word over oral traditions allowed the Orientalist 'expert' to exert control over representation. With a blind eye turned to the political interests and cultural prejudices of the knower/Orientalist, it is his voice that is allowed to speak with authority on the native's behalf, legitimated through the manipulation of forms of knowledge. As Said puts it, "One myth supports and produces another."[108]

Physiological, moral, psychological and social characteristics were attributed to the Oriental subject. Said illuminates the many objectionable ethnic stereotypes that thrive in colonial narratives, "The perfidious Chinese, half-naked Indians, and passive Muslims."[109] Through the analysis of texts by colonial administrators, philosophers, historians and authors such as Cromer, Disraeli, Homer, Kipling and others, Said unpacks the dangerous distortions and reductive generalisations that fatefully form the

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[104] Said, *Orientalism*, 42.
[105] Said, *Orientalism*, 83.
[106] These sources varied from ethnographic documentation to imaginative travel literature.
[107] Said, *Orientalism*, 94.
[108] Said, *Orientalism*, 307.
[109] Said, *Orientalism*, 108.

canonical basis of the empire's knowledge regarding the East. Analysing an excerpt from Cromer, Said summarises his presumptions of Oriental character, concluding with a negative comparison with the European temperament—"Orientals or Arabs are… "devoid of energy and initiative," much given to "fulsome flattery," intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals;… Orientals are inveterate liars, they are "lethargic and suspicious," and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race."[110] Said goes on to say that "the Oriental is depicted as something one judges (as in a court of law), something one studies and depicts (as in a curriculum), something one disciplines (as in a school or prison), something one illustrates (as in a zoological manual)."[111] These frameworks that were shaped and maintained by the imperial strength of the West strictly regulated how the Oriental subject was to be stereotypically depicted.

Egyptian-French thinker and political scientist Anwar Abdel-Malek, known for championing pan-Arabism, is cited by Said for his thoughts on "the hegemonism of possessing minorities."[112] The Oriental becomes the static, passive "object" of scholarly discourse, essentialised and othered against an anthropocentrism aligned to a Eurocentric exemplar. The silence of the Orient in the wake of the all-pervasive military and political strength of the West provided a seedbed for (what Derrida might call) the violence of a singular notion of history. As self-appointed saviours, the imperialists wove around themselves a dissimulation through the narrative of an altruistic mission to wrench the ignorant natives away from the brink of economic, social and moral degradation and to rehabilitate and transform lawless lands into productive colonies. As Said pronounces, "The scope of Orientalism exactly matched the scope of empire…"[113]

Marxist literary theorist, Aijaz Ahmed, offers a fierce critique of Said's *Orientalism* in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* from 1992. He comments on the privileging of Western canonical literary texts and attributes this orientation to Said's own European-inflected scholarly training in the discipline of Comparative Literature. Said's pivotal work has been critiqued for its tendency to homogenise forms of colonialism, to paint the work of all Orientalists with the broad brush of imperialist ideology and in addition, to often misconstrue Marx's writing. *Orientalism* has been found lacking in its examination of the social structures of class and also overlooks the gendered and sexualised nature of colonial encounters. Nevertheless, the extraordinary impact of *Orientalism* on postcolonial studies cannot be disputed. Through its questioning of the established power and authority of Western knowledge, scholarly objectivity and its success in unveiling the regimes of representation that constructed the fictional Other, *Orientalism* lends itself as a model of analysis to diverse disciplines and new fields of scholarship.

Postcolonial Studies

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[110] Said, *Orientalism*, 38-39.
[111] Said, *Orientalism*, 40.
[112] Said, *Orientalism*, 98 and 108.
[113] Said, *Orientalism*, 104.

The institutional advance of postcolonial studies developed in the academies of the US and the UK in the 1990s. Postcolonial theorists delved into unearthing the myriad forms of colonial oppression, indebted to anti-colonial thought from South Asia and Africa. Scholars began to examine the intricate history of the deployment and maintenance of colonial hierarchical relations through literary works, institutional law and the imposition of language and culture. The role of anthropology, the ideological conditioning through education and, more directly, the impact of political, economic and military control were also scrutinised. Among the early Indian postcolonial scholars, Gayathri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha have been significantly influential in the field of postcolonial studies.

Gayathri Chakravorty Spivak, born in 1942 in the city of Calcutta, during the chaos of the tail end of colonial rule and the emergence of independent India, was witness to the violence of the partition of both Bengal and that of India. She was witness not only to the physical, visceral violence of British colonialists but also to the processes of nationalism. On completion of her undergraduate degree at the University of Calcutta, she moved to America for higher education and is currently a professor at Columbia University and a founder of its Institute for Comparative Literature and Society. Spivak rose to prominence with her English translation *Of Grammatology* by Jacques Derrida and is best known for her controversial and influential essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* from 1988.

Spivak borrows the notion of subalternity used by Italian Marxist theoretician Antonio Gramsci. Originally a military term, Gramsci used it to refer to those classes that are oppressed by dominant groups. More explicitly, classes of people that are marginalised and disempowered through their lack of social, political and economic agency. Spivak adopts the word ‘subaltern’, in the context of the native under colonial subjugation and also of the woman in a postcolonial nation. Spivak adduces through case studies, events and private stories, that it is the native woman who is encircled by a doubly silencing erasure, under the powers of both colonialism and patriarchy. Bringing a determined feminist critique to the mechanics of representation of the subaltern subject, Spivak questions the lack of subaltern agency in this non-nuanced constitution of identity.

Spivak presents a range of theoretical leanings through her approach—feminist, Marxist, poststructuralist, deconstructivist, postmodern and postcolonial. Connecting literary, philosophical and historical interests, Spivak calls attention to the problematic practice of Western historicisation of narratives of the third-world subject. Spivak’s argument is that the subaltern cannot speak for themselves in the midst of competing hierarchies. She is concerned with the problematic role of the intellectual in the construction of the subaltern subject, the “ventriloquism” of the intellectual that in effect, obscures the native voice. Spivak notes a complicity between western intellectual production and western international economic, political and ideological agendas. The complicit role of the bourgeoise Indian nationalist as a native informant to British colonialists does not escape her attention either. Analysing Spivak’s *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), Mark Sanders comments on her conception of the role of the native informant:

> Closing her section on Kant, Spivak associates the perspective of the Native Informant, as reader, with terms from literary theory – specifically, a thematics of parabasis, irony and allegory: ‘To read a few pages of master discourse allowing for the parabasis operated by the native informant’s impossible eye

> makes appear a shadowy counterscene' (CPR 37)… In another of her splendid long footnotes, Spivak 'recommend [s] de Man's deconstructive definition of allegory as it overflows into "irony" [...] which takes the activism of "speaking otherwise" into account; and suggest [s] that the point now is to change distance into persistent interruption, where the agency of *allegorein* - located in an unbeatable alterity presupposed by a responsible and minimal identarianism – is seen thus to be sited in the *other* of otherwise' (CPR 156n, cf. 430)."[114]

Spivak calls to attention the impossible perspective of the native informant who is invited by the ethnographer into the realm of colonial knowledge production but will always be denied an authorial or narrative position. Spivak uses the Lacanian term of 'foreclosure' to describe the expulsion/dis-location of the native informant from colonial networks of power who, nonetheless, retains a haunting presence in the colonial discursive tradition.[115] Commenting on the binary opposition between master and native, she writes, "One task of deconstruction might be a persistent attempt to displace the reversal, to show the complicity between native hegemony and the axiomatics of imperialism."[116] She thus identifies the ironic position of the native informant as both privileged and oppressed. Spivak is also mindful of her own positionality as a postcolonial intellectual and locates her position of subjectivity throughout her writing.

The Subaltern Studies Group or Subaltern Studies Collective, founded in the 1980s by renowned Indian scholars, took on the prodigious task to review the colonial and nationalist-elite-inflected framework of Indian historiography by documenting the neglected experiences of subaltern groups. The term 'subaltern' drafted by Gramsci, primarily in the context of worker and peasant struggles in Fascist Italy, was co-opted by the group to refer to those disenfranchised by the ruling elite. The early writing of Ranajit Guha, founding editor of the collective, recovers instances of peasant uprisings to colonial rule and perceives these revolts to be paradigmatic of subaltern consciousness. Through a reading of Guha, Spivak demonstrates that he locates subalternity in a definitive oppositional relation to hegemonic domains. Spivak critiques this simplified dichotomy and argues instead that the subaltern is located both inside and outside these domains, both autonomous to and inscribed within.[117] Furthermore, by posing the problem of the intersection of gender and subalternity, she delivers a necessary feminist intervention, shedding light on the double effacement of the subaltern woman.

Spivak is sceptical of subaltern agency as she notes the western meta-narratives that inform subaltern history. She argues that the subaltern is often "spoken for" by the benevolent intellectual and therefore cannot claim agency or enunciation within such a discourse. In particular, the subaltern native woman, facing oppression determined by both race and gender, remains at the periphery, her trace obscured.

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[114] Mark Sanders, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Live Theory* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 16. 'Parabasis', as de Man explains it in *The Concept of Irony*, is the constant interruption, disruption or undoing of the narrative line, while simultaneously maintaining it.

[115] For Spivak's adaptation of the Lacanian concept of 'foreclosure' in relation to the native informant, see *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 4-6.

[116] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 37.

[117] Spivak's perception of subaltern identity is implicitly analogous to the operations of critical irony as it functions from both within and outside that which it critiques. Subsequently, in decolonial literature, we see parallels in the concept of 'border thinking,' formulated by Gloria Anzaldúa and further developed by Walter Mignolo.

Through the discourse on the Hindu practice of *sati* or widow immolation, constructed either by the patriarchal colonialist or the native male intellectual, Spivak exposes the specious assumption of agency in the woman's 'choice' of yielding to a ritualistic death. Discourse on the British abolition of sati is inscribed with the legitimising politics of the 'civilising mission' on the one hand and the Indian male nativist nostalgia for ancient origins and sacred rituals on the other.[118] Spivak discusses both the interesting nuance of the ritual of sati "not being redefined as patriarchy but as *crime*"[119] by British law and also the male "Hindu manipulation of female *subject*-constitution".[120] The precarity of subject-formation is laid bare, as we see that the 'free will' of the woman is conscripted as an instrument of colonial and patriarchal agency.

Spivak's poststructural, deconstructivist, feminist intervention had a notable influence on the Subaltern Studies Group. Their research methods underwent a marked change as they began to question the authenticity of voice, mechanics of representation, the unstable category of the subject and problems of alterity. The complicity of the intellectual in obscuring the subaltern was acknowledged along with the subsequent ethical responsibility of the scholar to the Other. Their previously exclusive male conception of subaltern rebels was also altered. Indian historian Partha Chatterjee marks this new phase to volumes published between 1989-90, where the fragmentary nature of subaltern history was acknowledged along with the heterogeneous elements of its constitution.[121]

While Spivak's essay resists the essentialist positioning of subaltern subjects, "strategic essentialism" is an approach that she is well known to have articulated around 1984. It was proposed as a strategy that could be employed to create solidarity amongst ethnic or minority groups. Despite diverse agendas within members of a social group, subscribing temporarily to essentialist foundations would serve as a pragmatic minority strategy, one that projects a collective identity with the aim of achieving common goals or political interests. One could read irony into this strategy of resistance, where an oppressed group intentionally assumes certain ascribed categories and stereotypes in order to subvert or destabilise the systems of power that marginalise it. Australian cultural theorist Claire Colebrook in her book *Irony: The New Critical Idiom* (2004), notes the complicity of voice in this strategy but clarifies that the intention behind repeating an essentialising discourse is to demonstrate its workings rather than to re-commit its violence.[122]

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[118] Through colonial legal policy, the ritual was institutionalised as crime, and the act projected as moral duty to defend and protect the indigenous woman from her own men folk.
[119] This quote is taken from a revised iteration of Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak" from 1999. It appears in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, in a chapter titled "History" (198-311) on page 296. The word "superstition" from the original text is replaced by "patriarchy". I found it pertinent to use this revision to highlight the intersection of competing hegemonies in the oppression of the subaltern woman.
[120] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," 305.
[121] Partha Chatterjee, "Reflections on "Can the Subaltern Speak?": Subaltern Studies after Spivak," in *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind Morris (Columbia University Press, 2010), 83.
[122] Colebrook, *Irony*, 167-8.

Spivak, persistently critical of her own practice, later disavowed the term. She acknowledges that the piecemeal appropriation of essentialism has its shortcomings and poses the danger of reinforcing and centring essentialising notions. It is easy to miss the subtle play of subversive irony in this anti-essentialist strategy but despite Spivak's renunciation, it grew to have popular applications in other fields of study. Theorised within a postcolonial space in the context of cultural discourse, strategic essentialism was adopted and used extensively in feminist and queer theory.

As Sanders remarks, one could read '*Can the Subaltern Speak?*' as "irony in the classical mode, as *eironeia*, a Socratic questioning in feigned ignorance" or as cast in a "de Manian vocabulary of 'permanent parabasis', as a disrupting of the script of informatics through a performance of the (im)possible perspective that mimes its foreclosure of that perspective."[123] The many contradictions of Spivak's work and her disorienting eclectic approach have been widely critiqued. Her valuable insights, though, have influenced and shifted paradigms of thought within postcolonial studies.

Similar to Spivak, Bhabha, a prominent scholar in postcolonial studies, owes much of his poststructuralist approach to the works of Derrida and Foucault. An Indian English critical theorist, Bhabha is well-known to have created and delineated highly significant concepts in the field, such as mimicry, hybridity, difference and ambivalence. Born in India in 1949, post-independence, Bhabha pursued higher study in English Literature at the University of Oxford and is currently a Professor of English and American Literature and Languages at Harvard University. In the essay "Of Mimicry and Man," published in 1984, Bhabha identifies elements of irony, mimicry and repetition in colonial discourse that betrays its farcical high ideals. He singles out mimicry as an effective strategy of colonial power but also argues that the partial mimicry of the colonised could unintentionally become ironically subversive.

The Location of Culture from 1994 is a seminal work that introduces Bhabha's deliberations on the theory of cultural hybridity along with key concepts such as ambivalence, mimicry and liminality. Within the interdependent relationship of the coloniser and colonised, Bhabha identifies mutable boundaries and the possible articulation of cultural negotiations in this transitory space. Recognising that boundaries are not that at which something stops but rather, as the Greeks understood and as Heidegger reiterates, the stage "from which something begins its presencing."[124] In his examination of the complex and slippery concept of culture, he discards notions of origin, essence, authenticity and singularity. Examples from contemporary art, poetry and literature accompany his analyses.

In his introduction, Bhabha uses the stairwell as a metaphor for the liminal or interstitial space, what he identifies later as the "third space of enunciation".[125] It is within this interactive, intermediate location that Bhabha sees the opportunity for negotiations of cultural difference for the individual and collective

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[123] Sanders, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, 20.
[124] An opening quote by Martin Heidegger from "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," inaugurates the introduction to *Location of Culture*, 1.
[125] Bhabha, *LOC*, 4 and 36-39.

through conflict and collaboration. Birthed within this ambiguity is the potential for a cultural hybridity that is subversive, that undermines fixed hierarchies, displaces boundaries and moves 'beyond' into an interventionist, revisionary space.[126]

Bhabha notes that colonial discourse is ideologically dependent on the paradoxical concept of 'fixity', which is similar in essence to the discriminatory strategy of the stereotype. Both are characterised not only by a rigid, unchanging otherness with marked boundaries of racial, historical and cultural difference but are also attributed with degeneracy and repetition.[127] The writings of Fanon and Said amply contribute to Bhabha's psychoanalytical examination of the role of the stereotype. He engages the Freudian concept of fetishism to examine the significance of the stereotype in colonial discourse and its anxious movement between polarities of fantasy and fear, desire and revulsion, and phobia and fetish. Vacillating "between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated,"[128] Bhabha recognises that this characteristic ambivalence that marks colonial discursive strategy could also be used alternatively as a subversive strategy. For Bhabha, the inherent ambivalence of this manner of discriminatory knowledge, oscillating between recognition and disavowal of difference, contributes to the internal dismantling of its power and authority.

The disavowal of difference often leads the colonised subject to emulate or mimic the coloniser. Fuelled by Freud and Lacan, Bhabha describes this form of colonial mimicry as an "ironic compromise".[129] Bhabha elaborates:

> Within that conflictual economy of colonial discourse which Edward Said describes as the tension between the synchronic panoptical vision of domination - the demand for identity, stasis - and the counterpressure of the diachrony of history - change, difference - mimicry represents an *ironic* compromise. If I may adapt Samuel Weber's formulation of the marginalizing vision of castration, then colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers.[130]

For the coloniser, the encouragement of this form of mimicry arises from the desire for a rehabilitated, regulated, identifiable Other. Mimicry sustains a partial or metonymic presence—*almost the same but*

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[126] Bhabha, *LOC*, 4-7. Note the remarkable similarity to the ironic space.
[127] Bhabha, *LOC*, 66. The attribute of degeneracy was often used as a justification for colonial conquest and legitimation of authority, by virtue of superior moral difference. Paradoxically, the *repetition* of the stereotype in colonial discourse, ends up challenging the very terms of its own signification, as an original, essentialising narrative, by virtue of its reiteration.
[128] Bhabha, *LOC*, 66.
[129] Bhabha, *LOC*, 86.
[130] Bhabha, *LOC*, 85-86.

not quite/ white[131]—since a full presence would overturn the legitimacy of colonial ideology.[132] However, since a mimic can never achieve an identical manifestation, the difference that reveals a lack there-of, also defends its presence. This trace of difference or excess, which is more than just mimetic, produces a hybrid.

The ambivalence of the hybrid mimic could destabilise the legitimated authority and authenticity of the coloniser but also goes beyond to question and rearticulate the paranoid essentialisation of identity. This mimicry, through strategic reversal, can turn into ironic mockery. Bhabha perceives the assertion of hybridity as an effect of colonial power, its ambivalence, a condition of postcoloniality. He states, "The ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on the undecidability, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention."[133] Hybridity potentially threatens to rupture and de-authorise histories of 'official knowledge' and their univocal claim to "truth"; it exposes the hollowness of imperial narcissism and its 'normalised' power hierarchies. In this liminal, interstitial, third space of hybridity, we find the articulation of new transcultural forms or identities (not a synthesis of dualisms but rather intersections and dislocations of boundaries), cultural difference and resistance to hegemonic processes. Bhabha opines that the ideological ambivalence of colonial writing and discourse threatens its own foundations. An estrangement in the relationship between symbol and sign, between signifiers of colonial identity and what they signify, weakens the representative power of colonial texts. Through partial imitation and comic subversion, the hybrid mimic, in Bhabha's opinion, carries the potential for the expression of agency of the colonised subject.

Bhabha argues that a monolithic perception of culture as stable and fixed, as is the case with colonial vision, can envisage only cultural diversity but not cultural difference. For Bhabha, cultural diversity implies a pre-given, originary and totalised framework; cultural difference, on the other hand, is envisioned as a process of signification characterised by hybridity, intertextuality and an escape from the politics of polarisation.[134] *The Location of Culture* offers a novel way of approaching the notion of culture as non-essentialist, dynamic, discursive and constantly fluctuating. It has also presented a host of important concepts such as 'hybridity,' 'mimicry,' 'ambivalence,' 'liminality,' and other specialised vocabularies that have become integral to postcolonial theory. These concepts also pave the way for my later study of artworks that contain irony.

Helen Tiffin, an influential scholar in literary studies and postcolonial theory, remarks on the project of postcolonial scholarship—"Post-colonial counter-discursive strategies involve a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling of

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[131] Bhabha, *LOC*, 89.
[132] As Taussig paradoxically notes in *Mimesis and Alterity*, "the mimetic basis remains, dependent, above all, on an alterity that follows the ideological gradient decisive for world history of savagery vis à vis civilization." 65.
[133] Bhabha, *LOC*, 112.
[134] Homi K. Bhabha, "Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (New York: Routledge, 2006), 155-157.

these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified 'local'."[135] This critical function of postcolonial texts, the intrinsic subversive nature of this form of discourse, along with the inherent contradictions and multiple dualities of the postcolonial experience, position irony to be an effective and strategic articulatory ally. In the same vein, the subversive manoeuvres of anti-colonial expression in the visual arts, more than often, employ the mechanisms of irony.

The suitability or significance of irony as a subversive aesthetic strategy complementing postcolonial expression is articulated by Hutcheon, who argues that:

> as a double talking, forked-tongued mode of address, irony becomes a popular rhetorical strategy for working within existing discourses and contesting them at the same time. Its inherent semantic and structural doubleness also makes it a most convenient trope for the paradoxical dualities of… post-colonial doubled identity and history. And indeed irony… has become a powerful subversive tool in the re-thinking and re-addressing of history by… post-colonial artists.[136]

The quote above is also cited in an article by Mac Fenwick, who locates irony's postcolonial promise in the interdependent relation between local meaning and global sense.[137] He also gives an account of scholars who have previously addressed the relation between postcoloniality and irony, such as William H. New, who has argued for the rich potential of irony in post-colonial literature to provoke deliberation over the problematic dualities symptomatic of the postcolonial condition.

Hutcheon points out though that this "doubleness" of the postcolonial is not only merely linked to the condition of their dual history but also, "Doubleness and difference are established by colonialism by its paradoxical move to enforce cultural sameness."[138] We see a similar observation with Bhabha, who asserts that since hybridity (a condition that embodies ambivalence, irony and mimicry) is the product of colonial power, the repetition of that trace inscribes complicity. He contends, therefore, that irony could never be wholly considered as an empowering strategy. Bhabha, along with Hutcheon, however, recognise irony's potential to unsettle the narcissistic claims of colonial authority.

As Hutcheon describes it, irony provides "a way of resisting and yet acknowledging the power of the dominant."[139] Often, irony borrows or repeats the words and logic of the dominant, purposefully appropriating, in order to disarm. Working within constraints set by the dominant, irony activates a temporally deferred identification of intent, which could provisionally veil it from surveillance and penalty. This momentary temporal extension of peeling back the layers of the covert communication of irony's coded message speaks of deflection, dissimulation and delay. Hutcheon writes, "Because irony is also the trope of the unsaid, it becomes as well a possible way to encode a subtext which will deflect the risks of "[f]ull visibility and accessibility... [which] constitute an inherent danger for the colonized" (Weir

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[135] Helen Tiffin, "Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (New York: Routledge, 2006), 101.
[136] Linda Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire: Post-Colonialism and Postmodernism," *Ariel* 20, no. 4 (1989): 154.
[137] Mac Fenwick, "Realising Irony's Post/Colonial Promise: Global Sense and Local Meaning in Things Fall Apart and 'Ruins of a Great House,'" *Kunapipi* 28, no. 1 (2006): 9.
[138] Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire," 161.
[139] Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire," 163.

61)."[140] The partial ambiguity of irony's polysemantic levels can entertain deniability, which could prove useful to sidestep the punishment a powerful authority might inflict. This ironic smokescreen can simultaneously protect and selectively reveal a covert anti-colonial resistance.

A wide variety of approaches abound in postcolonial studies, and a multitude of distinguished authors such as Ashis Nandy, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Leela Gandhi and Achille Mbembe have also made significant contributions to the field of postcolonialism. Much of the theoretical framework is based on a post-structural approach with a focus on a critical analysis of written texts produced by colonial powers—academic, historical, administrative and fictional. However, it has developed an extensive assortment of applications in disciplines ranging from literary studies, philosophy, film and media studies, anthropology, sociology, theology, and political science. Said, Spivak and Bhabha, through deconstructive approaches, contest the notion of binary oppositions in different ways. The binary of the 'Self' and 'Other' is a key concern in postcolonial studies and has been used in feminist, queer and critical race theory as well.

1.4 Literature Review of Decolonial Theory

While both postcolonial and decolonial theory unmask, critique and challenge the dominance of Eurocentric worldviews, one of the identified failings of postcolonial literature is the omission of South American thought. Much postcolonial literature refers to the periods of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while decolonial writing commences its inquiry from what it recognises as the beginnings of European colonial expansion in 1492. The year marks both the Spanish conquest of the Nasrid Kingdom of Granada and the first voyage of Italian navigator Christopher Columbus on behalf of the Catholic Spanish monarchs. Apart from this temporal difference, there is also an epistemic one. The principal criticism of postcolonial studies by several decolonial authors such as Walter Mignolo and Ramón Grosfoguel is that much of its theoretical framework is ironically grounded in the authority of Eurocentric knowledge. Postcolonial theory is ironically implicated by the imperial vision that it is strongly politically motivated against. Mignolo remarks that "Third World thoughts are processed in European intellectual factories."[141]

A distinction to bear in mind is the differing socio-historic contexts that postcolonial and decolonial theory emerge from.[142] Postcolonial theory is more concerned with the direct effects of European

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[140] Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire," 164.
[141] Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 57.
[142] In *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, Mignolo embarks on tracing the lineage and the distinct points of origination between the two schools of thought, he writes, "The decolonial originated during the Cold War… and from the experience of decolonization in the Third World and in the works of Afro-Caribbean intellectuals and activists. The point of origination of the postcolonial is the experience of decolonization of British India and owes much to Edward Said's influential *Orientalism* (1978), published the same year Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1978) appeared." 55.

colonisation, while decolonial theory illuminates the enduring legacies of Western imperialism and its socio-political and cultural implications. While postcolonial theory unravels the racialised optics of colonial subjugation, it has been criticised for its lack of real-world or material application; decolonial theory, on the other hand, offers some practical, restorative, liberatory measures such as epistemic de-linking.

Decolonial theory offers a framework with which to rethink and rebuild systems of thought that have been erected on the foundations of Eurocentric epistemology and its myths of universalism. The discourse has contributed important theories that reveal the important link between modernity and coloniality. It destabilises the perceived objectivity of racial categories and marks their relation to colonial structures of power while also bringing to light the suppression of native discursive practices. The artworks discussed in the final chapter feature a variety of these arguments in their use of critical irony. The dynamics of certain decolonial strategies of resistance are also found analogous to the workings of irony employed to critique colonial legacies. The transgressive nature of Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of 'border thinking' addresses the 'lived dimension' of epistemic production and centres the experiences of those living in the liminal intersection between two cultures. This concept, along with her use of the word 'nepantla,' referring to the ambivalent nature of the psyche of a person of mixed descent (European and Indigenous), provokes comparison with the Du Boisian concept of double consciousness and Bhabha's discussions on liminality. In addition to these concepts, Maria Lugones's theorising of 'curdling' as resistance forms yet another important theoretical-practical link to contemporary ironic practices that subvert the colonial logic of 'purity' and the constructed colonial hierarchies of power that continue to shape our world.

Some important authors in the field of decolonial studies are Anibal Quijano (1928-2018), Walter D. Mignolo (1941-), Ramón Grosfoguel (1956-), Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1942-2004) and Maria Lugones (1944-2020). Quijano was the first to articulate the intimate link between modernity and coloniality, seeing them as two facets of the same coin. This epistemic frame is used extensively in decolonial thinking and is further developed by other decolonial authors.

Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano is an influential thinker in the field of decolonial studies and has lectured on the Social Sciences across universities worldwide. Some of Quijano's key writings are "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" (2000) and "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality" (2007). In both texts, he develops his well-known concept of the "coloniality of power." Quijano sheds light on the intricate configuration of colonial structures of power and their fundamental basis in the 'scientific' category of 'race'. Perceived as a 'natural phenomenon,' the concept of race was seen as 'objective', and the heavily intertwined historical structures of power operating through it were ignored.[143] Identities and social relations that were earlier indicated by geography

[143] Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality." *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2-3 (2007): 168.

acquired a racial tenor, which was used effectively as an instrument of hierarchical social classification.[144]

In his essay, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," Quijano opens his text by defining 'globalisation' as "the culmination of a process that began with the constitution of America and colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism as a new global power."[145] Quijano identifies the colonial origin of the racial anchor of this global model of power. He observes the ensuing exploitative forms of labour control and production and how certain forms of labour would be associated with a specific race. Writing on the intersections between race, coloniality and global capitalism, Quijano writes:

> The racial classification of the population and the early association of the new racial identities of the colonized with the forms of control of unpaid, unwaged labor developed among the Europeans the singular perception that paid labor was the white's privilege. The racial inferiority of the colonized implied that they were not worthy of wages.[146]

Quijano identifies that this historical colonial form of the control of labour, resources and products, fashions and moulds the Eurocentered global capitalism of today.[147] In his text, Quijano proceeds to examine the impact of this coloniality of power on the history of Latin America.

"Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality" is a ground-breaking work written originally in Spanish in 1989 and translated in 2007. The very title of the essay strings together a revelatory relationship between "coloniality" and "modernity", along with the concept of "rationality" that accompanies modernity. Quijano offers a comment on 'coloniality', he writes, "Coloniality, then, is still the most general form of domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed. It doesn't exhaust, obviously, the conditions nor the modes of exploitation and domination between peoples."[148]

Quijano elaborates that while direct European political domination might have formally ended, the cultural and epistemic repression that colonialism wrought has had long-lasting, damaging effects. Modes of knowing and signification, images, symbols and plastic or visual expressions have been repressed, destroyed or exploited.[149] European culture was portrayed as the exclusive, universal standard to aspire to, and Quijano notes that this led to differing intensities of cultural destruction in Africa, Asia, America and the Middle East.[150] He mentions, for example, the colonial view of African plastic expression and how the products were used as a "starting point, source of inspiration for the art of Western or Europeanised African artists, but not as a mode of artistic expression of its own, of a rank equivalent to the European norm."[151]

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[144] Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla* 1, no. 3 (2000): 534.
[145] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power," 533.
[146] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power," 539.
[147] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power," 539.
[148] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 170.
[149] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 170.
[150] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 169-170.
[151] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 170.

Quijano challenges the European paradigm of rational knowledge and its basic presupposition of "knowledge as a product of a subject-object relation."[152] He questions the assumptions of the 'subject' being an isolated self, while the 'object' is seen as external and defined via its difference from the 'subject'.[153] Quijano also takes to task the assumption of the 'object' as having an irreducible, original and fixed identity. The imposition of the paradigm of the 'rational' subject and the 'inferior' 'irrational' object cemented in an unequal relationship is a domination practice that has influenced and continues to influence modes of knowledge production. He remarks that all these presuppositions fail to reflect the importance and prevalence of the intersubjective aspect of social relations.[154]

Quijano notes that while non-Western cultures have always been the 'object' of study, an inverse examination of Western culture does not exist except as "ironical parodies."[155] He cites the 'Body Ritual Among the Nacirema' (an anagram of 'American') by American anthropologist Horace Mitchell Miner, published in 1956, as an example. The satirical essay reverses the subject-object relation and performs an anthropological reading of the peculiarities of American culture instead, suffusing quotidian bodily practices such as brushing teeth or shaving with an air of magic and ritual. The trope of 'strangeness' so readily ascribed to the colonised native is reversed. The essay is littered with irony, wordplay and humorous inversions but, more importantly, serves to critique the cultural arrogance of Euro-American societies.

Shedding light on the European idea of social totality[156] and the imposition of a single logic, Quijano writes, "Nothing is less rational, finally, than the pretension that the specific cosmic vision of a particular ethnie (read as ethnicity) should be taken as universal rationality, even if such an ethnie is called Western Europe because this is actually pretend [ing] to impose a provincialism and (as) universalism."[157] As a reconstructive measure, he proposes epistemological decolonisation and social liberation from the web of colonial power. This revolutionary essay is often cited by decolonial authors such as Lugones and Mignolo.

A significant theorist in the field of decolonial studies, Walter D. Mignolo, acknowledges his indebtedness to Quijano's concept of coloniality. Mignolo, an Argentine semiotician, is a Professor of Literature and also the director of the Center for Global Studies and the Humanities at Duke University. He simultaneously holds an associated research position at the Andina Simón Bolívar University in Quito, Ecuador. His years of writing, teaching and research are dedicated to unravelling and revealing colonial constructions of power and fostering decolonial thinking. He also critiques aspects of modernity as well as discourses that present themselves as alternatives to Eurocentrism. Some of his major works

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[152] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 172.
[153] This 'difference' does not just imply diversity but problematically, a hierarchical inferiority.
[154] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 172-74.
[155] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 174.
[156] Quijano refers to the idea of society perceived as an organic totality, as a human body, with parts in a subordinate relation to the brain as the ruling centre. He also mentions how the categories of 'society' and 'humanity' of Enlightenment Europe did not extend to non-Western peoples.
[157] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 177.

are *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*: *Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (1995), *Local Histories / Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (2000) and *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (2011).

In *The Darker Side of The Renaissance*, Mignolo lays emphasis on the colonial aspect of the European Renaissance and the transformative touch of its hegemonic power in the discursive formation of both Europe and native cultures. In the introduction, ironically titled "On Describing Ourselves Describing Ourselves," Mignolo notes that with the valorisation of the alphabet and by association, the book, a range of alternative semiotic practices from Amerindian cultural traditions such as pictograms, ideograms, quipus[158] and oral traditions became marginalised, fractured or relegated to obscurity. [159] With historiography linked exclusively to words, other modes of archiving or organising knowledge, through the visual and material cultures of native populations or their oral methods of passing down memory, were either dismissed or irrevocably transformed to make information accessible for the purposes of control and colonial governance. Mignolo writes, "The hybrid cultural production emerging from the blending of the endurance of preconquest Amerindian with Western discursive practices illustrates what I have called colonial semiosis."[160] He remarks that the interactions between orality and literacy led Amerindian cultures to adapt the alphabet to their own semiotic traditions but also subjected them to descriptions recorded from the perspective and worldview of the sixteenth-century Spanish missionaries.

Mignolo proceeds with an examination of European cartography and juxtaposes it with indigenous configurations of space. The geometric spatial projections of the Eurocentric model of the world proceeded to reconfigure ethnic maps by decentring ethnic centres. Mignolo elaborates on the struggle between coexisting territorial representations and how the question of the centre of the illustrated world was deeply intertwined with dominant political power.

Mignolo sums up:

> European maps and Spanish territorial administration historically became the "true representation" of a New World and the Indias Occidentales. Looking at them as social and semiotic interactions and territorial control instead of as representations of an ontological space… opens up new ways of understanding in which cognitive patterns become embedded in social actions and representations become performances of colonization.[161]

The source of concern with the idea of "true representation" comes not just from its claim to reality but also from the underlying bad-faith imperiousness of posturing univocalism as universality.[162] In his writing, Mignolo shapes the locus of enunciation from the periphery, from which to view the European

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[158] Quipus are coloured, woven strings used to record data that can vary from calendrical information to census collection.
[159] Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 7-8.
[160] Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 213.
[161] Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 313.
[162] Claims, which critical irony can destabilise with its potent mistrust of a supercilious singular truth.

Renaissance, an inversion of the customary historical perspective of looking outward and downward from centres to margins. Deviating from the postcolonial theoretical focus on texts, Mignolo's perusal of multiple sources such as maps, codexes, letters, graphic representations and other genres of record-keeping provides an enlivening and more holistic analysis.

In the opening chapter of *Local Histories / Global Designs*, Mignolo states his preference to situate the inauguration of the history of colonialism or the global designs of the modern/colonial world order in the sixteenth century with the Spanish missionaries as opposed to the Enlightenment of the eighteenth. Another one of Mignolo's stated preferences appears in the following chapter, the term 'post-occidental' over 'post-colonial.' In an interview from 2000, Mignolo clarifies that while post-colonialism presupposes Orientalism, 'Occidentalism' is the very condition of possibility for Orientalism. [163] He asserts that the focus on 'Occidental reason' allows for a re-thinking of the historical articulation of the coloniality of power. Mignolo argues that "knowledge production is not detached from the sensibilities of geohistorical location and that historical locations, in the modern/colonial world, have been shaped by the coloniality of power."[164] He also stresses the importance of the role of local histories, which mark particular forms of coloniality, and the critical discourses they engender.[165]

Illustrating the similarities and differences between the postcolonial and the postmodern, Mignolo writes that for postmodernism, "the space of contestation comes from the legacies of capitalism rather than from the legacies of colonialism."[166] He points out that while both are processes that critique modernity, the loci of postcolonial theories are situated in voices from Third World countries, while postmodern theories are primarily in the First World.[167] Both discourses critique modernity but from different perspectives; postmodernism critiques the Western hegemonic grand narratives of modernity while postcolonialism targets colonial histories and legacies.

'Border thinking,' an important concept in decolonial studies, was first used by Anzaldúa and consequently developed by other decolonial thinkers. Referring to knowledge produced at the borders of the colonial matrix of power, Mignolo conceives of it as a "subaltern epistemology" or "an other thinking" that breaks away from the Eurocentric logic of the modern/colonial world. Mignolo writes:

> The form that this breaking away is taking is the irreducible difference established between the monotopic critique of modernity from the perspective of modernity itself, still "in custody" of the monotopic of abstract universals (e.g., a critique of the imaginary of the modern world system from its

[163] Delgado, Romero, and Mignolo, "Local Histories and Global Designs: An Interview with Walter Mignolo." 28-30.
[164] Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories / Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 185-6.
[165] Mignolo, *Local Histories / Global Designs*, 92. Mignolo associates specific terms with particular geohistoric locations—"post-Occidentalism," with the Americas, "postcolonialism," with the Commonwealth and British colonialism and "post-Orientalism," with the Middle East.
[166] Mignolo, *Local Histories / Global Designs*, 97.
[167] Mignolo, *Local Histories / Global Designs*, 114.

> interior) and the pluritopic and double critique of modernity from the perspective of coloniality (e.g., a critique of the epistemic imaginary of the modern world system from its exterior).[168]

This "other" way of thinking enacts a double critique, one which performs an internal critique of modernity but refrains from falling into the trappings of the modernist rhetoric of universality while also critiquing from outside the modern/colonial world order, making visible the colonial difference. Building upon Quijano's work on the coloniality of power, Mignolo explores the notion of 'colonial difference' with regards to language, literature and epistemology.[169] He notes how the coloniality of power and its embedded hierarchies manage colonial difference. Mignolo sees border thinking as a case of disciplinary transience, a method of decolonisation and a way of transcending colonial difference.[170] Contemporary artists that challenge colonialism and coloniality through irony, tend to emphasise colonial difference in their work. The contradictions and bias inherent in the colonial difference enable irony to become a vehicle for raising political consciousness, to inscribe, dethrone and transcend the colonial meta-narrative.

The central hypothesis of the book, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, exposes coloniality as the veiled agenda or darker side of modernity and proceeds to explore the complex intertwining of the pair from the sixteenth century onwards. Mignolo reveals how the European narrative of modernity was framed to be celebrated as salvation, newness, progress and development while the problems stemming from coloniality such as injustice, crime, poverty and the commodification or dispensability of human life were concealed or treated as problems to which modernity was the solution.[171]

Mignolo identifies the emergence of the constructed dichotomy of "humanitas" and "anthropos" as forming the very foundation of the dividing line of colonial difference.[172] The *anthropos* was the barbarian, the pagan, the other, who was constructed in contrast to *humanitas*—the enunciator, who was civilised, Christian, modern and capable of producing knowledge. Salvation, for the *anthropos*, was to be attained by Christian conversion, which was inextricably linked to the 'civilising mission' and the rhetoric of modernity.[173] Western philosophy and culture have a long tradition of constructing such clear dichotomies while holding them to be universally applicable. Critical irony as an aesthetic and political mechanism in the visual arts works to expose colonial delusions of superiority by contesting the very

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[168] Mignolo, *Local Histories / Global Designs*, 87.
[169] Colonial difference is a concept first introduced by Partha Chatterjee in the context of a ruling strategy deployed by the British Raj. The rule of colonial difference depended on a "preservation of the alienness of the ruling group". The social ordering of race with the colonised at the bottom of the scale, was the most telling mark of that difference. It was crucial for the strategy to also be set within the framework of a universal knowledge or theory of power. (See Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, 10-20.) Mignolo extends this notion to account for the epistemological and ontological colonial differences ensconced in the rhetoric of modernity.
[170] Mignolo, *Local Histories / Global Designs*, 322-23.
[171] Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 6.
[172] Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 90.
[173] Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 205.

foundations that construct this singular fictional pre-eminence. It is also specifically suited to target hubris and the basic assumptions underlying dichotomous hierarchies.

A combination of Enlightenment ideals and their suitability to the goals of imperialism created the extraordinary irony of a regularly used high moral rhetoric to defend the consequences of colonial conquest. Examining Kant's essay 'What is Enlightenment'? from 1784, Mignolo writes that "Kant's concept of Man and humanity was based on the European concept of Man from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, and not on the "lesser humans" that populated the world beyond the heart of Europe. So, "enlightenment" was not for everybody."[174] Modernity and Enlightenment humanism did not extend to all and was reserved exclusively for Europe.

What Mignolo describes as the "colonial matrix of power" or coloniality for short, is the control and management of knowledge, of political and religious authority, of economy, of institutions (educational, governmental, judicial) and of the norms regulating gender and sexuality.[175] He identifies epistemic delinking or epistemic disobedience as a step toward decolonial thinking and the breaking away from the colonial matrix of power.[176] A special focus of the book is to explore and offer decolonial options. Decoloniality, he says, "shall dispel the myth of universality grounded on theo- and ego-politics of knowledge."[177] Mignolo presents options such as "dewesternization," spiritual and decolonial options as counter-narratives to modernity, as trans-modern perspectives that could shape global futures and the making of a pluriversal world, where one can be independent and yet live in harmony with other realities.[178]

Another Latin American theorist, Ramón Grosfoguel, a Puerto Rican sociologist, is well-known for his work on decoloniality and also the study of Islamophobia. Several concerns of Mignolo's and Grosfoguel's overlap, such as the examination of the locus of enunciation and the need for the urgent move away from a Eurocentered epistemology to a pluriversal understanding of the world. Currently, an associate professor of Chicano and Latino Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, Grosfoguel teaches courses on international migration and the sociology of international development.

In the book *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (2003), Grosfoguel bases his conceptual framework on a modification of American sociologist and economic historian Immanuel Wallerstein's "world-system approach,"[179] but from a Puerto Rican subaltern perspective/location. While taking care to avoid essentialising Puerto Rican voices, he feels that this modified approach provides

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[174] Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 133.
[175] Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, xv.
[176] Mignolo views the Bandung Conference of 1955 as an important event marking the emergence of delinking and decolonisation.
[177] Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, xvi.
[178] Dewesternisation does not wholly reject modernity but is a disobedient appropriation of it. It still indulges in the modern rhetoric of growth and development but challenges Western epistemic monopoly by political delinking from the economic control of the West.
[179] Influenced by dependency theory which suggests that there is a world economic system, in which wealthy, core countries benefit from exploiting peripheral countries, Wallerstein's world-systems theory refers to a more dynamic inter-regional and transnational division of labour, rather than an international division.

new insight into examining the issue of Puerto Rico's colonial political status. Also, employing Quijano's concept of the "coloniality of power," Grosfoguel attempts to go beyond nationalist and colonialist discourses by using a modern/colonial/capitalist world-system approach. Commenting on the traditional divide between social sciences and the humanities, he observes that while world-system theorists have difficulties theorising culture, postcolonial theorists struggle with political-economic processes. He, therefore, calls for an interdisciplinary approach:

> We need to find new concepts and a new language to account for the complex entanglement of gender, racial, sexual, and class hierarchies within global geopolitical, geocultural, and geo-economic processes of the modern world-system where the ceaseless accumulation of capital is affected by, integrated into, constitutive of, and constituted by those hierarchies.[180]

Grosfoguel suggests "heterarchical thinking" to avoid the dangers of assuming a single logic (or hierarchy) which could lead to a reductionist understanding. This kind of heterarchical thinking could be complemented by the polyvocal heterogeneities that the mechanism of irony can introduce, as irony undermines not only univocalism but also hierarchical and essentialist, racist and sexist structures. Considering the entanglement of heterogeneous hierarchies allows one to transcend monism and binary thinking, to perceive the implications of multiple structural hierarchies.[181]

The book introduces Puerto Rico as a "modern colony." It explores and analyses its political economy and Puerto Rican migration with a comparative analysis of the histories of Caribbean migration to the United States. Shedding light on the differing policies of the U.S. government that are applied to separate groups of Caribbean migrants, it also examines other nuances of the processes of colonial Caribbean migration to Western Europe and the United States, such as modes of incorporation or reception at respective metropoles. Delving into the varying experiences of racism and discrimination faced at the metropoles, Grosfoguel outlines the three concepts of nation, race and coloniality as integral to understanding that racism is not universal but of historically specific types.[182] "Scientific racism" is the traditional biological racist discourse, while "cultural racism," also known as "new racism," is what he sees as the central racial discourse in the "global racial/colonial formation" of today.[183] Concluding the book, Grosfoguel offers an interesting insight into the central foundational myths of four metropolitan nations that form the framework of their racist premises.[184]

Grosfoguel has published several insightful articles on racism, while islamophobia is another key concern in his writing. Developing his arguments based on Fanon's conception of racism through the (heterogeneous) zones of being and non-being, Grosfoguel elaborates on the imaginary line fabricated to divide superior from inferior human beings, which affords the former, social recognition as human

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[180] Ramón Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 15.
[181] Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects*, 15-16.
[182] See Jamaican-born cultural theorist, Stuart Hall's, "Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance," for his argument on the historical specificity of racism, 305-345.
[183] Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects*, 196.
[184] For the foundational myths of the four core nations—United States, France, Netherlands and Great Britain, see Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects*, 197-210.

beings with access to human and civil rights. The latter, however, classified as sub-human, are cast into the zone of non-being, where their rights, subjectivities, spiritualities and epistemologies remain unrecognised.[185] In the zone of being, Grosfoguel observes the conflicts between the "I" and the "Other," characterised by the Hegelian dialectic as oppressor and oppressed:

> The 'I's in the imperialist/capitalist/patriarchal global system are Western, heterosexual, masculine, metropolitan elites and/or Westernised, heterosexual, masculine elites in the peripheries of the world-system. Internal colonialism exists as much in the centre as in the periphery. For Fanon, the Hegelian 'Other' consists of the populations of the Western metropolitan centres or the Westernised subjects within the periphery whose humanity is recognised, but who at the same time live under racial privilege oppressions based on class, sexuality or gender, dominated by the imperial 'I' in their respective regions or countries.[186]

Although the humanity of the Other is recognised in the zone of being, conflicts arise from non-racial oppressions. Grosfoguel also reminds us that the zones do not refer to geographical sites but rather positions within racial/ethnic hierarchies. Exploring diverse forms of racism, Grosfoguel sheds light on the qualitative difference between "intersectional/entangled oppressions"[187] and provides several quote-worthy definitions in his articles. The following from the article "'Racism', Intersectionality and Migration Studies" (2015) is one such example—"Racism is a global hierarchy of human superiority and inferiority, politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for centuries by the institutions of the 'capitalist/patriarchal western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world-system' (Grosfoguel 2011, 2013)."[188]

The "locus of enunciation," an important concept in Mignolo's writing, is also a chief concern in Grosfoguel's who provides a crisp definition: "the geo-political and body-political location of the subject that speaks."[189] Critiquing western epistemic privilege, Grosfoguel pays homage to the contribution of ethnic and feminist subaltern scholars and suggests that shifting the location of the hegemonic Eurocentric epistemic paradigm to an indigenous vantage point offers a critical decolonial perspective to world-system analysis.

French philosopher René Descartes, considered as the father of modern philosophy, contributed the popular quote '*Cogito, ergo sum',* translated as 'I think, therefore I am.' In his search for the ultimate grounding of knowledge, Descartes laid the foundation for what Colombian philosopher, Santiago Castro-Gómez, describes as the hubris of the zero point. Grosfoguel calls to attention Argentine and Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel's argument that the condition of possibility for "I think, therefore I

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[185] Ramón Grosfoguel, Laura Oso, and Anastasia Christou, "'Racism', Intersectionality and Migration Studies: Framing Some Theoretical Reflections," *Identities* 22, no. 6 (2015): 636.
[186] Grosfoguel, Oso and Christou, "'Racism', Intersectionality and Migration Studies," 638.
[187] Ramón Grosfoguel, "What is Racism?," *Journal of World-Systems Research* 22, no. 1 (2016): 12. 'Intersectionality,' a concept developed by American lawyer, philosopher and noted scholar of critical race theory, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, is used by Grosfoguel to conceptualise Quijano's concept of the coloniality of power as the entanglement or intersection of multiple global hierarchies. Read Grosfoguel's article "'The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms", from 2007, pages 216-17, for a lucid and straightforward dissection of entangled global hierarchies—ethnic, linguistic, spiritual, sexual and others.
[188] Grosfoguel, Oso and Christou, "'Racism', Intersectionality and Migration Studies," 636.
[189] Ramón Grosfoguel, "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms," *Cultural Studies*, 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 213.

am" is "I conquer, therefore I am."[190] Grosfoguel writes on Descartes's replacement of God as the foundation of knowledge (in the Middle Ages) with Man (in Modern times) and perceives the Cartesian quote as emblematic of Castro-Gómez's concept of point zero.[191] Grosfoguel elaborates on point zero—"It is this 'god-eye view' that always hides its local and particular perspective under an abstract universalism. Western philosophy privileges 'ego politics of knowledge' over the 'geopolitics of knowledge' and the 'body-politics of knowledge.'"[192] Grosfoguel calls out this disembodied, non-situated knowledge that conceals its locus of enunciation as a historically crucial epistemic strategy for Western global designs of domination.

Grosfoguel continues his critique of Western epistemic privilege and Cartesian philosophy. He comments that the Social Sciences are steeped in Eurocentric epistemology while the underlying Cartesian myths of "objectivity," "neutrality" and "universalism" obscure the locus of enunciation of the Westernised academy.[193]

Grosfoguel stresses on the importance of the inclusion of epistemic perspectives from the subaltern side of colonial difference—"the side of the periphery, the workers, women, gays/lesbians, racialised/colonial subjects, homosexuals/lesbians and anti-systemic movements in the process of knowledge production."[194] He anticipates the critical transformation that this would make to knowledge production. In the article "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality" (2011), Grosfoguel advocates for a move beyond the monologism and universals of eurocentered modernity toward what he calls a "radical universal decolonial anti-systemic diversality."[195] Compounding the concepts of Dussel's "transmodernity," Quijano's "socialization of power" and Mignolo's notion of decolonising Eurocentered modernity through "diversality as a universal project," Grosfoguel proposes a "transmodern decolonial socialization of power."[196] He proposes a world where power is socialised but open to diverse conceptions rendered through multiple epistemologies; he envisions a common decolonial language that is anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal and anti-imperialist but most importantly, one that is mindful and inclusive of diverse epistemic particularities.

In his writing, Grosfoguel credits Chicano and Chicana scholars such as Anzaldúa for their work on 'border thinking,' which refers to the in-between location of subaltern knowledge that critiques both

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[190] Grosfoguel, "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn," 214.
[191] Mignolo also devotes much thought to Castro-Gómez's concept of zero point (from his book *La hubris del punto cero* from 2005) and Descartes's dictum in chapter two of *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* titled 'I Am Where I Do,' 77-117. Mignolo comments that Descartes was possibly unaware but still responsible for rooting his thought in an imperial logic that arrogantly assumed its own 'applicability' beyond Europe.
[192] Grosfoguel, "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn," 214.
[193] Ramón Grosfoguel, "Epistemic Islamophobia and Colonial Social Sciences," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self Knowledge* III, no. 2 (2010): 30.
[194] Ramón Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality," *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 1 (2011): n.p. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/21k6t3fq.
[195] Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political Economy," n.p.
[196] Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political Economy," n.p.

global coloniality and internal coloniality. Well-known for co-editing the feminist anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), queer Chicana American scholar, Gloria Anzaldúa, centres the writings of women of colour, consequently challenging the now outmoded white feminist ideal of a universal sisterhood that completely negated subjectivities shaped by race, class and sexuality. Born in southern Texas, poet, philosopher, fiction writer, feminist and cultural theorist, Anzaldúa is also celebrated for authoring the pivotal text, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). This influential semi-autobiographical book has influenced postcolonial scholars and also decolonial thinkers such as Mignolo, Lugones and Grosfoguel. Her work is seminal for women's studies, queer theory, Chicana and postcolonial feminism, and decolonial thinking.

Borderlands/La Frontera weaves a bilingual combination of English and Spanish, further embellished by varying dialects of the two languages. This code-switching is demonstrative of Anzaldúa's linguistic stance of celebrating and accepting different languages and accents. The incorporation of what she calls a "border tongue"—Chicano Spanish—when mixed with standard academic English transgresses the boundaries of traditional academic norms.[197]

The text is composed of prose interspersed with poetry and is rich with metaphors. It contains Anzaldúa's personal accounts of growing up along the border between Mexico and the U.S. and also communicates the history of that ambiguous liminal space at the intimate edge of two cultures. Alienated from the dominant culture and occasionally from her own, Anzaldúa is caught between the threshold of two worlds. Her own Indigenous American ancestry mingled with Spanish conquistadors, further merged with Anglo-Americans (through colonisation), forges a complex synergy of identities. The book essentially deals with the struggles of navigating these shifting identities and the cultural values associated with them.

Anzaldúa talks of the presence of a strong sense of self-autonomy from her youth that rebelled vigorously against the tyranny of incontestable beliefs transmitted through culture, a culture that was inevitably fashioned by those in power—men. Several derogatory terms were accorded to women from her ethnic background, contingent upon the degree of variance from rigid cultural expectations. For Anzaldúa, a feminist lesbian woman of colour, it meant immersion in a relentless state of rebellion against entrenched hierarchies and social categories, as well as orthodox sexual norms. She also addresses the internalisation of colonisation and the inner conflict that leads to the continual oppression practised within ethnic communities.

Fabricated borders hierarchically divide men from women, heterosexuality from homosexuality and other sexual orientations, body from spirit, Christian from pagan and Latinas/os from non- Latinas/os; the list is endless. Anzaldúa documents the violence caused by this kind of dualistic thinking and advocates transcending these forms of hegemonic dichotomy from the borders, which she

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[197] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987), 55. Anzaldúa sees Chicano Spanish as a bifurcated tongue belonging to people who are neither Spanish nor Anglo, who cannot fully identify with either formal Spanish or standard English.

conceptualises as a physical and conceptual metaphorical space. Anzaldúa also recognises the split encouraged by institutionalised religions that ironically differentiate themselves from "cults" or mythologies while exclusively sanctioning their own ritual sacraments and religious rites. A heightened perception of reality or psychic experiences are considered irrational and are discouraged by enlightenment rationality, an enduring legacy of colonialism.

A chapter is dedicated to the deep connection between language, ethnic identity and heritage. Anzaldúa calls out instances of "linguistic terrorism," where native linguistic expression is suppressed and actively discouraged, while the internalisation of the dominant culture and its linguistic hierarchies excludes and attaches shame to the native tongue. Anzaldúa lists a variety of languages and dialects spoken by Chicanas/os (as a result of Spanish/Anglo colonisation), such as Chicano Spanish with its various regional variations, the North Mexican Spanish dialect and Working class and slang English. She calls for the legitimacy of linguistic heterogeneity instead of having to constantly accommodate the limitations of an exclusively English audience. Anzaldúa recalls childhood experiences with Chicano novels, Mexican movies, Chicano music, folk songs, the smell of woodsmoke and food; she remarks on how all of these experiences are intimately tied to identity. As Chicanos straddle multiple identities, Anzaldúa believes that the resultant malleability renders strength.

The concept of "mestiza," a term that refers to a woman of mixed-race heritage, typically Spanish and Indigenous American ancestry, was made popular by Anzaldúa's text. Opposing the underlying logic of purity of the Aryan race theory, Anzaldúa embraces the confluence of multiple cultures. Constructing the new mestiza consciousness, Anzaldúa explains, "From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological crosspollenization, an "alien" consciousness is presently in the making- a new mestiza consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands."[198] Anzaldúa uses the Aztec (Nahuatl) word "nepantla" to explain the ambivalent nature of this restless psychic state of 'in-betweeness,' what she calls "mental nepantilism," born from straddling multiple cultures and being torn between opposing messages.[199] The coping mechanism of the new mestiza, Anzaldúa reveals, is to cultivate protean boundaries, "a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity," and a pluralistic outlook.[200] A synthesis that sustains colliding elements without an outright rejection of any, a creative assembly that could subvert colonial hegemonic paradigms. Contradiction, sustained ambiguity, and polysemantic expression are all features of irony, which could thus function as a complementary strategy that effectively expresses this state of 'in-betweeness', which could destabilise the colonial logic of purity.

Contemplating her own writing style, Anzaldúa invokes metaphors of assemblage, layers of paint and woven textile. There is a raw honesty to Anzaldúa's writing where she takes to task the oppression of her own culture and the dominant culture, insisting that she would not glorify that which had shackled

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[198] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, 77.
[199] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, 78.
[200] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera*, 79.

and wounded her in the name of culture. She calls for accountability from all three cultures that comprise her heritage—white, Mexican and Indian—and also for the freedom to be the architect of her own identity, her own culture of the new *mestiza*. However, some critics have argued that homogenising "mestiza consciousness," or the notion of mixed-race, tends to readminister racial hierarchy and erases mono-racial identities such as Black or Indigenous, thus making it harder to address issues of racism. While the reception of the book has been largely celebratory, it was also listed as one of the books banned under a law in 2010 that outlawed Mexican American or ethnic studies in Tucson, Arizona public schools.

Inspired by Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* and the concept of border thinking, decolonial scholar María Lugones builds on the concept of mestiza, connecting it to practices of resistance. She is also well-known for advancing Quijano's concept of the "coloniality of power" to include considerations of the categories of race, gender and sexuality, and their impact on the construction of the paradigm. An Argentine sociologist, activist and lesbian feminist philosopher, Lugones, was a Professor of Comparative Literature, Latin American and Caribbean Area studies, and Women's Studies at Binghamton University in New York State until her death in July of last year. Her research interests included Latin American philosophy, the philosophy of race and gender, social and political philosophy, feminist theory and theories of resistance. Lugones has made invaluable contributions to decolonial and feminist theory and was awarded the 2020 Frantz Fanon Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of her outstanding and prolific work.

A seminal volume of essays authored by Lugones, *Pilgrimage/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (2003), presents in its introduction a maxim that she devotedly followed: "I won't think what I won't practice." Ethically and methodologically, the collection of essays employ what Lugones calls a "theoretico-practical" approach that dissolves boundaries between theory and practice. Stressing on the importance of praxis, she invites her readers to engage in a self-reflexive manner. Collaborating with textile artist Mildred Beltre, Lugones intersperses her prose with multiple expressive modalities for her readers to engage with. The essays masterfully wield a bilingual tongue of Spanish and English and include personal accounts. The writings explore intermeshed oppressions and the complexities of variegated resistances to them. Lugones remarks that resistance is:

> an ongoing activity from which to understand liberatory possibilities. Resistance is also the active state from which to seek collectivity and coalition. Resistance hardly ever has a straightforward public presence. It is rather duplicitous, ambiguous, even devious.[201]

[201] Maria Lugones, *Pilgrimages/ Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 11. Interestingly, Lugones's description of resistance is analogous to certain features of critical irony.

Lugones clarifies that while there are reactive resistances, all resistance should not be reduced to a reaction but seen rather as a response that is complex, sometimes devious and most importantly, providing insight into the complexity of the structures being resisted.[202]

Lugones introduces a range of vocabulary that act as spatial metaphors engaging with the complexities of resistance. For instance, she lays the context for the term 'pilgrimage,' as the movements of people that create possibilities for "antistructural understandings of selves, relations and realties."[203] The word 'trespassing' is employed to refer to the violation of one's constructed spatiality in relation to the conceptual map of power or oppression. In the essay "Playfulness, "World"-Travelling, and Loving Perception," Lugones uses the term '"world"-travelling,' to refer to navigating across multiple differing selves or plural identities that shift in accordance to each new "world" one inhabits. She employs the interesting expression 'playfulness' to refer to an attribute that she claims to both have and not have, depending on which "world" she inhabits. 'Playfulness' refers to an "openness to uncertainty that enables one to find in others one's own possibilities and theirs," unbound by ossified norms and definitions.[204]

A recurring theme in Lugones's work is the motif of liminal, in-between spaces. She alludes to Anzaldúa's notion of 'borders,' and although she does not draw explicitly on Bhabha or Du Bois, she echoes their concepts of liminality and double consciousness, respectively. She writes, "The experience of victims of ethnocentric racism of moving across realities, of being different in each, and of reasoning practically differently in each, can be understood as liminal."[205] Lugones's concluding essay from *Pilgrimage*, titled "Tactical Strategies of the Streetwalker/Estrategias Tácticas de la Callejera" describes the streetwalker theorist as one who practices resistance to interlocked oppressions from within this liminal space. By inhabiting this border space, the streetwalker cultivates a practice that foregrounds multiplicity and polyvocal complexity, which subvert monologic discourse.

In her later works, Lugones builds on Quijano's concept of the "coloniality of power." Writing from the position of a Latina lesbian woman navigating a patriarchal world, she calls for an examination of the dynamics of the categories of race, gender and sexuality within the context of the modernity/coloniality paradigm. She identifies the following features as characteristic of the modern/colonial gender system—biological dimorphism, heterosexualism and patriarchy.[206] She also calls to attention the historical elision of non-white colonised women in women's liberatory struggles and expounds on what she calls the light and dark side of colonialism, where the gendered oppressions experienced contrast and differ along racially coloured lines.

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[202] Lugones, *Pilgrimages/ Peregrinajes*, 36.
[203] Lugones, *Pilgrimages/ Peregrinajes*, 21.
[204] Lugones, *Pilgrimages/ Peregrinajes*, 33. Some of these metaphors are important to our later analysis of the performance work, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West*, by Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, which is an ironic parody based on the history of human zoos.
[205] Lugones, *Pilgrimages/ Peregrinajes*, 59.
[206] Maria Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/ Modern Gender System," *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 22, no. 1 (January 2007): 189-90.

Lugones cites at length the work of scholars such as Nigerian academic, Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí (1957-) and Native American poet and activist, Paula Gunn Allen (1939-2008). She infers that prior to colonisation, many tribal societies such as Native American tribes were matriarchal, recognised more than two genders and also viewed homosexuality positively. The construction of these categories was understood in egalitarian terms, did not rest solely on biology, nor were they hierarchical in nature.[207] The introduction of Christianity replaced gynecratic spiritual plurality with a singular, supreme, male-gendered creator, while colonised men were drafted into a patriarchal society. The imposition of sexual dimorphism of the Western gender system onto tribal societies such as Yoruba society led to the subjugation of women who bore double oppressions of racial inferiorisation and gender subordination.[208] The superimposition of Western patterns of understanding gender also led to the mistranslation and skewed recasting of Yoruba society by Western researchers.[209]

In "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," Lugones notes the disruption caused by colonial modernity to the forms of social organisation, gender relations, spiritual, ecological and cosmological understandings of indigenous communities. Lugones recognises the complex ramifications of the introduction of dichotomous hierarchies between human and non-human, male and female, wrought by colonial modernity. The characterisation of the masculinity of the colonised, she notes, was paradoxically subjected to an unresolved tension of irony between sexual passivity and hypersexuality. Writing on the role of Christianity in the civilising mission, Lugones remarks on its persuasive presence in the "ideological conception of conquest and colonization" and also marks its complicity in the characterisation of female sexuality as evil. [210]

Interested, in forms of intimate, everyday resistance to these multiple oppressions, Lugones attempts to theorise resistance as "the tension between subjectification (the forming/informing of the subject) and active subjectivity, that minimal sense of agency required for the oppressing ← → resisting relation being an active one…"[211] She conceives of the colonised as "a being who begins to inhabit a fractured locus constructed doubly, who perceives doubly, relates doubly, where the "sides" of the locus are in tension, and the conflict itself actively informs the subjectivity of the colonized self in multiple relation."[212] The critical double voice of irony could possess the means to express this paradoxical enunciation of identity through double-voicing or multivocal expression. The cognisance of plural subjectivities enables us to clearly perceive the phenomenon of multiply oppressive subjectification by colonial processes.

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[207] For instance, as Allen remarks, the Yuma tribe had a tradition by which they designated gender based on dreams, "… a female who dreamed of weapons became a male for all practical purposes." Quoted in Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/ Modern Gender System," 200.
[208] Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/ Modern Gender System," 197.
[209] We find parallel concerns with the damaging and enduring impact of the imposition of colonial categories of gender in the work of Tejal Shah and Yuki Kihara, discussed in the final chapter. Culturally specific gender identities such as the Indian Hijra or Samoan ***fa'afafine***, have suffered disenfranchisement from these colonial impositions.
[210] Lugones, "Toward a Decolonial Feminism," *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 744-45.
[211] Lugones, "Decolonial Feminism," 746.
[212] Lugones, "Decolonial Feminism," 748.

Lugones argues for the value of coalitional understanding, calling for the logic of coalition and multiplicity to respond to the coloniality of gender at the colonial difference.

Lugones's theorising of the concept of "curdling" as a resistant and liberatory practice forms an important theoretical link to the selection of contemporary art discussed in the final chapter. The essay "Purity, Impurity and Separation," from 1994 (also included in *Pilgrimage*), introduces the important concept of 'curdling' as a practice of resistance or creative defiance. The concept is of considerable importance to my thesis and will frequently feature in relation to the art discussed. Reflecting on the unique ambiguous position of mestizaje, Lugones conceives of mestizaje as metaphors for both impurity and resistance.[213] She writes in verse:

> *If something or someone is neither/nor, but kind of both, not quite either,*
>
> *if something is in the middle of either/or,*
>
> *if it is ambiguous, given the available classification of things,*
>
> *if it is mestiza,*
>
> *if it threatens by its very ambiguity the orderliness of the system of*
>
> *schematized reality,*
>
> *if given its ambiguity in the univocal ordering it is anomalous, deviant can it*
>
> *be tamed through separation? Should it separate so as to avoid taming?*
>
> *Should it resist separation? Should it resist through separation? Separate*
>
> *as in the separation of the white from the yolk?*[214]

Drawing on the analogy of making mayonnaise, an unstable emulsion of yolk and oil (that could separate and curdle), Lugones distinguishes between separation as splitting and separation as curdling; she sees the former as an exercise in purity and the latter, as one in impurity.[215] She envisions the curdled state of mestizaje as resisting the logic of purity and its categorical fetishism that seeks to split, classify and control. Curdling, she declares, possesses the power of the impure; it rejects fragmentation into unadulterated parts; it rejects homogeneity and resists domination. Lugones makes a key distinction between fragmentation and multiplicity; the first follows the logic of purity and the second the

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[213] 'Mestizaje' is a term that refers to racial mixing, in particular, the unique hybrid configuration of Latin America's population (European, Indigenous American groups and Africans) as a result of its colonial history. It is a positive affirmation or recognition of ethnic, linguistic, social or cultural mixing inherent in the history of Latin America or Chicanx culture. Chicano/a is a chosen identity sometimes used alternatively to Mexican American. The former term is affirmative and takes pride in Indigenous descent while the latter, characterised by dichotomy, has connotations of cultural assimilation into American mainstream society.

[214] Lugones, *Pilgrimages/ Peregrinajes*, 100-01.

[215] Lugones, *Pilgrimages/ Peregrinajes*, 101.

logic of curdling. Expounding on the art of curdling, on curdled behaviour as social commentary, on curdled expression as creative social defiance, she writes:

> Bi-and multilingual experimentation;
> code-switching;
> categorial blurring and confusion;
> caricaturing the selves we are in the worlds of our
> oppressors, infusing them with ambiguity;
> practicing trickstery and foolery;
> elaborate and explicitly marked gender transgression;
> withdrawing our services from the pure or their agents
> whenever possible and with panache;
> drag;
> announcing the impurity of the pure by ridiculing his
> inability at self-maintenance;[216]

Camp and cross-dressing could be comfortably added to the list. All of the strategies mentioned form examples of curdling. They undermine social hierarchy, destabilise norms, breach rigid dichotomies and display a healthy tension between contrasting elements that are in coexistence. One can observe that Lugones's descriptions of both resistance and the strategy of curdling are strikingly similar to that of irony. Irony too relies on and inhabits contradiction and possesses an element of deception, of deferral, of tactical deniability activated through deliberate obfuscation. It resists the tyranny of a privileged viewpoint and allows for multivocal expression, while its ambiguity could seem threatening to an ordered categorical eye. The strategies complement the mechanism of irony as they maintain a mindful and often playful distance from (the colonial categorical obsession with) fixed identities positioned within hierarchies, thus providing slippage and room for manoeuvring.

To conclude, I have constructed a table to illustrate the various postcolonial and decolonial terms that are analogous with the characteristics of irony. Interestingly, some of these terms have been perceived as afflictions of the postcolonial condition (e.g. double consciousness), some as colonial strategies (e.g. mimicry), which are also capable of subversive transformation, while others are marked as strategies of anti-colonial resistance (e.g. curdling). Some of these theorists and their strategies frequently feature in the final chapter, in the analyses of the contemporary artworks that subvert colonial legacies.

DU BOIS	SPIVAK	BHABHA	ANZALDUA	LUGONES
• Double Consciousness	• Strategic Essentialism	• Mimicry • Hybridity • Liminality • Interstitial Space	• Border Thinking • Mestiza Consciousness • *Nepantla*	• Curdling

[216] Lugones, *Pilgrimages/ Peregrinajes*, 116-17.

CHAPTER TWO

An Understanding of Irony in Western Works of Art

This chapter is dedicated predominantly to an understanding of the uses of irony in Western visual art, beginning with Marcel Duchamp, who is most often credited with systematically introducing irony into art history. An exploration of irony's purposes, its sensory and experiential effects in Duchamp's work will transition into the exploration of postmodern works and culminate with the use of irony in contemporary global practice. Exploring the motivations of irony across these broad periods of time serves as a useful differential against the final chapter that focuses specifically on ironic engagement in contemporary artworks that undermine a Eurocentric worldview and other legacies of colonialism.

Literature uses the medium of language, and its appreciation or critique depends on its comprehension; the appreciation of the visual arts, however, is contingent on the senses. In the case of verbal irony, the medium examined is the text, either written or spoken, from which irony is inferred. Semantics, word plays, quotation marks and even punctuations could be revelatory signs as to the presence of irony in a text. An artwork *could* also appeal through 'literary' irony by using text, either in the piece itself, written or spoken, or perhaps in its title; the temporality of its usage could vary significantly. The title of an artwork or the text contained within an image produces a form of irony. For instance, Belgian painter René Magritte's (1898-1967) painting titled *The Treachery of Images* (*Ceci N'est Pas Une Pipe*) (Fig. 8) is an example of an artwork where the text presents a conflict with the image of the object depicted. The text below the painted image states, 'This is not a Pipe,' however, the image is clearly that of one. Additionally, the words themselves are also painted, and the painting seems to interrogate itself. The simple irony of the text within an artwork presenting us with the opposite of what the image depicts compels one to search for a resolution that might explain this perplexing inconsistency.

Lars Elleström claims that a person with a philosophical bent of mind might perceive this viewing in the following way 'Yes, of course. This is not a pipe. It is merely a representation of one.'[217] In this case, irony seems to challenge language as well as assumptions and, more importantly, provokes thought which calls for a reassessment of normative thinking. A basic definition of irony describing it as "saying one thing and meaning another" implies a duality in the message, one a decoy and the other coded in by the ironist. With Magritte's irony, however, which presents a combination of literary and visual irony, there are more than two conflicting messages to be found. Rose provides a clear analysis of the messages encoded within the artwork: Message 1: This is a pipe. Message 2: No, it isn't. Message 3: It is the representation of a pipe.[218]

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[217] Lars Elleström, "Some Notes on Irony in the Visual Arts and Music: The Examples of Magritte and Shostakovich," *Word and Image* 12, no. 2 (1996): 101-02.
[218] A. Rose, *Pictorial Irony*, 72.

Applying irony to the experience of the visual arts is tricky and undeniably more challenging as one cannot always fall back on the conventions of a coded language to ensure its communication. Its inference, therefore, is just as complex. As Hutcheon implies, interpreters of irony are not merely passive receivers of the ironist's message. The communication of the same is also dependent on the eye of its beholder.[219] This puts us on unstable ground. It suggests that the communication of irony is not always guaranteed, which makes it to some extent discriminatory, elitist and exclusive, as not everyone might 'get' it. Certain modes of irony are even based on the requirement that a section of the audience remains unaware of the ironist's intention. While ironic utterances are often distinguishable by the tone of voice, identifying markers of irony in the visual arts often require the knowledge and understanding of context. Characteristically, it is shrouded in ambiguity, and this increases the difficulty of detecting its presence. This requires that the artists' task be one of precision—to balance the aesthetic quality of irony effectively along with other factors to create an artwork whose layers can be peeled and savoured through delicate probing.

2.1 The Arresting Entry of Irony: Duchamp

Duchamp's abandonment of traditional painting or 'retinal' art found him in favour of experiments with 'chance,' where he began to use unconventional pictorial approaches while exploring its potential for mental stimulation.[220] Consciously distancing himself even from his own artistic judgements and taste, Duchamp professes, "Irony is a playful way of accepting something. Mine is the irony of indifference. It is a meta-irony."[221] His creation of the 'readymade' revolutionised art practice and introduced equivocation. His use of irony through this radical technique questioned aesthetic value and disrupted long-standing certainties regarding the role of the artist as an expertly skilled creator.

Emerging in Zurich, Switzerland, Dada was an art movement that spread across many European nations and also North America, with Paris and New York developing as important centres. The origins of Dada are entwined with the beginning of World War I. Disillusioned with the aesthetic ideals of modern industrial societies, intellectual and cultural conventions, the perilous ascent of nationalism and bourgeois capitalism, the Dadaists saw these as principal causes of the War. They rejected these ideologies and the logic of capitalist societies by emphasising irrationality, unpredictability, impulsiveness and chaos in their aesthetics. Dada was diverse in its expression, it encompassed literature, poetry, theatre, visual arts, photography, performance, collage and was international in its

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[219] Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 118.
[220] Dalia Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit* (University of California Press, 1995), 16.
[221] Quoted in Robert Motherwell's, *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, 2nd ed. (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall, 1981), 311.

scope. This artistic and literary movement ignored the traditional aesthetics associated with art, posed itself as anti-art and adopted a critical and aggressive stance toward the conventions of its times.

The Dada manifesto's of 1916 and 1918 by Hugo Ball and Tristan Tzara, respectively, attempted to outline the goals and principles of the movement. While there were many differences in its articulation, Dada was predominantly anti-intellectual, endorsed anarchy and advocated a break with social and institutional conditioning. It also attacked the logic of language, its conventional usage of words and their associated meanings. The term Dada, for instance, could be understood as a nonsensical sound or could be seen to hold meaning in French, referring to a 'hobby horse'. Contradiction, absurdity, satire and parody were integral to Dada. Its positioning as anti-art was additionally a paradoxical claim considering it was a movement that produced art. Francis Picabia and Duchamp, who were key proponents of the movement, travelled to New York from France in the year 1915 and met American artist Man Ray. Together, all three generated a radical shift in art practice that rejected common standards and definitions of art. While influenced by many avant-garde movements such as Cubism and Futurism, Dada's ideologies were foundational to several twentieth-century art movements such as Surrealism and Conceptual art. The negation of traditional aesthetics and an obstinate, ironic refusal to be 'authentic' with regard to the staid standards of art is characteristic of Dada and is exemplified in the work of Duchamp.

The artistic career of Duchamp is essentially of an experimental nature, littered with phases of influence from various artistic movements such as Cubism, Dada and Surrealism, finally culminating into his signature iconoclastic defiance of normative categorisation. Humour, irony, satire, parody, visual and linguistic punning are trademarks of his oeuvre. Provocation is key. Questioning the meaning and function of art as practice and as institution, he began to consciously distance himself from its associated dogmas and systematised expectations. Liberating pictorial expression from the confines of its own aesthetic and generic conventions, Duchamp sought to alter its emphasis on retinal appeal and explore instead its potential for mental stimulation. His legacy is that of a relentless spirit of inquiry, review and critique alongside a perpetual mockery of customs and standards, thus transgressing or transcending previously uncontested conventions.

Employing a conceptual approach, Duchamp fashions the assemblage of the *Three Standard Stoppages*, 1913 (Fig. 9). His notes on the fabrication of the piece in the *Box of 1914*[222] indicate the following modus operandi. Three lengths of threads, each a metre long, were held horizontally at the height of one metre and allowed to fall onto three painted strips of canvas. Their chance formations were preserved and varnished onto the Prussian blue canvas surface, with each strip then mounted on a glass panel. The random curvature of the threads served as patterns for three wooden slats that were shaped accordingly on one edge. The wooden slats represent a technical drawing device for

[222] A book which contains reproductions of Duchamp's first box of notes relating to the conceptualization of *The Large Glass*.

draughtsmen to measure and draw straight lines. After their Duchampian alteration, with one edge ironically 'standardising' the chance curvature of the corresponding thread, they prove to be useless implements, although theoretically speaking, the wooden templates *still* retain the measure of exactly one metre of thread. The pseudo-scientific measuring devices are assembled within a wooden croquet box resembling a toolkit.

While invoking the qualities of a mathematical experiment on the surface, the work undermines the rational basis of science and questions the accepted authority of standards of measurement. He further complicates the idea of 'measurement' by multiplying the 'standardised' curves of fallen thread into diagrammatic form in *Network of Stoppages*, 1914 (Fig. 10). The curves from *Three Standard Stoppages* are repeated three times each and arranged to resemble a graph-like form on the canvas. By deploying chance and avoiding purpose or deliberation in the creation of an artistic work, Duchamp challenges the critic, audience's and institution's acceptance of the work as 'art' along with the tacit forms of determinism that they impose upon an artwork.

Most scholarship on Duchamp's *Three Standard Stoppages* reiterates the process described in his notes, taking them at face value. Literature that is more recent, however, has raised questions about the veracity of Duchamp's claims to follow the protocols that he had penned down and his insistence on a clinical devotion to them even when questioned repeatedly.[223] Duchamp's notes from the *Box of 1914* state, for example, that the thread measuring a metre in length was allowed to fall "twisting as it pleases" while creating "a new image of the unit of length." A closer but simple inspection of the original 1913-14 work at MOMA reveals that the string actually begins on the reverse side of the canvas, passes through a needle hole to the front, the path of the 'chance' curve is formed by the length of one metre of string which then disappears back into another needle hole returning to the reverse side of the canvas.[224] Perhaps this was meant to be a trace of an earlier experiment as Michael Schwab suggests, or perhaps, the jokes on us.

The premise of the entire experiment was dependant on the role of chance and the 'exactness' of the length of one metre. A simple act of observation reveals the premise defunct. The playful irony of Duchamp not only parodies the standardised concept of the meter through the *Three Standard Stoppages* but also demystifies and destabilises the much-revered authority of the art scholar and the artistic authority of the artist. His benevolent teasing also provokes his audience to develop a healthy curiosity, providing answers to the ones that dare to question.

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[223] See "Hidden in Plain Sight: Duchamp's *3 Standard Stoppages*, More Truly a "Stoppage" (An Invisible Mending) Than We Ever Realized" by Shearer and Gould. Also "Experiment! Towards an Artistic Epistemology" by Michael Schwab.

[224] Shearer and Gould approached conservators at MOMA, Erika Mosier, Pat Houlihan, and Christopher McGlinchey, to examine the original object.

The *Bicycle Wheel* (Fig.11) was Duchamp's first Readymade that comprised of a bicycle wheel mounted on a wooden stool, consequently undermining the utilitarian functions of both objects. Initially, never meant for display, the composite object or 'assisted readymade' fashioned in 1913 belonged to his studio and provided him merriment as he would turn the wheel and watch it spin. Mexican poet and writer Octavio Paz describes Readymades as "anonymous objects that the artist's gratuitous gesture, the mere fact of choosing them, converts into works of art."[225] The traditional notion of the creative act, perceived to involve deliberation, painterly skill, the artist's expertise, aesthetic sense and innovation, was thus put in jeopardy. The paradoxical characteristics of irony are embodied in the radical indeterminacy of the object oscillating between the tenuous states of 'art' and 'not art,' with each classification mutually destructive of the other on the one hand but confoundingly acquiring equal validity on the other.

The term 'ready-made' implies a stage of completion in production, hence forsaking any substantial input from the artist in its process of creation. Paz implies that by minimal intervention and the mere virtue of the artist's designatory act, a utilitarian item's otherwise ordinary status could be transformed dramatically—it would be knighted forever as an art object. When asked in an interview in 1968 on how he chooses an object, Duchamp insists, however, that the object "chooses you, so to speak." [226] He continues, "If your choice entered into it, then, taste is involved, bad taste, good taste, uninteresting taste. Taste is the enemy of art, A-R-T. The idea was to find an object that had no attraction whatsoever from the aesthetic angle."[227] Making a deliberate move away from the primacy of visual aesthetics toward the conceptual, Duchamp attempts to change the norms that an artist is defined by; to "de-deify" the process and the personality, and to induce humour into the dry seriousness of it all.[228] This expansion of the limits of artistic licence makes delicate the difference between the ontological statuses of the utilitarian object set against art object. The assimilation of the readymade into the art world triggered an assault on its customs, causing disorder and much deliberation into what was to be considered as acceptable standards of art.

A snow shovel bought from a hardware store, suspended from the ceiling of Duchamp's studio and titled *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, 1915 was the first piece he designated as a "readymade." The *Fountain,* though, was the first publicly exhibited readymade to garner considerable attention. Duchamp, from the showroom of J.L. Mott Iron Works, chose the bathroom fixture of a men's urinal. A few minor alterations were made to the porcelain white urinal—it was turned on its side, from its

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[225] Octavio Paz, *Marcel Duchamp: Appearance Stripped Bare*, trans. Rachel Philips and Donald Gardner (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1990), 20-21.
[226] Francis Roberts, "From the Archives: An Interview with Marcel Duchamp, From 1968," *Artnews*, January 18, 2019, https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/archives-interview-marcel-duchamp-1968-11708/.
[227] Roberts, "An Interview with Marcel Duchamp, From 1968," *Artnews*.
[228] Roberts, "An Interview with Marcel Duchamp, From 1968," *Artnews*.

functional position, signed in black paint with the fictitious name "R. Mutt," christened the title of 'Fountain' and promptly sent to the Society of Independent Artists for exhibition in New York, in 1917.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines Socratic irony as "A pose of ignorance assumed in order to entice others into making statements that can then be challenged."[229] If one were to stride across centuries and disciplines to tease a parallel out of art history, one might examine Duchamp's *Fountain* (Fig. 12). After all, the *Fountain* was also a sort of 'inside joke', meant to put to task the very nature of art. It challenged the erudite art world, making it question everything it once held true and provoked it to ponder over the aesthetic validity of the readymade object. Like Socrates, but in a much milder fashion, Duchamp too was once condemned as the *Fountain* was vetoed from the inaugural exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists. By administering mischievous irony, Duchamp undermined the then perceived fundamental requisite of an artwork—that it be made by an artist. The significance of this act lies in its defiance of the norms of the art-system delivered in the form of a critique of the definitions of art, beauty, aesthetics and value.

A machine-made object exhibited in place of an artistic object whose traditional qualifying criteria was that it be made meticulously and by hand proves incongruous through the ironic displacement of its context. The notion of artistic originality and authorship are undermined. In an interview from 1959, he explains, "the readymade comes in as a sort of irony, because it says, "Here is a thing that I call art, but I didn't even make it myself." As we know, "art," etymologically speaking, means "to hand make." And there it is ready-made."[230] The readymade is an ironic object. It is a paradoxical construction as it is both an ordinary object and an art object; both iterations coexist and are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They are aporetic, both plausible yet inconsistent.[231]

By altering the context of its normative placement, from the floor of a bathroom to a gallery setting, Duchamp defamiliarises the object, inducing a fresh reaction to this otherwise commonplace item. Viktor Shklovsky (1893-1984), a leading figure associated with Russian Formalism, envisioned the concept of defamiliarisation in the context of literary and linguistic theory and cited the writings of Tolstoy as an illustration. Shklovsky's essay from 1917, *Art as Device*, declares that the function of art is to eliminate the automatised perception of objects and that this could be achieved by making strange that which is familiar.[232]

> This is how life becomes nothing and disappears. Automatization eats things, clothes, furniture, your wife, and the fear of war… And so this thing we call art exists in order to restore the sensation of life, in

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[229] "Socratic irony," *Oxford English Dictionary*.
[230] George Heard Hamilton, Richard Hamilton, and Charles Mitchell, "A 1959 Interview with Marcel Duchamp: The Fallacy of Art History and the Death of Art," *Artspace*, February 21, 2018, https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/qa/a-1959-interview-with-marcel-duchamp-the-fallacy-of-art-history-and-the-death-of-art-55274.
[231] Aporia has been associated with the irony of Socrates and also with the writings of Derrida.
[232] Written prior to Freud's article on the 'uncanny,' Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarisation shares affinities to the Freudian concept of the uncanny, which will be discussed subsequently.

> order to make us feel things, in order to make a stone stony. The goal of art is to create the sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing, things; the device of art is the "enstrangement" of things and the complication of the form, which increases the duration and complexity of perception, as the process of perception is, in art, an end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is the means to live through the making of a thing; what has been made does not matter in art.[233]

Defamiliarisation is understood as an artistic device in which an object is presented removed from the common stain of its typical, habitual association. This displacement effects not only a temporally extended aesthetic response but also causes a profound imprint in its audience. As the automated response is bypassed, a novel perception is enabled. Paradoxically then, it is the perception of the common through an uncommon lens. One sees the broad multidisciplinary influence of this important artistic device in Dada and even later on in the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht and presently in contemporary art practice. Duchamp had intended to introduce the readymade as a form resisting a definition within the arts. He argued that repetition and taste were the enemies of art and placed importance instead on a nonconformist spirit, conceptual value and the art of ideas. He believed that ideas could survive longer and without distortion.

Art historian William A. Camfield, an authority on the *Fountain,* describes the many physical and conceptual ironies that it presents, "Ironic dualities continue as a hard, chilly surface bellies the sensuousness of the form; as a receptacle for waste fluid is renamed as a dispenser of life-giving water; as an object associated with 'dirty' biological needs comes to bear association with the serene, spiritual forms of a seated Buddha or a chaste, veiled Madonna."[234] When first presented to the Independents for exhibition, its members baulked at the object's offensive relation to a secretion that is part of the body's refuse. The lure of its peculiar aesthetics, however, gave rise to a number of accounts likening the *Fountain* to the anthropomorphic forms of the Madonna and the seated Buddha.[235] Apart from observations of the elements of the sacred and the obscene residing within its form, writings on the *Fountain* also found it suggestive of a conceptual synthesis of male and female forms. Its utilitarian identity as a urinal generates the male association, while its sensuous triangular form evidently resembles female genitalia.

Several dualities were thrown to light for re-examination in the stir of the *Fountain*, elevated/ordinary, high/low, handmade/machine-made, artist/artisan, utilitarian/artistic; their associated premises of difference weakened and destabilised. Derrida, in his theories on deconstruction, points out the habitual construction of opposites in our culture such as Reason/Emotion, Masculine/Feminine or Presence/Absence and reveals the logocentric nature of dualistic theorising. Based on Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's relational pairs, Derrida calls attention to the positive and negative values associated with most of them. One pair of the binary is typically dominant, implying the interplay of

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[233] Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Device," trans. Alexandra Berlina, *Poetics Today* 36, no. 3 (2015): 162.
[234] Thierry de Duve, ed., *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp* (The MIT Press, 1991), 148.
[235] Duve, *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, 140-142. These observations engender their own irony considering that they are formalist interpretations of Duchamp's undermining of formalism.

power structures within the binary opposition, ultimately leading to a privileged or marginalised status. Through deconstruction, Derrida intended to weaken each pair by undermining their dichotomies and ultimately subverting them. A comparable subversion occurs in Duchamp's *Fountain*, where we see both opposing orders of classification, utilitarian commodity and artistic object, find their place within the same object.

Différance, a term coined by Derrida is a concept central to deconstruction and its examination of the relationship between text and meaning. A semiotic concept pronounced like 'difference' but spelt otherwise; it is a portmanteau that refers to both the production of 'difference' and the act of 'deferring' or postponing. In an interview with Bulgarian-French semiotician, psychoanalyst, literary critic and philosopher Julia Kristeva, Derrida explains that "in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present."[236] This intertwining indicates that a word derives meaning from internal traces of other words that it is associated with as well as how it differs from them. Therefore, the other words or signifiers represent the critical absences that constitute the word. The internal structural instability of meaning is therefore laid bare. Derrida offers further clarification of the term, "*Différance* is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other."[237] This *space* between elements is a generative space of 'becoming', and the transformations of the elements in their play against each other are not fixed or static. An element in reference to its present reality, always takes on meaning by referring to trace elements from the past or future, thus displaying this *spacing* as the temporal postponement or deferring of complete meaning.

Thomas Deane Tucker in his book *Derridada* locates Duchamp's readymades as emblematic of *différance*. The *Fountain*, for example, transcends the threshold of its own traditional context as a urinal through a different iteration. This new formulation does not refer solely to its original context nor entirely suppress it but engenders meaning through *différance*. Designated by Duchamp to belong to a new context, the signification of the object is suspended between the possibilities of multiple readings. Through his iconoclastic gesture of making analogous the act of designation (an act of deliberation paired with aesthetic indifference) with the act of creation, Duchamp ironises the creative act and stimulates the rigid disciplinary boundaries of art to integrate conceptual artistry and reflexivity.

Duchamp's interest in the playful use of language is found in his titles, which are in themselves an integral part of the work. He exercises a semantic rebellion in his titling in order to avoid a reductive analysis and instead puts them into play with the object. In the case of the *Fountain*, the title does not describe its object but alters it and functions as a referent providing delayed, unanticipated, alternate associations between the visual, the verbal and the conceptual. There is no simple opposition between

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[236] Jacques Derrida, "Semiology and Grammatology," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 2nd ed. (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1998), 337.
[237] Derrida, "Semiology and Grammatology," 337.

the *Fountain* (verbal) and the urinal (visual). The discordancy of their interaction is made somewhat partial due to the signifiers in the verbal title. The play of *différance* and traces in the production of meaning invokes even multisensorial connotations, especially with respect to its former context as a urinal. The evocation of the invisible lingering odour of human waste activates an olfactory dimension, thus avoiding the singular domination of the ocular that typically transpires in a work-spectator encounter.

Philosopher and scholar Dalia Judovitz in her book *Unpacking Duchamp* talks of the olfactory dimension following the logic of Duchamp's concept of the *infrathin. Infra-mince* was an idea that Duchamp began thinking about in the late 1930s. Most scholars on Duchamp use *infra-slim* or *infra-thin* as a translation. Art Historian Molly Nesbit explains that Duchamp came to use the term *infra-mince* to explore "those immeasurable transitions *between* one thing and another."[238] Duchamp resisted providing a definition for the term and insisted that it could only be described through examples. The first public example appeared on the back cover of the Surrealist journal *View* in March 1945:

> WHEN
> THE TOBACCO SMOKE
> ALSO SMELLS
> OF THE MOUTH
> WHICH EXHALES IT
> THE TWO ODOURS
> ARE MARRIED BY
> *INFRA-MINCE*.[239]

Indicating a state of 'betweeness' in the similarity between elements and also of their separation formed through difference, there is an easily notable affinity between Derrida's concept of *différance* and the *infra-thin*. Though predating Derrida's formulation of comparable concepts, *Infra-thin* is much like a trace and undermines pairs of binary opposition through its immeasurable margin. We find this applicable in the *Fountain*, where *infra-thin* impossibly measures the delayed interval between common object and artistic readymade.

Derrida's deconstructive approach employs irony as a critical tool in order to challenge previously uncontested notions, ultimately revealing their structural inconsistencies. By giving precedence to ambiguity and complexity, Derrida exposes the simplistic and reductionist practices that dominate our ways of thinking, a major characteristic shared by univocal colonialist narratives. The Duchampian irony exercised in the readymade is similar in nature to a deconstructionist reading. The readymade employs satirical irony as it attacks the conventions of its own ontological context in the art world while simultaneously transcending it and also creates a strategic interchange between the two positions. It does not just affirm or negate; but also creates a space that is indifferent to irresolution and accepting of ambiguity. Judovitz succinctly encapsulates the aporia of the readymade object, "The ready-made

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[238] Molly Nesbit, "Last Words (Rilke, Wittgenstein) (Duchamp)," *Art History* 21, no. 4 (1998): 547.
[239] Nesbit, "Last Words," 547.

thus embodies an impossible destiny: the predicament of art brought face-to-face with its own conditions of possibility."[240]

As fate would have it (or irony rather), while Duchamp intended to discourage aesthetic privileging through his readymades, the art world eventually enthusiastically embraced and assimilated the readymade into yet another artistic category. This institutional legitimation and the powerful commercialisation of the art market caused Duchamp's anti-aesthetic, anti-institutional gesture to fail miserably with respect to undermining the commodification of the art object. Amelia Jones, in her book *Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp,* quotes Peter Burger's avant-gardist theory where he cites the readymade as not only a prime example of avant-garde's negation of creativity but also of the definitive failure of its radicality: "Once the signed bottle drier has been accepted as an object that deserves a place in a museum, the provocation no longer provokes; it turns into its opposite… [its] adaptation [to the market] does not eradicate the idea of individual creativity, it affirms it…"[241]

Duchamp's anti-aesthetic, anti-rational, anti-establishment stance and his resolute irreverence to traditional and established aesthetics of the art world embodied the spirits of both Dada and Surrealism. Although Dada in itself was a short-lived movement, several crucial techniques that it employed and explored, such as assemblage, automatism, photomontage, chance and the practice or format of installation, were incorporated and expanded upon by several ensuing movements. The impact of these techniques is evident in Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, Fluxus and subsequently postmodern movements such as Conceptual Art, Neo-Dada, Neo-Conceptualism, Performance and Installation. We find the enduring impact of Duchamp's readymade technique influencing the ironic practices of postmodern appropriation and contemporary artistic practice.

2.2 Surrealism

With Dada as its principal source, Surrealism emerged between the two World Wars and was characterised by a fascination with the bizarre, the incongruous and the irrational. With several artists featuring successively in both movements, they had attitudinal affinities and were strongly anti-rationalist. As a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism that had guided European thought for most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, concluding in the devastation of World War I, Surrealism sought freedom from the limiting control of reason. Its chief spokesman, André Breton (1896-1966), in his first Manifesto of Surrealism published in 1924, defined Surrealism as "Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other

[240] Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp*, 119.
[241] Amelia Jones, *Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 13.

manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern."[242] Encouraging "the disinterested play of thought," Surrealism sought to eliminate conscious control through methods designed to release primitive urges and imagery and drew heavily on the writings of Freud concerning the unconscious and its relation to dreams.[243]

Drawing on inspiration from psychological theory, artists experimented with making artworks that merged familiar things in unusual ways to create uncanny feelings. Man Ray's *The Gift (Cadeau)* of 1921 (see Fig. 13), inspired by Dada, was a sort of precursor to the surrealist object. One also notices the influence of Duchamp in Ray's early readymade. The viewer is confronted by a common household implement now possessing brass tacks glued in a vertical line down the centre of its flat surface. A recognised functional object is made dysfunctional by this simple addition. Its level metal surface once used to smoothen creases on clothes, would now tear into delicate fabric if one was tempted to use it in its standard context. It possesses an air of violence and destruction. The iron and the tacks are shorn of their original function, displaced from their normative setting and are now imbued with a more sinister, destructive function.

In Freud's essay "The 'Uncanny'" (1919), he suggests that *unheimlich* or 'uncanny' is commonly understood as the opposite of *heimlich* or the familiar and homely. He notes additionally that *heimlich* could also be interpreted as something concealed, private or hidden, thus bringing it closer to *unheimlich* in its connotation. He states that in linguistic usage, the meaning of *heimlich* develops ambivalently to finally coincide with its opposite, *unheimlich*. He writes, therefore, that the uncanny "is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression."[244] Therefore, rather than referring to something that is strange or frightening because it is unknown or unfamiliar, Freud posits that the uncanny "is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar."[245] With the eerie *Cadeau*, familiar, utilitarian objects are ironically rendered unusable for their intended purposes and are inducted into the realm of art. When a distinction between classes of objects or categories is effaced, the subsequent uncertainty results in a feeling of discomfort. We note the unconscious and our conditioning as they intervene in our experience of the artwork, appearing as an affective irony, arousing in us a feeling of uncanniness.

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[242] André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (The University of Michigan Press, 1972), 26, https://archive.org/details/andrebretonmanifestoesofsurrealism/page/n37/mode/2up?q=exercised+by+reason
[243] Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 26.
[244] Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1971), 241.
[245] Freud, "Uncanny," 220.

Meret Oppenheim's iconic *Object* or *Luncheon in Fur*, 1936 (Fig. 14) is emblematic of the Freudian uncanny. In this archetypal surrealist object, we are confronted with a teacup, saucer and spoon, covered in the gradated brown fur of a Chinese gazelle. The pleasurable, tactile sensation of fur as experienced by touch turns into a dreadful sensation when picturing its bearing on taste, had the cup or spoon been brought to the mouth. We experience an unconscious anxiety as our most basic assumption of the categorical mutual exclusiveness of living and inanimate is made ambiguous by the objects that seem to have grown animal fur. We are strangely drawn to the sculpture but also physically revulsed by it. The fur animates the mundane domestic, utilitarian objects, imbuing the inorganic tableware with animality and sexual eroticism. In line with the Freudian aesthetics of the uncanny, the uneasiness that one feels arises from the repression of base and animalistic desires, a censoring necessary for social acceptability. Similar to Ray's *Cadeau*, Oppenheim's surrealist sculpture teases us through its self-cancelling nature, as its material contradicts its familiar function. The impracticality of the combination of materials is playfully ironic, as one would be ill-advised to offer a guest a warm furry cup of tea.

The ways in which Surrealist artists set about the exploration of submerged impulses and imagery displays visual, formal and stylistic heterogeneity. Some artists, such as Max Ernst and André Masson, for instance, cultivated various types of automatism in an effort to eliminate conscious control, while others like Salvador Dali and René Magritte painted in a scrupulously detailed manner to give a hallucinatory sense of reality to scenes evocative of dream imagery. In Surrealist objects and in some paintings, collages and photography, the startling juxtaposition of unrelated items was used to create a sense not so much of unreality as of a fantastic but compelling reality outside the everyday world. Dali developed the surrealist technique called the paranoiac-critical method, according to which one was required to cultivate genuine delusion, as in clinical paranoia, while remaining residually aware that the control of reason and will had been deliberately suspended. Dali believed that this altered state of delirium stimulated the brain to perceive differently and inspire previously neglected associations between things that a rational mind might not. His imagery takes on a strange, hallucinatory character as the meticulous academic technique is contradicted by an unreal dream-like space. Magritte also strongly expressed the Surrealist idea and method of a dream-like dissociation of image and meaning. As noted earlier, the danger of relying on rationality when viewing a Surrealist work is glaringly apparent in Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* (Fig. 8). There is an ironic 'cancellability' that is produced in the contradiction between painted text and painted image.

Unexpected, contradictory and unrealistic imagery may create "surrealistic" ironies, with its production heavily dependent on constructed contexts. Apart from manipulated uncanny juxtapositions, American art critic Rosalind Krauss, in "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism" (1981), draws our attention to the wealth of unmanipulated imagery in Surrealist photography. These images are imbued with a sense of the uncanny but may not be explicitly ironic as a result. Citing Man Ray's photograph of the hatted figure of a man (see Fig. 15), she elaborates on the strategies of cropping, framing, spacing or extreme close-up, which cause the displacement of certain elements of reality, thus enabling one to

better perceive the involuntary production of signs. Regarding *Untitled (Man's Hat)* (Fig. 15), she writes about the way that the familiar object of a hat is isolated through its framing to evoke its own sexualisation: "Man Ray's photograph is one of several to accompany an essay by Tristan Tzara about the unconscious production of sexual imagery throughout all aspects of culture-this particular one being the design of hats."[246] In the image, the feeling of the uncanny is not aroused by overt juxtaposition but instead in the transformative ability of the familiar object in its unusual framing to provoke analogies to the female sex organ. By its unfamiliar angle and isolation, it is decontextualised, defamiliarised and displaced from reality to conjure instead repressed feelings of sexual desire.

It is important to include Surrealism in our discussion on irony because it does not require irony to be realist, logical, intentional or tied to a certainty. Surrealism is also important because of its lasting influence on contemporary art practices that eschew logical or positivist narratives. Surrealism courts daydreaming and the bizarre imagination, which later emerge as major processes in contemporary artworks.

2.3 Postmodern Practice

The dilemmas of originality, authorship and reproduction evoked by Duchamp's subversive actions were conceptual precursors to the preoccupations of postmodernism. Emerging around the late 1950s, Postmodernism represented a break from Modernism and influenced numerous disciplines such as art, architecture, philosophy, sociology, literary criticism and others. Scholars took up varying and contradictory critical positions on postmodernism; some saw it as a reaction against modernism while others as an extension of it. Jean-François Lyotard's book of 1979, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, situates it anachronistically. Rather than applying a linear periodising, positioning it at the end of modernity, Lyotard recognises its characteristics cyclically, both before and after modernism, thus marking a temporal aporia.[247] Most other scholars of postmodernism prefer locating it as the announcement of the end of modernity. The common ground that all scholars share, however, is with regard to its "incredulity toward metanarratives".[248] The ironising and fragmentation of the univocal into the polyvocal was encouraged; the absolute into the relativist, the universal into multiple localised perspectives.

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[246] Rosalind Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," *October* 19 (1981): 31.
[247] Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1991), 40.
[248] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester University Press; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

American art critic Craig Owens writes that postmodernism is recognised as the crisis of the "authority vested in Western European culture and its institutions".[249] A declaration of the end of grand narratives and their control over the legitimation of knowledge, power relations and the homogenising of human experience is characteristic of postmodernism. The impact of World War II and the disenchantment that followed it saw a denunciation of modernism's Enlightenment ideals of societal and scientific progress, rational thought and a unified vision for humanity.

In late capitalist societies, where manufacturing had reached saturation levels, the emphasis on production shifted instead to mass consumption. In a post industrialist economy, media, marketing and cultural services became key sectors. American literary critic Frederic Jameson perceives the cultural phenomenon of postmodernism in correlation with the emergence of a new type of economic and social order, "postindustrial or consumer society, the society of the media or the spectacle, or multinational capitalism."[250] In the age of mass reproduction, consumer culture and information overload, Jameson points out that postmodernism reinforces the logic of consumer capitalism and also questions if it resists that logic at all.

Much postmodern art practice indeed reflects the excessive engagement with advertising, branded products, information and technology. Taking the example of Warhol's mechanical screen-prints of Campbell soup cans and celebrities, we understand that the point of the work is to emphasise the ultimate commodification of all things, not just of objects but also of people. However, by resembling printed adverts that were mass-produced, the work helped erode the longstanding aesthetic divide between high art and popular culture.[251] The modernist aesthetic was moulded on a sense of unique individual identity, whereas the postmodern pulls away from ideas of originality or autonomy, often playing instead on the idea of mass production. There is a sort of democratisation of artistic mediums while the conceptual gains more importance than the individual mark of the artist.

Defining "postmodern" art forms, Hutcheon asserts that the term could be used to "describe art which is paradoxically both self-reflexive (about its technique and material) and yet grounded in historical and political actuality."[252] Observing links between postmodernism and postcolonialism, Hutcheon declares that despite major differences between the two *posts*, the overlapping concern with marginalisation brings them together. She also opines that they share discursive strategies like "the use of the trope of irony as a doubled or split discourse which has the potential to subvert from within."[253] She deems irony an effective and strategic trope that can respond to the "paradoxical dualities of both postmodern

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[249] Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Bay Press, 1983), 57.
[250] Fredrick Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Bay Press, 1983), 113.
[251] Although the categorical elitism is bridged, it is important to point out that the economic elitism prevails, a Warhol most certainly remains unaffordable by the masses.
[252] Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire," 150.
[253] Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire," 154.

complicitous critique and post-colonial doubled identity and history," as it embodies the very nature of those conditions.[254] Hutcheon identifies the essence of postmodernism as "fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical and inescapably political."[255] If postmodernism rejects the modernist ideal of an ultimate truth, a postmodern society will have to believe itself liberated from a meta-position, an ideal and privileged viewpoint. It would then have to accept its own position as one amongst other competing views; else, it runs the risk of ironically mirroring a meta-narrative by believing in its own superiority.

American postmodern philosopher Richard Rorty (1931-2007) states that while western philosophy or the metaphysician attempts to rise above the plurality of experience in order to reach a universal proposition or the *real*, the ironist studies the plurality of these attempts as well as the urge to find a final vocabulary. Rorty identifies an ironist by their fulfilment of three conditions:

> (I) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses… (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself. Ironists who are inclined to philosophize see the choice between vocabularies as made neither within a neutral and universal metavocabulary nor by an attempt to fight one's way past appearances to the real, but simply by playing the new off against the old.[256]

Rorty advocates that irony enables us to abandon transcendental truths and allows instead for a plurality of competing accounts while acknowledging that our own context is subject to change and is but one of many others. By "recognition of the relativity and contingency of authority figures,"[257] Rorty urges us to strive towards self-creation through a renewed description of canons in order to break their concrete power over us. However, positing an ironic viewpoint that challenges Western values creates another central value. Rorty irons out this quandary by suggesting we draw distinctions between the public and the private. His pragmatist view advocates that we remain ironic at a private level by acknowledging the context-dependency of any proposition while publicly adopting a common democratic and political vocabulary. This is characteristic of the liberal ironist, according to Rorty.

Colebrook outlines two main objections to Rorty's claim that irony can avoid the elevation (from daily life) and the truth-seeking nature of the metaphysician. Firstly, to speak with irony is to posit another meaning; hence it cannot avoid being metaphysical. Secondly, with regard to the redescription of canons, Colebrook points out that, "To use a discourse ironically allows the continued articulation of that discourse and leaves that discourse in place."[258] Hutcheon is another critic who recognises the risks of misinterpreting critical repetitive articulations of irony, but she also acknowledges its political

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[254] Hutcheon, "Circling the Downspout of Empire," 154.
[255] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York & London: Routledge, 1988), 4.
[256] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 73.
[257] Rorty, *Contingency*, 107.
[258] Colebrook, *Irony*, 157.

edge, where one speaks in the language of a restricting canon in order to denounce it or reveal its violence. This contradiction is vividly present in engagements with critical or postmodern irony.

Susan Dorothea White

A critical interrogation of the past through an ironic revisiting is typical of some postmodernist artistic practices. The use of imitation through pastiche or parodic references that either satirise or acknowledge older genres creates temporal distortion, stylistic diversity and a multiplicity of elements. Helene A. Shugart explores the use of postmodern irony as a subversive rhetorical strategy through an examination of the painting *The First Supper* (1988) by Australian artist Susan Dorothea White. Shugart analyses the technical and thematic points of congruence and divergence between *The First Supper* and its rhetorical premise, *The Last Supper* (1498) by Leonardo da Vinci. Further to this, she explores how the piece contests the original context and finally, she examines the subversive potential of postmodern irony.

Based in Sydney, White is a multidisciplinary artist who works with a wide variety of painting, sculpture and printmaking techniques. *The First Supper*, 1988 (Fig. 16), an acrylic painting on wood, measures 4'4" x 8'4" and is a modest size in comparison to its ironic referent. The fresco of *The Last Supper* captures a familiar religious event in Christianity, Christ's prophecy of Judas' betrayal on the eve of the crucifixion. Seen as symbolic of the cornerstone of Western Christianity, its paradigmatic patriarchy is overtly challenged by the presence of women in White's painting, who are posed identically to match the male disciples and the central figure of Christ. White meticulously reproduces the form, proportions, facial and physical expressions of the figures. While scaled-down in size from the awe-inspiring original and revised to acrylic on wood, the smaller, more accessible painting of *The First Supper* retains the use of the Fibonacci series that da Vinci is famed to have employed, thus enabling White to achieve a mathematically and geometrically precise reproduction. The superficial congruencies collapse to reveal conspicuous incongruences. Apart from the obvious modification to the title and the presence of the multiracial women, another immediately noticeable alteration in *The First Supper* is the warm, almost cheerful light, as opposed to the dark-toned, ominous and melancholy setting of *The Last Supper*. The finality of *The Last Supper* is traded for an optimism in new beginnings.

The 1988 Australian Bicentennial motivated White's deviations, which was in effect a celebration of the 200th anniversary of the arrival of English settler colonisers on Australian shores. With extraordinary cultural arrogance, the English claimed possession of the land under the European policy of *terra nullius*[259], thus deeming the land uninhabited to justify genocide and territorial expansion. The irony of the impaired vision of the colonial gaze is indeed intriguing. The rationalisation and legal explanation of

[259] On landing in Eastern Australia in 1770, Captain James Cook declared the land unoccupied despite the presence of native Aboriginal peoples. A case of imperial blindness and the doctrine of *terra nullius* according to European international law, allowed Britain to claim ownership of land that had belonged to the natives for thousands of years prior.

the colossal theft of land helped appease their own sense of injustice. Such a commemoration, therefore, is undeniably problematic to indigenous Aboriginals considering that the disease, disenfranchisement, violence and massacre following colonisation nearly wiped out their own population.

The central and slightly isolated figure of Christ is replaced by an Aboriginal woman, casually dressed in a T-Shirt that is adorned with a print of the Aboriginal flag, a pointed affirmation of identity. The sacred aboriginal land of Uluru is additionally visible through a window behind the group; it is identifiable by its distinct rock formation. The clusters of figures replacing the apostles around the table are women from various parts of the world representing the multi-ethnic society that Australia comprises. They are identifiable by their diverse features and culturally symbolic attire, which are highly detailed, colourful and individualised, unlike the generic flowing robes, and the homogeneity displayed in the group of Christ's male apostles. The only person of Western European origin at the table is a blonde-haired woman in sneakers, who takes the place of da Vinci's Judas. Clutching a money purse like her male counterpart, she is interestingly the only one to have processed foods before her, which are rather distinct from the other natural foods displayed on the table. Shugart suggests that the canned Coca-Cola and burger placed before her are symbolic of commercialism, artifice and capitalism's exploitation of natural resources. She states that this signifies that the woman, not unlike Judas, embodies treachery and betrayal "here in its colonial and consumptive incarnations."[260] The woman represents the manipulation of nature as opposed to the other women who seem connected to nature or are in harmony with it, as plainly indicated by the simple, whole foods before them.

The table is bountifully laden with bread and a colourful array of fruits, vegetables and seafood, in addition to a centrally placed bright blue emu egg. This abundance is in stark contrast to the sparse meal before the male disciples symbolising the Christian attributes of abstinence, self-restraint and asceticism. Feminine energies have long been associated with nature, creation, nourishment and bounty, while the masculinised spirituality of Christianity calls for frugality, self-denial, sacrifice and suffering to be indicative of the faith required to attain the path of salvation. We see this embodied in the dramatic difference between the thin, linear figure of Christ who is fashioned to Eurocentric conventions of beauty and the dark-skinned, rounded Aboriginal woman. Shugart suggests also that this "indicates a clear inversion of the Western hierarchy that places "cultured" European men at the very top and women below, with women of "other", darker-skinned races relegated to the very bottom."[261] The spirituality represented in White's painting is simple, earthly and accessible, unlike the unattainable divinity represented in da Vinci's work. All are worthy to partake in the feast; regular women of varying ages, sizes and ethnicities are present at the table. While bread remains present in White's

[260] Helene A. Shugart, "Postmodern Irony as Subversive Rhetorical Strategy," *Western Journal of Communication* 63, no. 4 (1999): 447.
[261] Shugart, "Postmodern Irony," 448.

version, clear water replaces the glasses of wine, thus decontextualising their ritual association with the body and blood of Christ.

At first glance, it is easy to be unenthusiastic with regard to the complexity of the postmodern ironic subversion in White's painting as it seems like a mere, literal inversion of *The Last Supper*, overturning the frugal nature of Western Christian spirituality, its patriarchal premise and the racial homogeneity that it represents. However, a slightly deeper analysis promises a more fruitful albeit tricky yield. Apart from the focus on religion, *The First Supper* addresses a plurality of issues concerning colonialism, capitalism, exploitation, Aboriginal land rights, non-western spirituality and cultural diversity.

A multiplicity of meanings may be inferred from those articulated in *The First Supper* and some of them even prove to be problematic. For instance, while the women dressed in traditional attire represent the multi-ethnic configuration of Australian society, most contemporary Australians, irrespective of ethnicity, may not dress in their cultural attire and might even resent the stereotyping. Another such example is illustrated by the binary replacement of men with women, whereby other identities on the gender spectrum remain excluded. Additionally, essentialist notions of women as bountiful, fertile and connected to the natural world are evoked. In the same way, although Eurocentrism is rejected, the Aboriginal woman replacing Christ is still centrally placed and isolated from the rest of the figures, thus echoing the Western Christian hierarchy that it seeks to undermine.

By retaining the inherent structure of its ironic premise (albeit altering and challenging its meaning), *The First Supper* runs the risk of reinforcing the language and model of Western Christianity. However, if the allusion to the original was not established, one could not challenge it in the first place. This is one of the principal limitations (and the irony) of subversive irony—that the subversion often takes place in a mode familiar to its adversary, or the dominant discourse, or the very ideology that it seeks to critique or subvert. This hegemonic potential coexists with its more positive qualities. For instance, postmodern irony engenders reflexivity and tends to privilege the viewer. It invites its audience to tease out complexities; it opens up a context and even provides competing contexts, consequently eliminating the likelihood of deferring to universality. An audience to whom the irony is unapparent could view *The First Supper* as a homage to da Vinci's masterpiece. A more percipient audience might be able to see past the apparent congruence that embodies the critical riposte.

Regarding commonalities between traditional and postmodern subversive irony, Shugart marks the principles of detachment and superiority while identifying some nuanced differences. In the case of subversive irony, she says, "superiority is more complex."[262] She indicates that the specific postmodern nature of subversive irony tends to invite a predominantly perceptive postmodern audience. Postmodern irony, she states, "is highly abstract and esoteric, characterized by and cultivating paradox

[262] Shugart, "Postmodern Irony," 452.

and fragmentation."[263] Shugart states, that the discernment of the subversive irony present may then prove to be a confirmation of the audience's predetermined postmodern literacy. This linking of the perception of subversive irony and people's cognition of postmodern tenets seems slightly ill-advised, as a person with no prior knowledge of the postmodern could nevertheless have the capacity to perceive subversive irony if she is accompanied with an understanding of the contexts present.

Depending on varying individual perspectives, the audience could enjoyably manoeuvre through the contradictory and multiple messages that present themselves for scrutiny. This excursion could also prove to be cumbersome or cause confusion to a person unaccustomed to such negotiations of meaning. Some ironies may be more apparent through clear contradictions and hence easier to access, while others, more intricate and complex. The audience is thus divided into exclusive groups based on their levels of discernment and/or cohesion with the artist ironist. An artist risking the use of irony must accept varying levels of engagement from her audiences.

Sherrie Levine

In keeping with the spirit of challenging or reworking canonical works, American photographer, painter, sculptor and conceptual artist Sherrie Levine, born in 1947, also incorporates this strategy in her practice. Levine, along with Cindy Sherman and other prominent artists from the late 1970s and 1980s, are members of the "Pictures" generation[264], a term inspired by art historian and critic Douglas Crimp, who curated a group exhibition in 1977 titled *Pictures*. The show organised in New York brought together the works of five artists who exhibited certain shared contemporary sensibilities of that generation. References to mass media imagery appropriated from magazines, movies, music, advertising and television were characteristic features. Their choice of media ranged between photography, video, film and performance.

Levine's work directly appropriates motifs, images and art by eminent artists such as Duchamp, Man Ray, Walker Evans and Edgar Degas. Her repertoire exemplifies the tenets of postmodernism and is notorious for flouting copyright regulations and breaching intellectual property rights. While Duchamp took mass-produced objects and pronounced them as works of art, Levine further revolutionises the trajectory of the readymade by taking photographs of existing photographs or making facsimiles of original sculptures, paintings or illustrations. Through copying and replication, she addresses questions of authenticity, autonomy, authorship and challenges the aura of the original. Against the setting of a world saturated with images, these historical referents bring into play our associative abilities and cultural memory.

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[263] Shugart, "Postmodern Irony," 452.
[264] *Pictures* from 1977 curated by Douglas Crimp inspired *The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984*, an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2009. It featured thirty artists (in addition to four from the 1977 exhibition) identified from this timeline by curator Douglas Eklund.

Postmodernism prioritises the reader's, receiver's or viewer's role, thereby allowing room for the transformative potential of meaning. Postmodernists such as French literary theorist and semiotician Roland Barthes (1915-1980), contested the notion of assigning an original authorial identity to a text, in his essay of 1967, *The Death of the Author*. Barthes states ironically that, "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author."[265] The metaphorical *death of the author* liberates text from the autocracy of the author's intentions and, consequently, fixed meanings and interpretations. Levine's series *After Walker Evans: 1-22* of 1981 exhibited at Metro Pictures Gallery, New York, certainly performs Barthes' assertions of the demise of the author as the imposing source of meaning.[266]

American photographer and photojournalist Walker Evans (1903–1975) is famous for his documentary style of photography, showcased in his coverage of the impact of The Great Depression in the United States. Beginning as a commission to highlight the timely governmental support of rural communities, Evans eventually abandoned the political agendas of his brief and began recording the tragic plight of the proletariat. A portrait of Allie Mae Burroughs, the wife of a cotton sharecropper in Alabama, is one of Evans's most iconic images of the Depression and was reproduced in several books and newspapers. Resembling the style of a mugshot, Burroughs is set against a weathered wood background as she stares piercingly into the lens. Levine's *After Walker Evans, #4,* 1981 (Fig. 17), a photograph of this canonical image, performs an intrinsically ironic act.

Out of the multiple printed iterations of Evans's work, Levine chose to re-photograph the images from Evans's exhibition catalogue published in 1978. Photography as a medium is inherently referential. It is already a facsimile of its source subject. Levine's meta-referential image echoes not only Evans's subject but also his framing of the subject and the reproduction in his catalogue, thus standing on its own as a novel duplication. Art is valued for its originality, while commodities are characterised by their mass-produced nature. By confounding artistic notions of originality, she raises questions on the themes of capitalism, commercialisation and the commodification of art. Seen through a critical sociological lens, one could also add the commodification of poverty. Through these series of multiplications, removed from the original, she presents different copies of the same item within the one image. Interestingly, she does not simply produce a counterfeit image but affirms the authorial identity of the original work through her titles while simultaneously decontextualising the representation from its iconic status.

Levine states, "I like transgressional boundaries, leaky distinctions, dualisms, fractured identities, monstrosity and perversity. I like contamination."[267] It almost seems as if she proffers a description of

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[265] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 148.
[266] Levine chose twenty-two photographs of Evans's many pictures of life during the Depression to compose her series.
[267] Levine's statement in a 1996 catalogue of her work, requoted in *Sherrie Levine*, ed. Howard Singerman (The MIT Press, 2018), 127.

irony. With Levine's oeuvre, art transgresses into the realm of the commodity; its originality is undermined, and the iconicity of the historical referent is fractured and contaminated through reproduction. Her works also present an excess of stimulating dualisms, original/copy, art/commodity, absence/presence, before/after, and authentic/counterfeit.

In 1991, Levine cast an edition of six bronze sculptures after Duchamp's urinal and labelled them *Fountains after Duchamp*. Her *Fountain (Buddha)*, 1996 (Fig. 18) also substitutes the porcelain sheen of Duchamp's piece of plumbing with gleaming bronze and is a similar replica. Its title recalls the art critics of Duchamp's work that likened the *Fountain* to the religious imagery of a Buddha or a cloaked Madonna. Levine explores the dynamics of remaking a readymade in a material both revered and familiar to the history of sculpture. By recasting the readymade in the medium of bronze, which requires traditional skill and involves manual processes, Levine disrupts the common everyday item's commercially manufactured, utilitarian nature. She subverts the radicality of Duchamp's anti-art gesture by casting a common store-bought item into the realm of high art or 'art object' simply through its materiality. The object now transformed additionally holds material value and not just conceptual value. In an interview, Levine also notes that the traditional material of bronze automatically imbues the sculpture with aesthetic credibility, while its highly polished anthropomorphic form even evokes Brancusi.[268] With this re-working of the object, Levine displaces its paternal origins and establishes herself as its author.

Just as Duchamp's exercise involves the artists' *choice* in the selection of a common object, Levine's process involves choice too. She exerts her power of artistic selection and ironically chooses Duchamp's *Fountain* to be her *common object* and muse. Levine deliberately uses only the work of male artists as a point of departure in her works. She recreates them in order to examine their patriarchal dominance in the annals of art history. She questions the manufactured structures of power that lead to the reiteration of select representations in society. The art world of the 70s and 80s predominantly saw only the work of male artists. Levine, by donning the personas of a rebellious and ironic artist cum curator, acknowledges the autocratic presence of men's work by choosing to recreate them, but the resultant works now become, in effect, part of a woman's repertoire, consequently feminising art history in a sense. She juxtaposes the value added by Duchamp's signature and selection with her own and engages in a play of power.

With regards to her content and subject matter, Levine states, "The content is the discomfort that you feel at the *déjà vu* that you experience. The discomfort that you feel in the face of something that's not quite original is for me the subject matter."[269] By changing the material of a recognisable motif of an eminent artist, the historical referent is conspicuous by the absence of its original formulation but

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[268] Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon, *The Duchamp Effect* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 179.
[269] Paul Taylor, "Sherrie Levine Plays with Paul Taylor," *Flash Art* # 135 (Jul-Sep 1987). Reprinted in the Mar-Apr 2007 issue of *Flash Art* # 253, 117.

present through its reproduction. Displacement occurs through repetition and an altered context, while the novel iteration removes it further from its source. The frequent reference to art historical content suggests that Levine's ideal audience is one that is well-versed in art history. One that is not might completely miss the inflexions of irony in this case.

In comparison to the *After Walker Evans* series, *Fountain (Buddha)* (Fig.18) displays more distinctions between original and replica. Appropriation is not uncommon in the history of art and is found in varying degrees across all periods and genres of artistic production. The apprentice's hand is found in works attributed to their masters; even the education of art routinely involves the copies of old masters, emulating their styles and techniques. Copies are seen in the mimesis of the natural world, homages, satirical works and parodies. Manet's *Olympia* is an example whose composition and influences can be traced back to artists of the past, Titian and Giorgione. As noted earlier, it has also inspired future artists such as Morimura and Cox.

Levine's work is concerned about the subtlety of both differences and similarities between original and reproduction. One might even describe the active space between original and copy by the Duchampian term, infra-mince—the delicate, elusive margin between difference and similarity. By changing the context, the copy is always made distinct from the original; but the copy is the art object. The copy is also novel. Levine toes the line between self-actualisation and self-effacement, between admiration and derision. These contradictions bring to light the structures of signification that are embedded in the history of representation.

Authors of Levine's work have drawn on an assortment of theoretical links to psychoanalytical notions of fetishism, postmodern concepts such as the death of the author, art-historical strategies and sociological concerns. While these theoretical preoccupations are all valid in the discourse around Levine's work, they sometimes tend to overshadow the individual image or series. Craig Owens advises that Levine's characteristic appropriation of imagery should not prompt us to reduce her works to merely another Duchampian critique of the creative act; he urges us also to ponder over her thematic concerns and delve into the variety of her aesthetic strategies.[270]

Barbara Kruger

The work of American artist Barbara Kruger provides powerful illustrations of the use of word-based visual irony. Kruger uses advertising techniques to reveal the ironies of America's consumerist culture while also commenting critically on gender disparities. Appropriating existing photographs, she layers them with popular idioms and calls attention to the role of media and advertising in contemporary society. Through a limited palette of black, red and white along with the power of the image and word,

[270] Craig Owens, "Sherrie Levine at A&M Artworks," in *Sherrie Levine*, ed. Howard Singerman (The MIT Press, 2018), 35.

she critiques consumerist culture, rallies against superficiality and challenges asymmetrical power structures of gender. Kruger uses several methods to induce ironic contrast in her images, literalisation or corruption of the idioms employed, contrasts of scale, reversals and strategic juxtapositions of image and text.

'It's a small world' is an idiom that we often use to refer to encounters with familiar people or things under unexpected circumstances. In Kruger's *Untitled* (It's a small world but not if you have to clean it), 1990 (Fig. 19), she de-contextualises the idiom and employs it literally to refer to a tiny world. The references to scale are made through the word 'small', the image of the magnifying glass that in turn enlarges the woman's eye and, more subtly, through the varying sizes of text. Kruger appropriates an existing monochromatic image and contrasts it with assertive white captions on a red ground. She juxtaposes the familiar idiom 'It's a small world' with the line 'but not if you have to clean it,' in a distinctly smaller font size, deliberately misleading the viewer and ultimately subverting standard associations.

The text that reads 'it's a small world' references the original proposition, which is echoed. The background assumption of the familiar idiom is challenged by the remainder of the text, which corrupts its original connotation. Kruger references domestic work and the sexist perception that it is a sort of prefixed arrangement in a woman's marital life. The essential housewife peers questioningly at the audience as if to check for a speck of dirt. The break or pause between reading the larger text and the smaller is crucial to the play of irony. The piece set's you up, you think you're on familiar territory and then you are confronted by a subtext you did not expect under the circumstances. It involves a carefully cultivated ambiguity that ultimately requires the viewer to dispel the opacity of the overt message and deduce the concealed content. The playful usage of scale works as a visual metaphor allowing us to discern overt from covert communication.

In an interview with Richard Prince in BOMB magazine in 1982, Kruger states that "Pictures and words seem to become the rallying points for certain assumptions."[271] Her ironic juxtapositions question corresponding assumptions inherent in the associative power of appropriated images and familiar adages, thus compelling a reinterpretation of them.

2.4 Other Recent Developments in Contemporary Practice

While the terms Modern and Postmodern refer to particular time periods in history, they each also represent separate art movements that were characterised by certain stylistic criteria and/or overarching philosophies or goals. The term 'contemporary art', however, is a broad umbrella term

[271] Barbara Kruger and Richard Prince, "All Tomorrow's Parties," *BOMB Magazine*, Spring 1982.

incorporating diverse visual practices, media and concerns that speak of the experience of living in present times. The enduring state of the 'here and now' or the persistent present is brought into focus.

The robust alliance of art and irony endures in contemporary practice,[272] captivating both artists and their audience in equal measure. Artists employ the power of irony to illuminate a range of subject matter—social criticisms, economic circumstances, feminist interventions, existential ponderings and political commentaries. Possessing the potential to induce a range of emotions (that might at times even diametrically oppose one another), ironic affects can vary wildly from being liberating and cathartic to intense and aggressive. The artist's use of verbal and non-verbal irony involves complexity and layering in communication, posing challenges for both viewer and artist.

Biljana Scott proposes a method for the viewer to identify and analyse the irony found in the medium of photography. In the article "Picturing Irony: The Subversive Power of Photography" (2004), Scott applies the 'echoic mention' theory of Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson (1981) to word-based and wordless visual irony found in photography. The traditional rhetoric-based definition of irony has supposed that the ironist indicates a figurative (or transliteral) meaning opposite to the literal meaning of an utterance. Sperber and Wilson suggest alternatively that the ironist mentions the literal meaning and expresses a certain attitude towards it. The 'echoic mention' theory articulates a process by which one can identify, infer and evaluate *verbal* ironic meaning and intention. While there is a wide range of utterances that can be loosely termed as ironical, they propose that the distinction between the *use* and *mention* of an expression can help indicate the presence of irony. As Sperber and Wilson clarify, "USE of an expression involves reference to what the expression refers to; MENTION of an expression involves reference to the expression itself."[273]

Mention of a proposition or opinion rather than *use* is involved in an ironical utterance. Scott describes this distinction with the familiar ironical response to a rainy day, 'Lovely weather isn't it', where the speaker draws attention to the attitude towards the weather rather than the weather itself. Where *mention* of the weather rather than *use* is involved.[274] Sperber and Wilson believe that the comprehension of an ironic utterance has to do with the double recognition of "realizing that it is a case of mention rather than use, and also recognizing the speaker's attitude to the proposition mentioned."[275] The receiver, therefore, must reconstruct both the literal meaning and the attitude of the speaker towards it. They suggest that verbal irony should be regarded as a case of echoic mention since irony is generated through repetition and allusion. An excerpt from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* may help illustrate this:

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[272] One could approximately periodise the 1980s onwards as the contemporary art of our times.
[273] Sperber and Wilson, "Irony and the Use-Mention Distinction," 303.
[274] Biljana Scott, "Picturing Irony: The Subversive Power of Photography," *Visual Communication* 3, no. 1 (2004): 36.
[275] Sperber and Wilson, "Irony and the Use-Mention Distinction," 308.

> 'You take an eager interest in that gentleman's concern's, said Darcy in a less tranquil tone, and with a heightened colour.
>
> 'Who that knows what his misfortunes have been, can help feeling an interest in him?'
>
> 'His misfortunes!' repeated Darcy contemptuously, 'yes, his misfortunes have been great indeed.'[276]

Through the immediate repetition of an utterance, emphasis is laid on ironic construction, conveying a specific alteration in attitude towards the utterance that is echoed. Mr Darcy echoically *mentions* the literal meaning in order to express his disapproval of it. While the example illustrates an explicit type of echoic mention, Sperber and Wilson acknowledge that varying types and degrees exist; but regardless of being delayed, immediate, tacit or explicit, they maintain that it "crucially involves the evocation of an attitude—that of the speaker to the proposition mentioned."[277] In their book *Relevance* (1986) Sperber and Wilson abandon the term 'mention' for the more general term 'interpretation'. Part of their argument is that "irony involves an interpretive relation between the speaker's thought and attributed thoughts or utterances…"[278] In the case of an ironic utterance, the discrepancy between the said and the unsaid invites the process of interpretation, which involves the decoding and reconstruction of an utterance to reveal its contextual affiliations or effects.

With regards to the attitude of the speaker, Sperber and Wilson acknowledge that there are no limits to the varied attitudes and emotions that a speaker may express but that, "The attitude expressed by an ironical utterance is invariably of the rejecting or disapproving kind."[279] Hutcheon suggests that this pejorative attitude or feeling that is polemical to the proposition expressed has an evaluative or critical edge. The English scholar Connop Thirwall in "On the Irony of Sophocles" (1833), comments on the emphatic effects and emotion associated with irony: "With respect to opinion it implies a conviction so deep, as to disdain a direct refutation of the opposite party: with respect to feeling, it implies an emotion so strong, as to be able to command itself, and to suppress its natural tone, in order to vent itself with greater force."[280] While there lies an element of pretence in a detached, restrained exterior, there is often an overwhelming sense of earnestness and conviction underlying the deception. Moreover, there are instances when an ironist could either be overtly contemptuous or conversely emotionally detached; the range fluctuates significantly according to the ironist's intention. Societal norms, customs, popular wisdom and stereotypical contexts are often the targets of an ironist who endeavours to devalue, challenge or subvert dominant representations.

Scott reiterates that it is the recognition of incongruity in the echoic mention that alerts us to the presence of verbal irony. She endorses its application in the comprehension of visual irony as well. Incongruous juxtapositions defy our expectations of how we are used to seeing things and contrast

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[276] Quoted in Sperber and Wilson, "Irony and the Use-Mention Distinction," 307.
[277] Sperber and Wilson, "Irony and the Use-Mention Distinction," 316.
[278] Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 231.
[279] Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 239.
[280] Connop Thirwall, "On the Irony of Sophocles," *The Philological Museum 2* (1833): 484.

them with how they are actually being represented. The dominant representation refers to *use,* while the subversive alternative refers to *mention*. Apart from the defining quality of *incongruity*, Scott identifies an *ideological* component and a *dissembling* component, both also contained within the echoic mention theory. The ideological component sets up a conflict between reality and associated belief systems, while the dissembling component refers to the differential awareness between the ironist-cum-audience and the unwitting victim.[281] Scott proceeds to delve into visual irony, looking at both word-based and wordless visual irony in the medium of photography.

It is curious that one should choose such a contra intuitive mode of expression. Still, ironic strategies have increasingly been employed in contemporary art through diverse media and continue to prove effective. A case in point would be the work of the Guerrilla Girls, whose feminist activist politics use rhetoric and irony to interrogate the curatorial ethics of museums and galleries. Additionally, Banksy and his satirical street art often exhibit a combination of irony and dark humour. Their anonymity, coupled with their use of strategic humour, enables them to comment openly on otherwise delicate issues. These artists provide good examples to which we can apply the echoic-mention theory, as their repertoire encompasses both word-based and purely visual irony; in Banksy's case, we may even explore situational irony.

Guerrilla Girls

The anonymous all-female collective Guerrilla Girls was formed in New York City in 1985 with a mission to undermine and expose gender and racial bias in art and society. Using statistical data and the format of posters and stickers, they employ humour in various ways, beginning first by punning on the word 'guerrilla'. The word 'guerrilla' is defined as "someone who fights as part of an unofficial army, usually against an official army or police force." Making a pun on this word, the members wear gorilla masks whenever making an appearance out in public and also use it as a recurring motif in their works. Hutcheon talks of the **playful** function of irony and relates it to humour, wit and compares its positive articulation to punning and even metaphor. Besides being a creative way of hiding their identity, the mask protects the anonymity of their message, induces humour and assists in tackling difficult issues. Moreover, attacking privilege is a dangerous enterprise; both wit and the mask enable them to challenge conventions and avert a possible backlash.

Their most iconic image *Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?*, 1989 (Fig. 20) poses a sarcastic question to the viewer. The title mocks the genre of the female nude while the image parodies one of the most revered paintings of the genre, *La Grande Odalisque* (see Fig. 56) painted in 1814 by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. The sensuous and passive monochromatic Ingres nude sports the signature gorilla mask. Enclosed partially by pink accents, she is pastiched onto a bright yellow flat background. The statistic in the subtext draws attention to the extensive industry of the

[281] Scott, "Picturing Irony," 35.

fetishisation of the female body and its overenthusiastic representation in the Metropolitan Museum of Art while also laying emphasis on the irony of the inversely dismal inclusion of female artists in the very same museum. The target of the critical irony here is explicitly the Met. Museum.
With regards to the echoic mention theory and Scott's own additions to the defining properties of irony, we can locate the three component items within the poster, an ideological component, a dissembling component and incongruity. By echoing the trope of the female nude with the rogue addition of a gorilla mask and an alteration of its context (indicated by the medium and text), the resultant incongruity alerts viewers to the potential for irony. The dissembling component is found in the differential awareness between the ironist (Guerrilla Girls)-cum-audience and the target (Met. Museum), oblivious to the irony within their own hallowed walls. Museums are understood to be inclusive and didactic spaces, but the conflict between their supposed image and the gendered discrimination manifest in their representations of artists; poses an ideological conflict, thus exposing the hypocrisy of the institution.

The attitude of ironic irreverence towards the unquestioned authority of institutions and canons comes to bear a dialectic purpose. It provides grounds for an examination of the implications of the collected data and promotes the articulation of dialogue and rallies for possible change.

Banksy

London-based contemporary graffiti artist, activist and filmmaker Banksy, is well-known for the ironic tone that pervades his repertoire of work. Appearing on the streets of cities all over the world, his work features his signature stencilling technique which sometimes also includes text. Despite his international success, he retains his anonymity, which is advantageous in his line of work, especially as it engages in vandalism. Known for his controversial social and political satire, most of his artwork features incongruous juxtapositions, making it is easy to identify the irony present. His images are typically irreverent to authority; their messages are often anti-war, anti-establishment and anti-capitalist.

Girl with Balloon (Fig. 21) appeared for the first time in 2002 on the Waterloo Bridge in London as a stencil mural. Voted Britain's best-loved artwork, it has had a long history of alterations and adjustments, but our focus will lie on its most recent transformation, rechristened as *Love is in the Bin* (Fig. 22). The Contemporary Art Evening Auction at Sotheby's, London, began as a routine affair. *Girl with Balloon*, the final lot of the sale, was sold for 1.4 million dollars soon after which an alarm sounded as it began to self-destruct through a remote-controlled shredder that had been previously installed by the artist himself into the gilt covered frame.[282] Banksy later revealed that his impish plot had not gone to plan, as he intended for the whole painting to be shredded. Instead, it remains half-shredded into dainty

[282] "Latest Banksy Artwork 'Love is in the Bin' Created Live at Auction," Sotheby's, updated October 11, 2018, https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/latest-banksy-artwork-love-is-in-the-bin-created-live-at-auction?locale=en.

tassels, with the upper half remaining intact within its golden frame. The piece is now condemned to a half-life, its peculiar existential status ironically making it more valuable than ever before.

In an Instagram post on 7th October 2018, Banksy uploads a video revealing his plot and titles it with the quote, “The urge to destroy is also a creative urge.” Banksy attributes it to Picasso, but the quote is originally ascribed to Russian anarchist theorist Mikhail Bakunin. Anticipating that the painting would eventually be put up for auction, the video taken reveals Banksy installing a shredder into an elaborate art nouveau frame. Banksy had chosen a prime and momentous occasion with which to carry out the situational irony that he had planned methodically since 2006 when he had gifted the painting to a friend. He brought vandalism and anarchy to the auction house and rebelled against the art market in one of its most sacred institutions. The moment is littered with ironic elements of subterfuge, concealment, surprise, attack and self-attack. But as cosmic irony would have it, his meticulous planning failed, and he had inadvertently created a masterpiece, not under the cloak of night as he would normally fashion his graffiti but within the walls of a controlled environment and in plain sight. This particular turn of events is interesting because the situation moves from being intentionally ironic to unintentionally so.

Irony has been broadly defined as an incongruity between expectation and outcome. Do we not love that mental jolt to our brains? to be confounded and surprised by an expected outcome? The momentary confusion and air of indeterminacy at the auction eventually translated into an ‘aha!’ moment where the audience identified with the true subversive motive behind the events unfolding before their eyes. Banksy intended to destroy his own creation with the purpose of making a dramatic and ironic comment on artistic value.

An examination of the sequence of temporal events surrounding the artwork is paramount to recognising the assortment of ironies involved. If one were to apply Muecke’s grades of literary irony to Banksy’s plot, one could argue that he first indulged in Private Irony when evidence of the self-destructing mechanism was available only to him. As the shredding device was activated with the touch of a button, he quietly enjoyed the fruits of his trickery at the expense of his unwitting audience. As the moment passed, the audience became aware of the Overt Irony playing out before them. The situational irony stems from the outcome being so radically different from the audience’s expectation, which was that the piece would go intact and be preserved into the safe custody of its buyer. The circumstances proved doubly ironic since Banksy’s planned destruction had failed and resulted instead in a work of elevated artistic value.

One could argue that the ornate, gilded border, framing a canvas recreation of the beloved *Girl with Balloon* street graffiti, presents in itself a covert irony, echoically mentioning the original artwork and its considerably less glamorous surrounding. The famous artwork, recreated, exalted in a golden frame and put up for auction, could be seen as a symbol of the excessive commodification of artistic value. The critical echoic attitude referencing this excess is imperceptible to the oblivious institution-cum-audience and is only revealed during the subversive moment of self-shredding, which took place soon

after the bang of the auctioneer's hammer. The juxtapositioning of artistic creation and destruction, and in this particular case, unintentional re-creation, produces further intriguing contrasts.

Pictures On Walls or (POW) was a website that exclusively sold Banksy's prints as well as those of other street artists. They began in 2003 and shut shop in 2017, citing an interesting reason which is laced with irony. An excerpt of their statement reads:

> … inevitably disaster struck - and many of our artists became successful. Street Art was welcomed into mainstream culture with a benign shrug and the art we produced became another tradeable commodity. Despite attempts at price fixing regrettably some POW prints have become worth tens of thousands of pounds. Either unable or unwilling to become part of the art market we once so self-righteously denounced - we called it quits.[283]

Studies of irony that are essentially fixed in the rhetorical tradition tend to overlook its psychological motivations. Frank Stringfellow Jr., in *The Meaning of Irony: A Psychoanalytic Investigation*, 1994, provides a psychoanalytic approach to verbal irony and teases out meanings hidden behind ironic statements. He observes that the impulse to irony originates in an ambivalent attitude towards mainstream thinking and authority.[284] He explains the psychological underpinnings by reflecting on the power relations between child and adult, metaphorically referring to the ironist and a powerful authority figure. The child oscillates between the wish to identify with and rebel against the adult. The ironist reaches a sort of 'compromise' by attacking the authority and opportunistically atoning for the aggression instead of risking open rebellion. Freud explains that these contrary attitudes exist together with neither achieving full expression, thus resulting in what psychoanalysis describes as "compromise formations."[285] The statement above seems to recognise this 'compromise formation'. Street art fought to be recognised and given its due credit in the art world, but once it became a part of the mainstream art market, the value of its dissent was compromised. Rather than continue with this 'compromise formation,' the website decided instead to close down.

Contemporary art continues to employ irony in a variety of ways and for varying purposes. It facilitates the expression of dissent over past and current social and political issues, gender disparities and capitalist greed. The tone of the message varies vastly between ambiguous, subtle and overt. They are not always political in nature either and could simply reflect philosophical musings or approaches to nature and material. However, the focus of this paper is concerned with the critical facet of irony that enables it to challenge colonialist bias, authoritarian structures, and western academic paradigms. The final chapter will explore and examine various artists and artworks that use irony for this critical purpose.

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[283] "Pictures On Walls," accessed October 25, 2018, http://www.picturesonwalls.com/. (site discontinued).
[284] Frank Stringfellow Jr., *The Meaning of Irony: A Psychoanalytic Investigation* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 134.
[285] Stringfellow Jr., *The Meaning of Irony*, 24, 28.

CHAPTER THREE

Irony and the Subversion of Colonial Legacies

Manifestations of irony in contemporary art as an anti-colonial or anti-Eurocentric subversive strategy are large in number and varied in usage. It is hardly possible to present an all-inclusive survey, but this thesis hopes to offer a modest sample of the variety present. The curation of artists and artworks presented in this thesis spatially situates the locus of enunciation in the exteriority of those historically cast as "the other." This process of selection subverts epistemic hegemony and creates instead, a pluriversal and inter-epistemic dialogue. The artworks chosen, in their distinctive ways, contribute towards performing a decolonial move by unravelling the paradoxes or hypocrisies of colonialism and/or coloniality. The presence of colonial difference, the underlying hypocrisy of dichotomous hierarchies, of embedded norms and ideals provide a conducive environment to the work/play of irony. The selected body of work records diverse forms of ironic resistance to the multiple histories and legacies of imperial domination. This selection of contemporary art could be viewed as a coalition of resistance to the logic of colonial oppression at the colonial difference from multiple fractured loci. This line from Lugones, albeit written in the context of decolonial feminism, could also guide our reading to follow, "In thinking of the starting point as coalitional because the fractured locus is in common, the histories of resistance at the colonial difference are where we need to *dwell*, learning about each other."[286]

Maura Reilly, in her book *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating*, celebrates the strategies of several curators, including Okwui Enwezor and Lucy R. Lippard, that are committed to levelling hierarchies in the artists that they choose, she terms them "curatorial activists."[287] This much-needed intervention is crucial in countering the hegemonic biases of the art world directed towards those from the margins, "artists who are non-white, non-Euro-US, as well as women-, feminist-, and queer-identified."[288] Reilly's final chapter is dedicated to strategies of resistance that curators could adopt to address Western-centrism, sexism, queer-phobia and systemic racism. My interest as a scholar leans toward approaches that *artists* use as strategies of resistance towards Western centrism. Through my research, I hope to explore the critical nature of irony and how it could lend itself to be an effective tool of resistance to challenge cultural hegemony and colonialist bias. The compilation of contemporary artists and artworks hopes to embody the values of curatorial activism by being inclusive and providing a set of critiques and counterchecks to the naturalised master narrative.

This section will present and analyse contemporary artworks that express through irony, a critical disposition toward Eurocentric narratives, racism, systemic violence, gender inequality, epistemic oppression and other enduring effects of colonisation. The ironies found within the artworks chosen are

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[286] Lugones, "Decolonial Feminism," 753.
[287] Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2018), 21-22.
[288] Reilly, *Curatorial Activism*, 22.

essentially bred in postcolonial narratives. The artists and artworks discussed in this chapter have been selected for their strategic use of irony as a means of resistance to the varying kinds of oppression originating from imperialism. They address issues of race, oppressive systems of control and gender hierarchies that stem from colonial ideologies. Informed by postcolonial and decolonial theory and influenced by postmodern subversive practices, we find a synthesis of these stimuli in contemporary art's ironic anti-colonial practices.

A pertinent question to ask at this juncture might be—Is it inauthentic (and perhaps ironic) to use a predominantly western linguistic concept such as 'irony' as a means of confronting coloniality in the visual arts? A quote from Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin might help provide some perspective on this.

> language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists on other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own.[289]

One could argue two kinds of appropriation here, the appropriation of a concept firmly entrenched in the literary field, displaced and applied instead to the visual arts, and also the appropriation of the heavily *Western* theorised concept of irony as an anti-colonial or anti-Eurocentric subversive strategy. Audre Lorde's famous quote comes to mind, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." I believe, however, that in this case, the master's tools might be appropriated and utilised to hold up to scrutiny the weakness, instability, and inherently wobbly nature of the foundation of the master's house. Letting Lorde's statement percolate, I concede that irony may not oblige to wholly dismantle, but with some keen exploration, we may discover if it might serve to destabilise or expose the fissures of the master's cloaked enterprise.

3.1 Global Systems of Circulation

In the colonial era, the autocratic labour histories of production included slavery as a form of labour, a burden forced upon the "inferior" races. Writing on the commodification of labour and the coloniality of labour control, Quijano records that from the very beginning of the colonisation of America, American Indians were subjected to non-waged manual labour, while "slavery, was assigned exclusively to the "black" population brought from Africa."[290] Jaimey Hamilton Faris in *Uncommon Goods* (2013) draws attention to the widespread ignorance surrounding the ontological conditions of a commodity.[291] The

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[289] Quoted in the opening of chapter one in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (1989) by Henry Louis Gates Jr.
[290] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power," 538-39.
[291] Jaimey Hamilton Farris, *Uncommon Goods: Global Dimensions of the Readymade* (Intellect Ltd., 2013), x.

general populace is largely oblivious to the historical origins of a commodity—where it comes from, the conditions of its production and how it reaches the hands of a consumer. The global capitalist system that orders the world's resources and the circulation of the production and distribution of commodities also shapes our encounters with them. Commodities are tied to personal habits; they distinguish our taste and are intimately involved with the formation of identity.

Faris contends, "Through the aesthetic frame, the commodity experience becomes a more conscious, embodied, and particular encounter, allowing us as viewers, some entry points into exploring a material's hidden histories, values, and relationships." Artworks by Yinka Shonibare and Kara Walker address these complex histories of production and consumption via aesthetic renderings of the commodities of textile and sugar, respectively. Both Shonibare and Walker use stereotypes in their work, playing with them creatively to produce ambivalent feelings as they simultaneously embrace and confront them.

Yinka Shonibare, *Scramble for Africa*, 2003 and *Mr and Mrs Andrews without Their Heads*, 1998.

The prolific British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare's provocative works are often politically charged and revolve around themes of race, class, the complexities of identity, culture and other nuances of the postcolonial condition. His signature use of Dutch wax textiles to represent "African-ness" is symbolic of his condition as a "postcolonial hybrid," a term he has often used to describe his bicultural heritage.[292] Shonibare recalls seeing his father, a successful lawyer, dress in European business suits and speak English during the day. He would, however, change into the relaxed African apparel of a wide-sleeved gown and spoke Yoruba on coming home.[293] Likewise, Shonibare embraces both cultures and considers himself a hybrid. He was born in London to Nigerian parents, moved back to Nigeria at the age of three and returned to the UK to study at art school. During this initial period, he was struck by a rare disease that resulted in one side of his body being paralysed; despite this, he returned to his studies in a few years. Owing to his disability, Shonibare employs the help of assistants to produce his works. His art that abounds in parody, satire and irony reveals a combination of interests in history, literature, art, science and current affairs, with his personal life featuring in his work as well.

Scramble for Africa, 2003 (Fig. 23) consists of fourteen beheaded life-sized fibreglass mannequins seated in chairs around a table wearing brightly coloured Dutch wax-printed cotton textiles. The bodies are bent in discussion, gesturing dramatically over a large map of Africa on the wooden table. The Berlin Conference of 1884-5, organised by Otto Von Bismarck, inviting thirteen representatives of European countries and one from the US, disregarded prevailing systems of African sovereignty. Shonibare

[292] Rachel Kent, "Postcolonial Hybrid," *Art World*, (October-November 2008): 100.
[293] Robert Hobbs, "Yinka Shonibare MBE: The Politics of Representation," in *Yinka Shonibare MBE*, ed. Rachel Kent (Munich; London; New York: Prestel, 2014), 25.

reimagines in a theatrical manner the Scramble for Africa or the Partition of Africa by the leading European colonial powers and allows us a glimpse into a scene that took place behind closed doors.

Making a macabre reference to the beheading of the French aristocracy during the French Revolution, the headless bodies also inspire a clever, ironic pun on the 'headless' heads of state, mindlessly staking their claims on territories without regard for the people inhabiting them. Shonibare's installation evokes multiple temporalities marked not only by the historic setting of the Berlin Conference but also by the allegorical beheaded mannequins and their present-day fashionable apparel. The lack of a head defies an explicit identity; however, the rich, multicoloured clothing of the headless colonisers is ironically suggestive of African identity. Shonibare incongruously juxtaposes the two polar identities of coloniser and colonised—the first identified through the historical setting and the other through the African textiles. This results in a double vision. Comparable to the famous illusion of the "duck-rabbit" image, we move back and forth across two dominant interpretations.[294] The parodic irony of the installation condenses two distinct readings, thus enabling us to view a previous reality from a **new perspective** or setting. It could be construed as a fictitious historical inversion where power is placed in the hands of the inhabitants of the land as opposed to being wrenched from it. The sequence of the readings is left open to the varying predilections of the viewer depending on their comprehension of the many components of the piece.

The anachronistic scene is further ironised by our misplaced confidence in the authenticity of the 'African' textile. The Dutch wax fabric, often associated with "African-ness," is essentially a colonial by-product fabricated in the factories of the Dutch and English. As a result of the Dutch East India Company's engagements in the trade and colonial conquest of Indonesia from the early 17th century, the Dutch merchants had familiarised themselves with the technique of Indonesian batik. Textile factories in the Netherlands soon developed machine printing processes to imitate the batik technique. These imitation prints were unsuccessful in the Indonesian batik market but owing to the Dutch trade in Africa, the multicoloured fabrics were soon in high demand and were quickly assimilated into African apparel. Shonibare sources these fabrics at the Brixton market in London and uses the ambiguity of the multi-cultural origins of these 'African' textiles to ironise the scene of the dissection of Africa by the colonial powers. The comprehension of this coded message contained in the **duplicitous** material requires that the spectator possesses prior knowledge of its historicity. Its **evasiveness** in committing to a singular signification bestows it with the ironic function of a fence-sitting PROVISIONALITY as we see in fig. 23.

Trained as a painter in London, Shonibare first began using Dutch wax fabric in the mid-1990s to replace canvas. In an interview with Anthony Downey, Shonibare reflects on his influences in college in the mid-1980s.[295] Accomplished in still life and figure drawing, Shonibare's work eventually turned toward

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[294] See Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, page 127, on the "duck-rabbit" figure and the perception of irony.
[295] Anthony Downey and Yinka Shonibare, "Yinka Shonibare in Conversation," *Wasafiri*, no. 41 (2004): 31.

abstraction, which led him to question the authority of the Abstract Expressionists and his own complex relationship to them. Around this time, several feminist artists began to produce works that challenged the white-male artist's privileging and the notion of ‘genius’ reserved exclusively for this category of artists. Soaking up these influences, Shonibare responded with *Double Dutch* (1994) by fragmenting the grand large-scale format of Abstract Expressionism's predominantly white-male artistic movement into fifty small Dutch wax printed stretched cotton canvases mounted on a bright pink wall. Shonibare also observes that the term ‘decorative’ was perceived as derogatory when ascribed to an Abstract Expressionists' work. However, he clarifies that his generation of artists celebrated the use of popular culture and decorative expression as they challenged notions of ‘high art.’

Art history has been a robust source of subject matter for Shonibare. We see the characteristic use of the ‘African’ textile in his earlier work from 1998, titled *Mr and Mrs Andrews Without Their Heads* (Fig. 24). He achieves a three-dimensional restaging of the famous painting *Mr and Mrs Andrews*, c.1750 (Fig. 25) by the English painter Thomas Gainsborough. The original double portrait of the married couple and their hunting dog was combined with an expansive view of the landscape. Illustrative of the landed gentry of eighteenth-century England, the painting features a couple beneath an oak tree against a backdrop of fertile land and grazing pastures. Belonging to a social class that owned land, the farmlands surrounding them indicate their proprietorship and affluence.

In Shonibare’s **satiric** rendition, the couple is ironically displaced, both from their identities preserved in the traditional oil painting medium and from the backdrop of their land in the iconic image, thus stripping them of their status and identities as landowners. The absence of the heads of the brown mannequins serves to erase identity further. Their ‘headless’ state is also indicated in the phrasing of the title, “Without Their Heads,” making a witty reference to the fate of the aristocracy during the French revolution and the ensuing redistribution of land and power. The ASSAILING nature of this satiric reference also takes on a **corrective** function with regard to its prescription of change in the asymmetrical distribution of wealth and power. The elaborate and multi-layered Dutch wax textile, in which the couple are clothed, functions as a performative sign of African authenticity but is also simultaneously **subversive** to notions of fixed identity. It ‘Africanises’ the couple on the one hand and renders **ambiguous** their national and ethnic identities. We note the symbolic weight of the fabric as it performs plural identities, negotiating between social classes and nationalities.

Manthia Diawara notes that Shonibare’s use of the wax print draws our attention to the capitalist workings of production and consumption in the global era. He writes:

> The politics in Shonibare’s work lie here in his interpretation of consumption and identity formation in the post-colonial era. The wax material is made in Holland and Manchester for African consumption. In this sense, Shonibare’s art provides us with an unlimited resource for criticizing globalization and the market

> logic of consumption … Thus, even though the wax print is not produced in Africa, it necessarily becomes African through consumption.[296]

Diawara observes that our identities are in fact, constructed through our patterns of consumption. The batik print textile, bought in London, may invent its exotic 'African' implications, but the capitalist-imperialist origins of its production dismiss its own authenticity; it is at once both fake and authentic. By deploying the stereotype of the wax print and through the ambivalence of its signification, Shonibare explores new modes of addressing multiple identities in the global world, including Afro-diasporic identity. In Shonibare's work, the stereotype, which is usually perceived as something which is fixed and static, is somehow animated through its irony to move, circulate and mutate as it confronts history and art history while addressing issues of race, class and identity through its multiplicity of voice.

Shonibare's work seamlessly combines the aesthetic domain with the politically charged; he remarks:

> There is always a sting in my art, something uncomfortable: be it a headless figure or a contradiction between the "signs" that I am using in a particular work. I use beauty as a way to engage people and I like the contradiction of something that is attractive and repulsive at the same time. The political content may be abhorrent on one hand, but the way it is expressed is delightful. When people see something they are attracted to its brightness, and then they realise what they are being dragged into.[297]

Captivating his spectator through the surface qualities of the bright, alluring fabrics, he reels them in for the deception that awaits, which is embedded in the artifice of its complex signification that they must then contend with. By means of the ironic medium of Dutch wax textiles, Shonibare expresses the complexity of postcolonial identity. While the colourful presence of the 'African identity' of the textile challenges the colonial establishment on the one hand, on the other, it also paradoxically articulates its own identity as formed through the actions of imperial power and its capitalist objectives. The historical **ambiguity** inscribed in its **complex** double-edged articulation (Fig. 5) marks the volatility of signification and the risk of attributing singular meaning to this product manufactured by means of the colonial project, thus activating the COMPLICATING function of irony. The layered signifying power of the ironic medium comprises of counterbalanced oppositions escorted by "a perpetual deferment of significance," which activates a series of interpretations.[298]

A 'double-consciousness' seems inscribed in the ontology of the fabric. While Du Bois conceives of "double-consciousness" as an affliction or disorder that denies "true self-consciousness" to the American Negro,[299] Henry Louis Gates, Jr. notes alternatively that this could be seen as "a solution" to release cultural identity from its monolithic confines.[300] If anything, he argues, the conservative accounting of "two-ness" in Du Bois's articulation ought to be revised to reflect the current age of cultural

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[296] Manthia Diawara, "Independence Cha Cha: The Art of Yinka Shonibare," in *Yinka Shonibare: Double Dutch*, eds. Jaap Guldemond, Gabriele Mackert and Barbera van Kooij (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen; Kunsthalle Wien; NAi Publishers, 2004), 20.
[297] Kent, "Postcolonial Hybrid," 107.
[298] Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, 31.
[299] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 3.
[300] From the series introduction by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. to Du Bois's, *The Souls of Black Folk*, xv.

multiplicity.[301] The ambiguous and multi-faceted dimensions of the origins of the printed textile challenges notions of a monolithic culture and identity, thus bringing forth the "mongrelization"[302] that is in fact inherent in the edifice of an imagined homogeneous culture.

Shonibare asserts, "The work needs to be aware of its own artifice: it cannot just become a propaganda poster."[303] Art historian James Elkins identifies factors that could result in unsuccessful political art: "The more blatant the message, the less successful the art."[304] Recalling the "dead seriousness" and straightforward earnestness of the Old Masters, Elkins notes a marked shift in the twentieth century towards the creation of non-literal and ironic artworks, save a few fragmented cases in earlier paintings. Elkins clarifies that irony should not always be regarded as a sure-fire solution to creating good political art. Irony either with serious intent or the flippant kind cannot afford to take refuge in obscurity and be evasive about political truths. However, he also cautions that straightforward messages that lack irony or complexity and ambiguity would create overt political slogans and not art.

Shonibare continues to stress that his work "needs to challenge itself and the fallacy of its own materials;" he says, "for me an interesting work of art is aware of its own falseness."[305] Shonibare appears to emphasise the need for a self-conscious irony, one that does not advocate a final vocabulary. It would seem that the fragmented psyche of Du Bois's metaphor of "double-consciousness," which permeates the postcolonial condition, necessitates a self-conscious irony to move toward (curdled) psychic integration that preserves tensions. As Rorty would stress, the ironist is "always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves."[306]

Irony echoes in Shonibare's personal life as well; he has been awarded two honours of the Order of the British Empire while his work continues to challenge the colonial establishment. Shonibare has received the distinguished title of MBE (Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire), an award conferred by the British Empire to reward contributions to the arts and sciences. He places the title MBE after his name, which he claims charges the dynamic ambivalent relationship with the imperial "mother country," a need to challenge the status quo is coupled with an aspiration to identify with. The semiotically charged name "Yinka Shonibare MBE" is evocative of a Freudian 'compromise formation' and also of Bhabha's reiteration that understands colonial mimicry as 'ironic compromise.' Perhaps, it is this public demonstration of a self-conscious irony that enables Shonibare to acknowledge that oppositional binaries such as coloniser/colonised or bondsman/slave contain each other persistently and helplessly. As Stringfellow Jr. observes, "irony allows the ironist to express two or more conflicting

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[301] Anzaldúa's term "nepantla" addresses this, as it refers to the ambivalent psychic state of 'in-betweeness' from straddling multiple cultures, which in turn cultivates resilience in its tolerance for ambiguity and contradiction.
[302] A term first used by British Indian novelist Salman Rushdie with reference to the notion of cultural hybridity.
[303] Kent, "Postcolonial Hybrid," 107.
[304] James Elkins, "Failure in Twentieth-Century Painting" (unpublished manuscript, September 2001), PDF file, 9.
[305] Kent, "Postcolonial Hybrid," 107.
[306] Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, 74.

ideas at once and to mean both or all of them."[307] Shonibare's work offers the possibility of multiple dialogues choosing to play multiple interpretations off of each other, often invalidating a privileged, singular viewpoint. The disparity between appearances and their connotation is a result of the delightful paradoxical irony that Shonibare's work indulges in. The materials challenge their own signification, producing a **playful** yet highly political piece that is informative and revelatory but avoids being didactic.

Kara Walker, *A Subtlety*, 2014.

Shonibare's use of irony for anti-colonial expression is performed predominantly via the medium of Dutch wax fabric supported amply by loaded historic and art-historic references. The dark undertones of his work are often 'dressed' beneath multiple colourful layers of fabric. In contrast, *A Subtlety* by American contemporary artist Kara Elizabeth Walker presents the offensive black mammy stereotype, her larger-than-life bare body 'dressed' by just a coat of sugar. Walker is explicit in her anti-racist imagery as she employs negative racial stereotypes from the Antebellum South. Now recognised for her polemical handling of the themes of race, gender, sexuality, identity and slavery, Walker admits that this was not always the case. During her early years, she was uncomfortable addressing these issues for fear of her work being deemed as 'typical'. Known for her black paper silhouettes that confront violent histories of racism in the Antebellum South, Walker also works with animation, watercolour, projections and large-scale installations. Her works are rooted in ambiguity and often engage a narrative style. Some of her characters exhibit visual markers that offer clues of racial stereotypes, while others defy categorisation, leaving room for ambivalence and multiple interpretations. Walker's provocative pieces of historical fiction do not shy away from handling difficult content, their narratives continually challenging viewers with uncomfortable histories.

Walker's monumental, site-specific piece descriptively and explicitly titled, *At the behest of Creative Time Kara E. Walker has confected: A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant* (Fig. 26), was commissioned by the arts organization Creative Time.

Confronting the unpleasant history of sugar, its processing, trade, consumption and its entanglement with enslaved peoples, Walker presents us with a colossal, white, sugar-coated figure, thirty-five and a half feet high with the face of the stereotypical black mammy archetype. Towering between two rows of iron pillars at the far end of the manufacturing plant, the figure reclines in a sphinx-like pose and is completely nude, save for the typical Aunt Jemima handkerchief knotted over her forehead. Around the massive figure shaped from polystyrene foam, there are fifteen minor cherubic figures carrying fruits and baskets (see Fig. 28), measuring about five feet. Some are modelled in dark resin, while others are

[307] Stringfellow Jr., *The Meaning of Irony*, 28.

made from hard candy that melts slowly in the ambient heat, leaving puddles of dark molten liquid at their feet.[308] Walker collected some pieces of the disintegrating figures and placed them into the baskets of the unbroken standing boys—a morbid reminder of the dangerous labour once involved in sugar production. The figures are reminiscent of the stylised figurines seen in the genre of European decorative arts of the blackamoor, usually, black males, exoticised and in subservient poses, often holding bowls, trays or baskets. With its sugar-encrusted interiors replete with dripping molasses on the walls, the abandoned factory also provided an overpowering olfactory experience for visitors with its sickly-sweet odour.

The title *A Subtlety* for the mammoth installation would certainly seem ironic if one were to assume its connotation synonymous with the delicate or muted. However, Walker's research prior to making the piece led her to stray upon the medieval history of a 'subtlety', which refers to an elaborately modelled confection served at a feast.[309] This tied together her aesthetic concerns with the site's historical significance and also enabled the pun in the artwork's title. On account of the back-breaking labour involved in its production, sugar was a luxury product during the medieval period. Cane, an unwieldy crop, required intensive labour from cultivation to harvest and its final refinement into crystals and molasses. By means of the transatlantic slave trade beginning around the sixteenth century, enslaved Africans were exploited to produce sugar, amongst other crucial trade commodities such as cotton and tobacco. In this triangular system, slave ships travelled between Britain, the West coast of Africa and sugar plantations in the Americas. Labelled as 'white gold,' sugar brought economic prosperity to America, Britain and other European nations. With low labour costs and increased production, the transformation of a luxury item into a pantry staple was thus achieved on the backs of the enslaved population—men, women and children who worked long hours in harsh conditions under cruel overseers. The processing of the harvested sugarcane stalks into sugar required labouring in hazardous environments, working with open furnaces, grinding rollers and boiling liquid in vats, which often resulted in a fatality or the maiming of limbs.

French Jesuit priests first planted sugar cane in Louisiana in the mid-1700s. With the onset of local sugar processing, multi-storey sugar warehouses and refineries burgeoned across New York City, becoming vital to its commerce. Built in the nineteenth century, the Domino Sugar Refinery in Brooklyn was once the largest and most productive of its time. Walker's installation and its iconic site embody more than just the bitter history of sugar production and slave labour. In conjunction with the human cost of modernity and progress, Walker places the contemporary issue of the enduring legacies of slavery and its effect on bodies, memory, women, race, sexuality, wealth and power structures.

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[308] Rebecca Peabody, *Consuming Stories: Kara Walker and the Imagining of American Race* (California: University of California Press, 2016), 155.
[309] Peabody, *Consuming Stories*, 159.

With the ironic use of the black mammy stereotype to pay tribute to enslaved workers, Walker employs **self-deprecating** irony as a **defensive** strategy (see Fig. 5), thus enabling irony's SELF-PROTECTIVE function. Hutcheon reminds us that self-deprecation could also be interpreted as an attempt to render oneself invulnerable.[310] The stereotype is REINFORCED **emphatically**, acknowledging the dominant culture's view in which it was created for the very purpose of dismantling it. Its mammoth size and associations to the sphinx ironically reconstruct the stereotype into a figure of veneration.

Walker filmed her audience on the last day of the exhibition to document their reactions and interactions with the sculpture. Some seemed puzzled, a few respectful, while others responded to the sculpture's provocation and indulged in several lewd photos of themselves explicitly gesturing to the sculpture's hypersexualised organs. The sponsoring organisation, Creative Time, endorsed a social media hashtag #KaraWalkerDomino that encouraged digital engagement. In contrast to the brevity of the installation's physical lifespan, its digital life through the circulation of numerous photographs remains preserved for posterity. The images associated with the tag are catalogued in the *Digital Sugar Baby* archive and were the source of much controversy. As Stephanie Iasiello notes in her article "Photographing a Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby" (2017), these offensive *Instagram* photos from the digital archive could be seen as accounts of behaviour symptomatic of prevailing social issues but more important is their significance as "artifacts that not only document the pervasiveness of systemic inequality, but also provide information about the way we continue to reproduce it, unwittingly or otherwise."[311] The images preserve the art along with the embodied experience of its audiences. Walker claims that she was unsurprised by this irreverent behaviour and that this was part of her strategy to provoke and implicate the audience, exposing human behaviour and its dark and devious proclivities.

Racialised notions of sexuality have deep roots in the colonial era. Sexual control was foundational to the colonial project and used as an important tool to demarcate racial boundaries and highlight asymmetrical power relations between colonisers and their colonised subjects. Colonial validations through pseudoscience and social Darwinism furthered the imperial narrative of black inferiority and abetted the dehumanisation of African men and women, consequently justifying their enslavement. Additionally, the legal policies drafted protected the white man and encouraged the sexual abuse and exploitation of black women.[312] The perpetration of harmful negative ethnographic stereotypes of black women as inherently sexually promiscuous, primitive beings that lacked agency created a ripe setting for them to be viewed as a spectacle.

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[310] Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 50.
[311] Stephanie Iasiello, "Photographing a Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby: Kara Walker's Take on the Neo-slave Narrative," *Callaloo* 40, no. 4 (2017): 20.
[312] Ann L. Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures," *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 641.

The hyper-sexualisation, commodification and racial fetishisation of the black female body, exemplified in history by the appalling treatment of Saartjie[313] Baartman, is a telling story of the complex intersectionality of race, class and gender in a colonial setting. Sara Baartman, a woman from South Africa, belonging to the Khoikhoi tribe, is believed to have been born around 1789. Widowed by Dutch colonists at a very young age, she went on to become a domestic servant to a free black trader. Alleged to have entered into a contract with her employer and an English doctor, Baartman is said to have agreed to be exhibited on the stages of England and Ireland as a 'curiosity' on account of her steatopygia[314] that resulted in her large buttocks. The validity of this contract and her 'consent' is highly suspect, but the arrangement resulted in her being poked, prodded, caged and examined while being exhibited in buildings, streets and even at homes for a private audience.

Nicknamed the "Hottentot Venus," her body was examined by naturalists, anatomists, zoologists and physiologists who convinced themselves that they were observing the missing link between humans and animals. Received in Europe with a combination of desire, disgust and fascination, the scandal of Baartman's 'human exhibition' continued for five years until she died at the age of twenty-five in Paris. The objectification of her body continued even after her death when her body was dissected with brain and genitals preserved in jars as specimens of 'science'. These, along with her skeleton and a plaster cast of her body, were displayed at the Musée de l'Homme (Museum of Man) in Paris till as late as 1974.[315] Modern racial fetishisation, often veiled as a complimentary remark, is a troubling legacy of colonialism and its perpetration of the stereotype of the hyper-sexualised black woman.[316] While slavery, inequality and sexuality form the artwork's point of departure, Walker claims that the perverse ways in which people recall and treat collective memories of shared histories, of slavery, of fantasies and eroticised racial stereotypes are the point of her work. A collaborative photographic work by Renee Cox and Lyle Ashton Harris also addresses the fetishisation of the black female body.

Titled *Hottentot Venus 2000* (Fig. 32) but created antecedently in 1994, Cox stands in profile with her hands on her hips and head turned to the viewer. She is in the nude except for the metallic appendages of protruding buttocks and breasts that are tied to her body by delicate white string. Interpictorially evoking the figure of Sarah Baartman, whose identity was reduced to her sexual parts, Cox and Harris use ironic hyperbole to emphasise the source of the European fetishistic gaze that came to define black female sexuality during the nineteenth century.[317] Cox wears visible make-up with her dreadlocks at shoulder length, her red lipstick matching the colour block of the background. Directly meeting the

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[313] Also spelled as 'Sara' or 'Sarah'.
[314] Refers to an accumulation of excess fatty tissue around the thighs and buttocks—not unusual for women of the Khokhoi tribe.
[315] "Sara 'Saartjie' Baartman," *South African History Online*, 2013. https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/sara-saartjie-baartman.
[316] Caren M. Holmes, "The Colonial Roots of the Racial Fetishization of Black Women," *Black & Gold* 2 (2016): 7-8.
[317] Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca; London: Cornel University Press, 1985), 232-5.

viewer with an unflinching gaze, the insertion of her body into the trope of Western representations of black female sexuality is redefined by her agency. Harris asserts that he is "interested in returning to the idea of the body, and asking the body to speak with a vengeance."[318] Harris and Cox go back to the archive, revisit the body as a site of trauma, and by futuristic redefinition, reclaim the image of the Hottentot Venus.

In Walker's installation, too, the steatopygic excesses of the early illustrations of the Hottentot Venus (see Fig. 29-31) are repeated. *A Subtlety's* large breasts, buttocks and visible vulva provide access to pleasure (see Fig.27), but also undressed for view, is Otherness, as seen by the white imagination. A subtlety, served at a medieval banquet, was to be aesthetically admired and then consumed. Walker's installation suggests the metaphorical feasting of the black body and the toils of black labour, "a consumer cannibalism," enabling the "white consumption of the dark Other."[319]

A Subtlety thrives on contradictions, **ambiguities** (Fig. 5) and ironies. The mammoth size of the installation is offset by the ephemerality and impermanence of its materials, quite fitting for a piece housed within a site slated for demolition. The sugar factory as the venue to pay homage to enslaved workers is strategically ironic, considering the murky history of America's sugar industry and its dependence on slave labour. The black mammy figure, paradoxically dusted in a monochromatic sugar-white, appears massive and powerful on the one hand, staring straight ahead as if guarding an ancient site, while on the other, her nudity and sphinx-like reclining pose make her vulnerable and provocatively sexual. Her pronounced breasts, buttocks, and genitalia invite a sexualised gaze, but the fingers of her left hand are clenched in the 'fig gesture,' which is understood in most cultures to be **offensive** and as the equivalent of giving someone the finger.[320] Irony's OPPOSITIONAL function (Fig. 5) is chiefly activated in the deliberate use of familiar but **offensive** stereotypes such as the mammy and the blackamoor, where Walker ironically and **subversively** partakes in racist language in order to critique it.

American art critic Thomas McEvilley makes a note of Walker's politics of ambiguity and her significant placement within the postmodern period, "In general, white or black, younger Americans are more 'postmodernized' than their elders, which means they are more accepting of irony, cynicism, sarcasm—and above all ambiguity—as a way of life, or at least a reasonable way of expressing the meaning of life."[321] While the installation alludes to stereotypes, they are further reassembled with mythical references and incongruities, thereby refusing a direct extrapolation of meaning. The inconsistencies could be misinterpreted as deliberately **misleading** (Fig. 5) but add **complexity** to the reading. The

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[318] Alan Read, *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, (London: Seattle: Institute of Contemporary Arts: Institute of International Visual Arts; Bay Press, 1996), 150.
[319] bell hooks and Ebooks Corporation, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, new ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 30, 31.
[320] While considered obscene in some countries, it is perceived by others as a gesture of good luck.
[321] Thomas McEvilley, "Primitivism in the Works of an Emancipated Negress," in *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love*, ed. Philippe Vergne (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2007), 59-60.

strategy invites the audience into the work with reassuring and identifiable characters but diffuses easy recognition, drawing viewers deeper into the complexity of the narrative and urging personal reflexivity. *A Subtlety* is a multi-layered work using an intersectional approach by addressing themes of power, race, gender and perpetuated stereotypes. Despite being actively political, Walker's work refrains from delivering a persuasive truth and alternatively takes a dialectical approach.

3.2 Challenging the Archive

Within the first few months of its invention in Europe in 1839, the medium of photography soon made its appearance in India. Coinciding with the East India Company rule at the time (soon to transfer its powers to the British Crown), the instrument of photography presented itself to be a tool well-suited to the rigours of the imperial cataloguing culture, of collecting and archiving novel 'data' that was encountered through colonial expansion. People, ethnicities, communities and cultures were chronicled and catalogued, as were flora, fauna and architecture. Anything that was different from the European norm, 'exotic' or 'savage', was to be examined and studied. This identifying of difference and gathering of information supported colonial surveillance and administration. The photographic practice of ethnographic archiving became integral to the colonial enterprise.

The genre of ethnographic photography was often clinical, as its primary objective was to classify and would therefore feature a grid or other measuring devices along with the native in a rigid, impassive pose. Another facet of the same genre, however, featured models artfully staged with studio paraphernalia, frequently orientalising or romanticising its figures. It sought to capture a dying past (the people and/or culture) of the country that was being ushered into the modern colonial present—with haste after European contact. Nathaniel Gaskell and Diva Gujral, in *Photography in India: A Visual History from the 1850s to the Present* (2018), make an interesting observation regarding the racial identity of the photographers in the complex society that was Victorian India. They record that there existed a few urban Indian elites that were also complicit in depicting the "native" body.[322] This is a tragically ironic note—the repetition of strongly internalised colonial ideology engendering the complicity of the oppressed in their own oppression.

The People of India (1868-75) was an album of photographs created under the patronage of Lord Canning, who became the first viceroy of British India. The album comprised 486 photographic prints that were bound into a collection of eight volumes. The collection was formatted to include a portrait or a group of persons photographed in a studio, haphazardly classified to represent a particular tribe or caste or sect. The logic of the genre of ethnographic photography was that one individual metonymically

[322] Nathaniel Gaskell and Diva Gujral, *Photography in India: A Visual History from the 1850s to the Present* (Munich; London; New York: Prestel, 2018), 21.

served as a specimen for a whole racial group or community. The photograph was then placed alongside an essentialised textual description of their characteristics and social propensities, thus fixing the subject for categorical ease. Assuming the native's pristine fixity and unchanging 'otherness,' this system of representation was built on power, discrimination and organised exploitation.

These kinds of photographic albums were a form of knowledge-gathering and offered European anthropologists and administrators an index of racially inferior 'types' of people. They additionally served as effective placebos to soothe British colonial anxiety, as they strove to identify the 'types' that would be submissive to colonial rule from the ones that were potential troublemakers, the aggressive 'types' or the 'barbarous races.' It was assumed that social organisation within cultures, customs, habits, races and their degrees of 'civilisation', could be interpreted through outward visual markers and the supposedly unbiased eye of the camera.

Pushpamala N. *The Ethnographic Series Native Women of South India: Manners & Customs*, 2000-2004.

Based in Bangalore in South India, Pushpamala N. (1956-) began her artistic practice as a formally trained sculptor. Through her explorations with photography in the 1990s, she eventually found an interest in the genre of photo-performance, casting herself as a lead character, playing different personas. Her interest in narration led her to move into photo and video work. She credits her inspiration for this shift to a series of humorous self-portraits by Bhupen Khakhar (1934-2003), where he masquerades as James Bond. Inspired by her mother, who staged amateur theatre productions, her love of costume was cultivated at a young age. Playing the lead model in most of her works, not unlike Cindy Sherman, she transforms into a variety of characters to create thought-provoking pieces that are aimed at critiquing society and subverting stereotypes. Pushpamala's themes are drawn from numerous historical—colonial, postcolonial, and art history sources. She uses popular imagery taken from the visual culture of India, from religious icons to the intriguing plots of Bombay cinema. She bends space and time with ease by creating fantasies, blending them with real-time and masquerading different eras.

Pushpamala in collaboration with British photographer Clare Arni created a set of 45 black and white photographs titled *The Ethnographic Series Native Women of South India: Manners & Customs* (2000-2004). The sepia-toned images feature Pushpamala as the subject, clothed in an assortment of costumes and props. She poses, bestowing great care and detail to the various attributes that construct each stereotyped representation of the native South Indian female identity. Re-enacting images that were colonially crafted to represent India and its peoples, she explores issues of race, caste and the excessively imbalanced relationship of power between the coloniser and the colonised. This series that took over four years to complete did not start as a pseudo-ethnographic venture; however, Pushpamala's increasing interest in the processes of classifying and archiving led some of her work to take on the flavour of an anthropological study. She refers to her works as a 'pseudo-archive'.

Her title reflects the imperial project's taxonomical impulse to document indigenous peoples. Marked by their particularities in "manner" and "custom," their 'difference' was understood as 'natural' or 'fixed' and therefore could be conveniently essentialised into rigid categories. Through the power of the biased colonial lens, the hegemonic documentation and representation of the Other as primitive, savage and exotic was established while the women were typically portrayed as passive and submissive. In some images from the series, the native is depicted in a natural background, while in others, positioned within a studio setting. The three chosen images (Fig. 33-35) all feature nineteenth-century colonial apparatus that was used for anthropometric measuring. These devices were used to facilitate standardised ethnographic documentation.

In the first two images, Pushpamala is set against a black and white chequered backdrop stretching her right arm out, which is placed over a rod-like measuring apparatus. The tightly stretched canvas of black and white squares, each measuring two inches, is a grid system similar to the 'Lamprey Grid',[323] developed by British naval officer Maurice Vidal Portman (1860–1935). The Portman's grid seen in the image explicitly references the obsessive urge of the colonial empire in the nineteenth century to categorise a typology of the native tribes of the Andaman Islands according to their physiognomies and racial distinctions.

Portman, the officer in charge of the Andamanese, was a self-fashioned anthropologist. With easy accessibility to his subject matter, he produced a large body of work consisting of several hundred photographs of the Andamanese. The mise-en-scène was constructed, as they featured both in their "natural" habitat and in the studio, serving Portman's ethnographic project, rich in imperial scope. Using grids, callipers and imposing mechanical devices of measurement, Portman indulged in the process of the ordering of 'savage' bodies. Portman enlisted the help of natives to transport his equipment and even help develop his images. Tabea Cornel, in her essay on Phrenology, notes that scientific authority believed to be decisively rooted in objective knowledge is more precisely contingent on social processes and derives more from social negotiations.[324] Rather than the colonial narrative of 'civilising' the native, Satadru Sen notes that Portman preferred instead the rhetoric of 'taming' the savage.[325] Sen notes that photography and ethnography were crucial to the practice of 'taming,' where the native body was subjected to the disciplining authority of both camera and callipers in the encounter between coloniser and savage.

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[323] Jones H. Lamprey, an assistant secretary to the *Journal of the Ethnological Society* proposed a system of measurement that the naked colonial subjects were to be photographed in front of— a grid of two-inch squares composed of stretched threads.
[324] Tabea Cornel, "Something Old, Something New, Something Pseudo, Something True: Pejorative and Deferential References to Phrenology since 1840," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 161, no. 4 (December 2017): 324-5.
[325] Satadru Sen, "Savage Bodies, Civilized Pleasures: M. V. Portman and the Andamanese," *American Ethnologist* 36, no. 2 (2009): 365.

Pushpamala uses Portman's photograph of a *Ta-Keda Woman* from the Andaman Islands taken in the 1890s as the ironic premise of one of her images. In mimicking this image, the REINFORCING function of irony is emphasised in even the replication of minor details such as the disembodied hands at the edges of the backdrop, which hold the canvas taut for measurement. Pushpamala is clothed in both images, unlike the naked tribes in Portman's photographs; she appears instead in the attire of a Toda[326] tribal woman in the first image and is draped in the traditional South Indian sari in the second.

The third image, in black and white, features a disembodied hand holding a calliper measuring Pushpamala's cranial dimensions and is suggestive of phrenological measurement. The size of the brain and cranial capacity were supposedly indications of intellectual prowess. The curved hooks of the calliper culminate in sharp ends that seem to pierce the top of her head and the flesh of her chin. To my mind, the curved blades carry associations to the shape of a sickle, an implement commonly used by farmers in India to harvest or gather their crop. To position this potentially lethal instrument against her face is not only telling of violence but also evokes a metaphorical 'gathering,' in this case 'data' for the purposes of racist deductions. Juxtapose this with the imagery of the Western concept of the Grim Reaper, and we see a reaping of not just data but of lives and identities.

Science and photography were drafted as aggressive tools to justify violent and invasive procedures. The biological determinism of the nineteenth century is known to have predominantly targeted racial minorities, but also, women in particular. In *The Second Sex* (1949), French philosopher and social theorist Simone De Beauvoir states, "No group ever defines itself as One without immediately setting up the other opposite itself."[327] With reference to the man-woman binary in a correlative process of definition, the man is asserted as the standard human type, while the woman, in contrast, is posited as the absolute Other. Zuleyma Tang-Martinez writes about the prevalence of scientific sexism and the interchangeability of oppressed groups who were relegated to the category of the Other. Similar adjectives were used to describe women and non-white races, and the intelligence of women was deemed closer to children and savages.[328] Pushpamala, in her role as a South Indian native woman, is then doubly othered through her identity as both a woman and colonised native.

Appropriating the manner of early ethnographic documentation, the OPPOSITIONAL function of irony is performed as Pushpamala **subverts** (Fig. 5) the objectifying colonial gaze by being the one who actually controls the composition and content of the photographs. Using a deconstructive approach, she recreates and re-enacts the anthropological objectification of the "exotic other" thereby undermining the privileged viewpoint of the West as well as Eurocentric modes of historiography. This **altered perspective** (Fig. 5) also challenges the authenticity of the image and the notion of the unbiased eye

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[326] The Toda's are a distinctive ancient tribe of Dravidian origin living in the Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu in South India.
[327] Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (Vintage eBooks, 1949), 26.
[328] Zuleyma Tang-Martinez, "Scientific Objectivity and the Concept of "the Other"," *Women's Studies International Forum* 12, no. 3 (1989): 286-7.

of the camera, and the exalted status of photographic evidence. Altering the state of undress typical of Portman's images of the Andaman tribes, she questions the scientific relevance of physical anthropology and exposes it as a colonial tool for the objectification of native peoples and for the sanctioning of imperialist and racist discourse.

The ironic gesture here is not simply an inversion of the dichotomies of the coloniser and colonised; alternatively, it undermines the security of the imperial power of representation over the "other." It is important to note, however, that through the ironic mimesis of anthropometric documentation, the language of colonialism is regrettably still present. Because the condition of its possibility is necessarily defined by that which it seeks to subvert, the image may inadvertently replicate the very concepts it seeks to challenge. Hutcheon notes this limitation of irony and cautions us against the valorisation of the subversive nature of irony. She notes that ironising and lending quotation marks to authoritative discourse run the danger of misreading or misapprehension.[329] Nevertheless, in using irony to subvert a colonial narrative, the allusion to it must be made. The voice of ironic critique is found in, and through the voice of that, it is in rebellion against.

Hutcheon also simultaneously maintains the value of the aesthetic distance that irony creates from Western positions of truth; and its critical nature in revealing the fictionality of Western authority over history. In Pushpamala's imitation of the manner of ethnographic portraits, however, one struggles to find discernible incongruities or indicators that signal the presence of irony. The frame of reference is easily identifiable, but the mimicry lacks the slippage necessary to distinguish its distance from its referent. The ironic tension between the repetition and its premise is faint, as no major or subtle alterations, distortions, or recoded meanings are incorporated into the echoic mention. Therefore, our understanding of irony is largely dependent on identifying Pushpamala in her contemporary masquerade as a South Indian native subjected to ethnographic documentation and in her role as a contemporary artist subverting such representations.

Yuki Kihara. *A Study of a Samoan Savage*, 2015 and *Fa'a fafine: In the Manner of a Woman*, 2004-05

Pushpamala's method of pastiche, which references early ethnographic photography, is a technique also explored in the works of Yuki Kihara, who is an interdisciplinary artist and independent curator. Of Japanese and Samoan heritage, Kihara identifies as *fa'afafine*, which is a term that refers to a third gender in Samoan society. Kihara explains:

> Fa'afafine are an Indigenous queer minority in Samoan culture known to be gifted in the spirit of more than one gender, or "third gender"; the term is also used broadly to describe those who are, in the

[329] Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 202-04.

> Western context, lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender, intersexed, or queer. *Fa'afafine* also translates as "in the manner of a woman," and is often applied to biological males with feminine characteristics…[330]

Her themes address issues of cultural, gender, sexual and diasporic identity, from both a historical and contemporary perspective. Through photography, performance, dance, video and installation, Kihara's work primarily destabilises the presence of an overarching Eurocentric perspective. Often inspired by Samoan postcolonial history, her body of work undermines colonial ideology and challenges the standardised forms of representation of non-western peoples.

Kihara's series, *A Study of a Samoan Savage* (2015), explores the historical role of photography in aiding and abetting colonial anthropology and, by extension, the colonial gaze. In an incident in 2009 involving the coach of the Super Rugby Auckland-based Blues team, fans implied that the Pacific Islander ethnicity of the coach was the reason for the team's failure; this fuelled Kihara to address the source of this racial abuse of Samoans. Deftly weaving historical and contemporary concerns, Kihara's work highlights the enduring legacies of racially-based colonial interpretations of difference and their pervasiveness in our collective memory. Employing both photographic and digital media, the subject of the series is a man, shown to be a manifestation of the Polynesian demi-god and trickster figure, Maui, who features in a range of creation narratives. Anthropometry and motion photography are the two overarching themes explored in the series.

A group of images (see Fig. 37-39) demonstrate the use of anthropometric instruments on Maui's unclothed body. Maui, a divine being, performed by Samoan artist John Ioane, is measured, pinched and examined as an exotic savage; his physical dimensions evaluated for study. Maui's warm brown skin-tone contrasts not only against a pitch-black background but also against the white tone of the hands that measure him in "Nose Width with Vernier Caliper" (Fig. 37), "Head with Pelvimeter" (Fig. 38) and "Bicep with Skinfold Caliper" (Fig. 39). The hand clad in the sleeve of a white lab coat is disembodied by the framing of the photograph, an intruder within the space. The hand holds steel instruments that glint sharply in the light; their harsh geometry contrasting against the soft flesh of the organic body is suggestive of threat or harm.

Anthropometry, involving the measurement of the human body, was a tool employed by physical anthropologists for the purpose of studying physical variations in humans. Callipers and other specialised instruments were developed to obtain measurements of the various segments of the body. The length, breadth and circumference of the anatomical face, the width of the nose and the and the thickness of the skin were all measured and recorded. In the late nineteenth century, these systematic

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[330] Yuki Kihara, "First Impressions: Paul Gauguin," in *Gauguin: A Spiritual Journey*, (Munich; London; New York: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco in association with DelMonico Books/ Prestel, 2018), 170. Kihara also asserts that in her view, the term *Fa'afafine* developed in response to colonialism and Western methods of categorisation to differentiate those outside the status quo of the Western cisgender binary.

measurements contributed to the racialisation of difference, projecting standards and hierarchies with the European male placed firmly at the summit of the racial ladder.

Anthropometry obliged the legitimation of pseudoscientific theories steeped in eugenic and racist agendas. The best methods for anthropometric photography were employed in order to turn colonial natives into objectified specimen.[331] Hypervisibility in the colonial display of native bodies is a feature embedded within the ethnographic tradition as was the resultant paradoxical attribute of invisibility in real life. They were photographed undressed, measured and reduced to facets of their physicality: a collection of a series of data to be filed away as 'proof' of their otherness and natural inferiority. Stephen Jay Gould in *The Mismeasure of Man* (1981) re-examines Morton's cranial measurements and his conclusions, finding them to be flawed and biased toward proving blacks to be an inferior race. He recalls the response of a South American leading medical journal on Morton's death: "We of the South should consider him as our benefactor, for aiding most materially in giving to the negro his true position as an inferior race."[332]

Kihara cites American anthropologist Louis R. Sullivan's work as a source that triggered her ironic and creative rendition. Sullivan was a student of German-born American anthropologist Franz Boas, who is considered to have been the father of modern anthropology. Sullivan's *Essentials of Anthropometry,* published in 1928, provided a practical guide that was not only directed to the scholarly anthropologist but also to a less erudite audience of enthusiastic dilettantes. Armchair anthropologists, who varied from explorers to colonial officials, were often enlisted to the cataloguing of 'specimens.' It was common for amateurs to be roped in to contribute data to ethnology, a rather ironic practice, displaying questionable empiric rigour, considering its 'scientific' purpose. The book is replete with illustrations of essential instruments alongside details of their procurement, advice on the most choice of subjects for study, tips for photography and much-needed skeletal collections. Sullivan joined the American Museum of Natural History in 1916, and his study was largely dedicated to Polynesian anthropometry. With the islands as his racial laboratories, Sullivan was prolific with his measurement of Hawaiians and cataloguing of the crania that were often plundered from burial grounds.[333]

Sullivan's handbook begins with two photographic illustrations elucidating the proper use of the spreading calliper and the sliding calliper, both of which are featured in Kihara's images. Through ironic repetition, the REINFORCING function (Fig. 5) of irony is activated. By mimicking the methods of anthropometric photography, the absurdity of the premise of scientific objectivity is revealed—the very disingenuous ways in which the idea of 'race' was shaped by science. A 'science' that was engineered

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[331] The introduction to Louis R. Sullivan's *Essentials of Anthropometry: A Handbook for Explorers and Museum Collectors* (1928) for instance, contains a strong recommendation for seven absolute measurements to "untangle the relationships of the many physical types" of the peoples of "Polynesia, Micronesia, Malaysia and Melanesia." Pages 13-14.
[332] Quoted on page 69 of Stephen Jay Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man* (1981).
[333] Warwick Anderson, "Racial Hybridity, Physical Anthropology, and Human Biology in the Colonial Laboratories of the United States," *Current Anthropology* 53, no. 5 (2012): 99.

via an unequal relationship between the European researcher and the native subject. The dichotomies of self/other or the thinking subject from the object that is thought about, or more specifically, the scientist from the Other, have been essential binaries inscribed in the development of western science. Additionally, the separation of emotion/intellect in conjunction with subjective/objective has underpinned the history of science.

"Objectivity, defined as the condition of being uninfluenced by emotion, surmise, personal prejudice, or belief, is usually considered as the *sine qua non* of science," writes Tang-Martinez.[334] The category of the scientist, believed to be "incorruptibly objective," aligns with the category of the "self," which was inevitably constituted by "white, upper and middle class, heterosexual men of Christian background."[335] These characteristics became regarded as the "normal" self, while all else was considered the Other. The presumptions of racial hierarchy and the inferiority of other races were paradoxically not always *conclusions* of the 'science' (as is generally demonstrated) but often the contents of its biased seed of motivation. Tang-Martinez argues that studies in pseudo-sciences such as craniometry were undertaken to ascertain intellectual capacity with the a priori bias of white superiority/non-white inferiority.[336] The ironic fictionality of Kihara's photographs confirms and reiterates the fictionality of the pseudo-scientific anthropology that it represents.

Maui is depicted with the characteristic 'stillness' of ethnographic studio photography, but he also presents an imposing figure. With his shoulder-length dark hair framing his face, Maui seems to have an aura of defiance about him as he stares piercingly back into the camera, disrupting the colonial gaze. Could it be an instance of poignant irony that a being as powerful as Maui is shown subjecting himself as a specimen to be disrobed for a racist science when he could easily overpower his anonymous white researcher with ease? Or perhaps we bear witness to yet another one of Maui's comic exploits? Where he is counting on the anthropologist being completely in the dark as to his supernatural ability to shape-shift, thus rendering his meticulously taken physical readings both ironic and invalid. A victim of scientific oppression or a trickster figure? Or both? [337] Allan Rodway's photographic analogy aptly serves our investigation of the image; he says, "irony is not merely a matter of seeing a 'true' meaning beneath a 'false,' but of seeing a double exposure […] on one plate."[338] Comparable trickster figures are found

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[334] Tang-Martinez, "Scientific Objectivity," 285.
[335] Tang-Martinez, "Scientific Objectivity," 285-86.
[336] Tang-Martinez, "Scientific Objectivity," 288.
[337] These questions prompt a parallel analogy. American cultural anthropologist, Margaret Mead (1901-78), another famous student of Boas, wrote the contentious book *Coming of Age in Samoa* in 1928. She conducted pioneering research that examined gender, sexuality and social norms with respect to adolescent girls on the Samoan islands. A New Zealand anthropologist living in Samoa at the time, Derek Freeman, contested Mead's findings five years after her death. One of the reasons cited by Freeman was that he believed the Samoan girls had pulled a prank on Mead. He asserted that they had been joking when responding to Mead's inquiries, thus rendering her findings, the consequences of an elaborate hoax. While Freeman's assessment has also been critiqued, the case points to the contingency of certain anthropological methods. For more information read "The History of Samoan Sexual Conduct and the Mead-Freeman Controversy" by Paul Shankman (1996), pages 555–67.
[338] Allan Rodway, "Terms for Comedy," *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 6, no. 1 (1962): 113.

in the religious and folk literatures of Africa, Asia and North America; their character embodies both chaos and order and mocks static visions of life and worldly assumptions of structure. Occupying borders and liminal spaces, the trickster's play, reveals just how "ludicrous is every vision of life constructed of hierarchies without ironic wholeness."[339] As Allan J. Ryan notes, the trickster's presence in a story alerts the audience to the fact "that some aspect of the story will require ironic interpretation."[340]

Photography was welcomed as a tool of anthropology from the 1840s onward. In the 1870s, advancements such as motion capture photography were developed by English photographer Eadweard Muybridge and French physiologist Étienne-Jules Marey. Two images from Kihara's series, formally, thematically, and through their title, reference Duchamp's famous oil painting titled *Nude Descending a Staircase No.2* (Fig. 40) from 1912. The superimposed forms of Duchamp's abstract nude in motion were, in turn, jointly inspired by the chronophotography of Marey (which was used in the study of locomotion) and Muybridge's picture series, *Woman: Descending a Stairway*, series 45 (see Fig. 42). Muybridge's series was published first in 1887 in *Animal Locomotion* and later in 1907 in the photo album titled *The Human Figure in Motion*.

Muybridge's photo album contains sequential images of athletes performing a range of motions such as walking, jumping, and catching a ball. In a similar manner, a group of photographs from Kihara's series depict the mature, muscular body of Maui performing a range of actions and movements such as sprinting, walking, leaping and dancing a traditional Samoan dance—his movements layered as successively superimposed images on a single photograph. With a nod to Duchamp, Kihara applies Marey's style of multiple exposures (see Fig. 41), while drawing thematically from Muybridge. Her inspiration reveals a non-linear trace from Duchamp to Marey and Muybridge. One of the photographs depicts Maui kicking a rugby ball (see Fig. 44). Ioane, an accomplished artist himself, coincidentally, comes from a competitive rugby background.

Currently, the use of anthropometry still prevails in a number of sports, where athletes are profiled, their bodies seen as machines, and their physicality, meant to fulfil a singular purpose. The commodification of the Other and of Pacific masculinity in particular is a visible phenomenon in sports such as rugby and American football. Polynesian men have become international sports commodities and are traded by teams, clubs and franchises owned by corporates. Peter Horton declares that "Pacific Islanders have become the most prodigious and prevalent ethnic group of rugby sports migrants globally."[341] However, there are clear problems with the fetishisation and objectification of a racially defined group being seen as "exquisite 'products'" and "prime commodities." While there is a heroism fetish attached to super-

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[339] Lawrence E. Sullivan, "Multiple Levels of Religious Meaning in Culture: A New Look at Winnebago Sacred Texts," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 2, no. 2 (1982): 259.
[340] Allan J. Ryan, *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (UBC Press, 1999), 9.
[341] Michael Field, "Polynesian Men a Global Sports Commodity," *Stuff*, August 09, 2013, https://www.stuff.co.nz/sport/8718872/Polynesian-men-a-global-sports-commodity.

masculinity, the athletes are also subject to exploitation and discrimination.[342] Facing family pressures and the heavy expectations of an entire nation, intense anxiety and even suicides are not uncommon issues.

In her essay on Kihara's *A Study of a Samoan Savage*, Mandy Treagus articulates the irony present in international sports, of the intricate entangling of the colonised savage body with invader-settler nation identity. She writes:

> The morphing of the exoticised, savage body into an exoticised, muscular body becomes part of the project of the invader-settler nation. Non-white bodies are co-opted in the creation of national identity, and are disciplined to become the perfect playing machines, bringing glory to the (predominantly) white nation. In serving the national project, they enforce and endorse its dominant values. Their presence signals its colonising premise—they would not be there without it—while at the same time eliding this reality.[343]

Kihara's images take us through the abrupt transition of the stereotyping of Pacific masculinity from savage to heroic while demonstrating the persistent foregrounding of the corporeal and the contiguous negation of placing value on aspects other than physical prowess. As Lisa Uperesa observes, the savage male body was viewed positively only "in contexts where their physical labour and sacrifice was accrued to the colonial state or economy (as plantations labourers, factory and meat works, military servicemen, and today as sportsmen)."[344] The evaluation of physical competence as 'natural' is confounded with the implication that 'savage' and 'primitive' peoples are inherently physically superior while intellectually inferior.

In the images that foreground the technique of motion-photography, Maui, in chiaroscuro, is bathed in a graded palette of warm browns against a dark backdrop. "Siva (Dance)" (Fig. 45) features Maui performing the traditional Samoan dance in a sequence of movements, his body silhouetted against a rectangular, oppressive black. The framing recalls the nature of human exhibitions, where native peoples and their 'culture' were caged as a spectacle for consumption. Similarly, "Walking I" (Fig. 46) brings to mind the familiar illustration of the *March of Progress* or *The Road to Homo Sapiens* published in 1965. Endorsing the idea that evolution represents progress, it depicts human evolution over millions of years from ape-like ancestors to Homo sapiens. Kihara's image is delicately nuanced to echo the idea of progress with the metaphor of light—as Maui begins his walk from the left side of the frame,

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[342] A parallel can be drawn to stereotypical representations of black masculinity where black male athletes are associated with hyper-masculinity. Hall writes about the commodified bodies of black athletes and the problematic representations of black bodies in "The Spectacle of the Other" from *Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, pages 223-290. Contemporary artists such as Glenn Ligon have also addressed similar issues of discrimination in works such as *Rumble Young Man Rumble (Version #2)*, 1993 in collaboration with Byron Kim and *Notes on the Margin of the Black Book* (1991–93), where he critiques Robert Mapplethorpe's problematic fetishising of black bodies in *The Black Book* first published in 1986.

[343] Mandy Treagus, "From Anthropometry to Maui: A Study of a Samoan Savage (2015)," in *Yuki Kihara: A Study of a Samoan Savage* (Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery, 2016), 5. Catalogue published on the occasion of *YUKI KIHARA: A Study of a Samoan Savage* at Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery.

[344] Fa'anofo Lisaclaire Uperesa, "Of Savages and Warriors," in *Yuki Kihara: A Study of a Samoan Savage* (Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery, 2016), 10.

gradually emerging from a soft darkness into brighter light. Does Kihara make an echoic allusion to the illustration of human evolution by staging Maui as the evolutionary primitive savage? or does she point to our complicity through this very act of visual determinism? The **playful** (Fig. 5) ironic subversion here, provokes a scent of the enduring presence of racialised notions of evolution, forcing us to question our own fallible internalised preconceptions or world views.

Uncharacteristic of ethnographic photographs, in "Walking II" (Fig. 47) and "Maui Descending a Staircase I (After Duchamp)" (see Fig. 43), we see Maui turn back towards the camera in successive movements, fiercely meeting and confronting the voyeuristic colonial gaze. "Maui Descending a Staircase II (After Duchamp)" (Fig. 48) is particularly interesting because in it, Maui, in his final sequential replication, turns back towards previous iterations of himself. It is almost as if he is coming to terms with his own past, on the verge of choosing to ascend the stairway and transcend imposed stereotypes. These aberrant and ironic details of self-reflexivity and self-awareness disturb the secure foundations of the practice of ethnographic photography that is customarily inscribed with imperial power. The mimetic device of the camera captures the ostensible likeness of the colonial native but rather than producing a 'faithful' likeness, the representation reflects the power involved in the 'capture.' Through re-performance and working within this mode of cultural imaging, Kihara explicitly induces cognitive dissonance by staging a **subversive** (Fig. 5) ironic intervention to this method of historical record. While the series inherently critiques the medium of photography and the myth of its incorruptible objectivity, Kihara reclaims agency through cultural self-imaging.

The ethnographic practices of colonial society and the obsession with physiognomy and its racial and eugenic contexts continually rendered the colonised native as the dehumanised object of the colonial gaze. The myth of scientific objectivity and its evidence-based conclusions rendered blind the dominating power over representation, concealed behind the mechanical eye of the camera. The deployment of anthropometric photography to fix types and fit bodies into archives was an inventive formulation of authority. In the anthropometric style of photography, individuals were positioned in profile or frontally with specific methods of framing the body against grids, measuring devices or plain backdrops; the exclusive visibility of the body and its potential scaling was paramount. Meanwhile, other ethnographic images incorporated aspects such as weapons, personal adornment, ethnic clothing and architecture to construct aesthetic 'postcard' stereotypes of the native Other for Western consumption. These preconceived stereotypes were further used to perpetuate the 'primitive' typecast and affirm beliefs in scientific racism, while fetishes and the fascination with native bodies were conveniently masked under the guise of specialist knowledge and scientific appeal.

Fa'a fafine: In the Manner of a Woman (Fig. 49-52 and 55, 58, 59), a series from 2004-5, evokes the manner of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century colonial ethnographic photography. Consisting of a series of seven photographic portraits meticulously staged in a studio environment, Kihara performs as the principal subject of these images, bringing forth for deliberation stereotyped images of Pacific Islanders and the fraught history of Western representations of the Pacific. Echoing and ironising the

manner of ethnographic and commercial photography by the likes of New Zealand photographers Thomas Andrew (1855-1939), Alfred John Tattersall (1866-1951) and Alfred Henry Burton (1834-1914), Kihara mimics their exoticist, eroticist and primitivist tones through her sepia-toned images of carefully posed figures, sometimes partially nude and adorned with stereotypical cultural accessories.

Thomas Andrew, best known for his studio portraits, had lived in Samoa through the turn of the twentieth century. Tattersall, who went on to live in Samoa for a significant part of his life, also documented the country's colonial-era and is well known for his postcard studio portraits of Samoans in traditional attire. Alfred Burton, in partnership with his brother Walter had established the Burton Brothers (1866-1914), a photographic studio in Dunedin, New Zealand. The firm grew successful and was popular for covering the landscapes of New Zealand and portraits of Maori. In 1884, Burton travelled to the South Pacific as part of the Union Steam Ship Company's (USSC) inaugural tourist operation. Covering Fiji, Samoa and Tonga in one month, his photographs were in high demand, garnering commercial success with the added benefit of promoting the tourist ventures of the USSC. While his images have been valued as 'truthful' ethnographic documentation of indigenous populations in institutional and private collections, current research indicates that their primary purpose in the context of their production was as saleable commodities.[345] As Christine Whybrew writes in her thesis of 2010, this "commercial emphasis influenced the selection and interpretation of subject matter."[346] She adds that the photographs adhered to predominant ideologies that continued to persuasively shape the perceptions of both settler and international audiences.

The paradisical allure of images of partially clothed men and women amongst props and lush tropical foliage, posed as passive and inviting, functioned well to market Polynesian regions for tourism; additionally, these images were also circulated as postcard souvenirs. As Caroline Vercoe notes in "Postcards as Signatures of Place" (2013), "the photographed image presents an ironic paradox. While the medium itself suggests absoluteness and authority, on closer inspection what we often see reflected are the attitudes and pre-conditioned bias of the photographer, effectively framing the 'photographed' within a western structure of thought and interpretation."[347] The massive output of the early nineteenth and twentieth centuries of romanticised images of empire display the visual regimes of imperial propaganda made persuasive through the colonial mastery of imaging and representation. Through careful selection and omission, photographic technology supported the marketing, advertising and construction of preferred representations of the colonies. These generic images of "…the calm, tropical and unpolluted beach, the wild yet idyllic waterfall, the muscle-bound, warlike (yet safely dying) warrior

[345] Christine Mary Whybrew, "The Burton Brothers Studio: Commerce in Photography and the Marketing of New Zealand, 1866-1898" (PhD diss., University of Otago, 2010), 2, http://hdl.handle.net/10523/6829.
[346] Whybrew, "The Burton Brothers Studio," 2.
[347] Caroline Vercoe, "Postcards as Signatures of Place," *Art and AsiaPacific* 3, no. 1 (1996): 86.

and of course the sensuous, exotic dancing girl"[348] also served to provide an aesthetic erasure of the violence of imperial encounters.

Visual tropes, motifs or cultural stereotypes of the 'dusky maiden' and the 'noble savage' were launched into popular imagination, as was the myth of a paradisical primitivism. Kihara's series re-enacts these powerful, phantasmatic stereotypes of the nineteenth century, plainly visible in "Tama Samoa - Samoan Man" (Fig. 50) and "Teine Samoa - Samoan Woman" (Fig. 51). In "Ulugali'i Samoa: Samoan Couple" (Fig. 52), Kihara performs heterosexual stereotyped identities as she plays the woman and also unrecognisably masquerades as the man in this double portrait of a married couple. At the same time, her own identity as *fa'afafine* **subverts** the Western gender binary model through her ironic portrayal of heterosexual identities. Kihara's irony performs a DISTANCING function, as the **new perspective** (Fig. 5) induced through irony refuses to be confined by the restraints of the dominant heterosexual norm, thus broadening our perspective.

Seen in the context of Richard Schechner's conceptualisation of performance behaviour as restored behaviour, the nineteenth-century ethnographic photograph becomes raw material for the making of a new performance, which Kihara captures as a photograph. Marvin Carlson writing on the concept of "restored behaviour," elucidates—"…the process of repetition and the continued awareness of some "original" behaviour, however distant or corrupted by myth or memory…serves as a kind of grounding for the restoration."[349] Kihara performs the roles of nineteenth century Samoan natives as seen in ethnographic photography (a restored time and place) by using visual markers such as cultural accessories and the studio environment as explicit framing devices.

The pair in Kihara's image are dressed in ethnic clothing, draped at the waist in *siapo* or barkcloth. The man holds a fly whisk and adorns a *ulafala*, which is a seed necklace—both objects indicate that he is of high-ranking status. The woman holds a woven leaf fan in her lap and is bare-breasted. Their attire and accessories act as performative signifiers of Samoan tradition. With tropical greenery to mask the environment of the studio, the overall staged depiction is that of an otherworldly quaintness. Similar to the techniques of Thomas Andrew and the Burton Brothers, the figures are photographed head-on, with the use of ethnographic props and artefacts. In two albumen prints from the Burton Brothers studio from the 1890s, for instance, titled *Types, Samoan Girls* (Fig. 53) and *Samoan Princesses* (Fig. 54), we see similar elements. The first image displays two bare-breasted Samoan women, draped in *siapo*, holding fans, while in the second, a painted backdrop of foliage is noted behind the figures, amply supplemented by natural living plants with grass and leaves underfoot.

A few subtle elements in "Ulugali'i Samoa" (see Fig. 52) tend to disrupt the absolute mirroring of an ethnographic portrait. There is a visible border of a large frame behind the couple at about two-thirds

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[348] Vercoe, "Postcards," 86.
[349] Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 47.

height from the ground. It is unclear whether the frame belongs to the painted scenery in the background or is a prop lending spatial division between the couple and the painted scene. Perhaps the frame ironically alludes to the artifice not only of the false flora and the studio but also of the couple 'framed' to fit a cultural stereotype? Our easy recognition of a common stereotype is inscribed in our way of knowing the world. The complicity of our habitual modes of cognition is rendered into the spotlight with a work like "Ulugali'i Samoa." Another element of interest is Kihara's delicate neckwear. The piece, created by contemporary Samoan artist Ela To'omaga-Kaikilekofe who specialises in jewellery and body adornment, adorns Kihara's neck. The insertion of an anachronistic element ruptures the exotic fantasy. It is an ironic temporal anomaly veiled into the period imitation.

With the juxtapositioning of an ironic element such as the contemporary neckwear in the photograph, slippage is made ostensible, marked by the historical circumstance of its making.[350] In this way, (as Schechner might thoughtfully point out) two temporal frames coexist within the liminal realm of the performance—a repartee between the restored and the actual time and place. These ironic insertions of the frame and the contemporary jewellery into the ethnographic setting could be considered as subtle producers of *différance*. Considered against the background of Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarisation, irony proves to be a strategy to defer and disrupt automatic and indifferent recognition, providing the means to revive an altered perception of the world.

The woman stares enigmatically into the camera while the man is postured in a more passive stance with his gaze averted. He embodies the essence of the noble savage, the simple-minded and innocent primitive man uncorrupted by civilisation. This allegorically represents the primordial man before expulsion from the Biblical paradise of the Garden of Eden; naked and one with nature, uncorrupted by sin. Sander L. Gilman, an American literary and cultural historian, well-known for his contributions to Jewish studies, takes a psychoanalytic approach to examine the history of stereotypes of sexuality, race and madness in *Difference and Pathology* (1985). He attributes the formation of a stereotype to the moment our sense of order is threatened. Difference threatens order. Gilman elaborates that as our self-image reflects our mental representation of the external world, these internalised representations are linked to our sense of control.[351] He writes, therefore, that when

> …the sense of order and control undergoes stress, when doubt is cast on the self's ability to control the internalized world that it has created for itself, an anxiety appears… We project that anxiety onto the Other, externalizing our loss of control. The Other is thus stereotyped… The "bad" Other becomes the negative stereotype; the "good" Other becomes the positive stereotype. The former is that which we fear to become; the latter, that which we fear we cannot achieve.[352]

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[350] For a brief introduction to the concept of 'ostentation,' read "Umberto Eco and ostentation" in Marvin Carlson's *Performance*, page 36-7. However, I would argue that there lies a subtlety to this manifestation of irony and that the ironic element would only appear ostentatious to the spectator that might easily perceive the context of the irony.
[351] Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, 19.
[352] Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, 20.

Embedded within stereotypes are the social and political ideologies which structure our reality; these tend to shape the qualities assigned to the Other rather than any external reality. Gilman states that stereotypes are intrinsically protean and can ironically shift from overtly negative to positive valuations—from fearing the Other to glorifying them.[353] This quality of fluidity leads Gilman to assert that stereotypical systems "are inherently bipolar," producing opposing pairs of signifiers such as the "noble savage" vs "the ignoble savage."[354] Bhabha deliberates over this line of thought when analysing Fanon's observations on racial stereotyping in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Like Gilman, he too brings out the curious paradoxes, ironies and impossibility of stereotypical signification. Bhabha writes—"The black is both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces."[355]

Kihara's triptych of sepia-tinted photographs (see Fig. 55, 58, 59), which bears the same title as the series, uses her own body to disrupt the dusky maiden trope found in colonial portraiture as well as to challenge the Western notion of a gender binary. Re-enacting exoticised and sexualised representations of Samoan women, the first image features Kihara partially clothed in a grass skirt, bare-breasted and reclining on a plush tasselled Victorian chaise lounge, with her body fully turned towards the viewer. The *'ie toga*, which is a woven mat of significant cultural value in Samoa, is positioned as a backdrop and forms a curious contrast to the Victorian furniture. Framing the scene on either side are lush tropical foliage. Kihara becomes but one more of the exotic objects she is accompanied by; her long hair is loose and cascades over her shoulder in waves while she stares directly back at her viewer.

While the term "maiden" connotes the sexual fetish, "dusky" represents the tone of skin. Skin, as Bhabha describes, is the most visible fetish of colonial discourse, what Fanon refers to as the 'epidermal schema.'[356] Lisa Taouma, New Zealand writer, film and television director, screenwriter, producer and founder of Coconet.tv, an online portal that turns the spotlight on Pasifika stories, has written about the trope of the dusky maiden. She points out that, "The 'dusky maiden' functions as a metaphor for the colonisation of the Pacific in that she, like our social, economic and religious structures, was shaped to fit a colonial agenda. She can be seen as a symbolic representation for the land itself—a guiding beacon to its fecund and fertile depths."[357] Through the stereotype, an unknown quantity is given 'identity;' by accessing this identity, a taming of the savage/land is performed while ownership is gained. 'My,' the

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[353] Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, 18.
[354] Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, 27.
[355] Bhabha, LOC, 82.
[356] Bhabha, LOC, 78.
[357] Lisa Taouma, "Gauguin Is Dead … There Is No Paradise." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 25, no. 1 (2004): 37.

possessive pronoun in “My Samoan Girl” (Fig. 49), emulates this very sense of colonial proprietorship over the coy, passive, exotic subject.

Kihara’s languid pose conjures instant associations with the art historical tradition of the reclining nude as seen in a host of European artists from Giorgione and Titian to Manet and more. A more analogous comparison, perhaps, would be the orientalised odalisques of Ingres (see Fig. 56) and Delacroix that are featured alongside plush fabrics and exotic props such as a peacock feather duster. Cox’s contemporary parody of Manet’s Olympia, *Olympia’s Boyz* (see Fig. 4), in a similar vein, ironically attacks the art historical canon of the white female reclining nude with the insertion of a black body. While Cox disrupts the trope, Kihara assumes the ethnographic stereotype of her ironic premise.[358] In Kihara’s image (see Fig. 55), she explicitly performs the style and setting of ethnographic photographs where the tradition of stereotyped female sexuality is conjoined with the notion of the primitive female as unchartered territory, untouched but familiar and inviting, primed for sexual conquest. The colonised woman is doubly ‘Othered,’ with reference to both man and the European ideal.

The objectification and exoticisation of Pacific cultures is rampant in the legacy of Paul Gauguin’s primitivist modernism. As Taussig ironically points out, “Modernity stimulated primitivism along with wiping out the primitive.”[359] Gauguin’s paintings of Tahitian women (see Fig. 57) and his representations of the native Other have shaped the European imagination and its perceptions of an idyllic, mythical world suspended in time. These images endure in contemporary travel brochures, perpetuating the commodification of the ‘primitive’ Other and continue to shape contemporary racist stereotypes. Stereotypes carry a range of associations and accumulate nuanced meanings as they are perpetuated and refashioned through history via images, texts and scopic regimes. Taouma notes, however, that with reference to the dusky maiden trope, paintings from early travels to the Polynesian islands could be held up against nineteenth-century photographs and contemporary tourist postcards or brochures with the cliché effectively remaining the same over centuries.[360] This phenomenon is reminiscent of Bhabha’s notion of fixity in the representation of otherness.

The second image of the triptych (see Fig. 58) is identical except that the grass skirt is conspicuously missing leaving Kihara completely undressed. The paradoxical connotations of the trope of nakedness, as seen in ethnographic portraiture when compared to its presence in the ‘nude’ of Victorian art, are rich with irony. Contemporary historian Philippa Levine observes the curious inconsistencies and slippages between the ‘nudity’ of high art and ancient Greek statues and the ‘nakedness’ of the colonial native photographed without clothes.[361] While a native’s lack of clothing is equated with crude

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[358] Only to later disrupt its gendered assumption.
[359] Michael T. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 231.
[360] Taouma, “Gauguin Is Dead,” 36.
[361] Philippa Levine, “States of Undress: Nakedness and the Colonial Imagination,” *Victorian Studies* 50, no. 2 (Winter, 2008): 216.

primitiveness, a ‘savage’ nature, the lack of evolutionary ‘progress’ and immoral sexual allure, the European nude of high art often symbolises innocence. The irony is conspicuous in that while the nude woman in art was once seen as the epitome of pure femininity, the semi-clad, ‘naked’ native woman corrupted through her sexuality. The aesthetic and the scientific domain, curiously free of the moral constraints that Christianity imposed, allowed the male viewer to uninhibitedly indulge his sexual desires. Through the pervasive mediums of painting and photography, fantasies were circulated as reality.

Vercoe, mentions in her article “I Am My Other, I Am My Self: Encounters with Gauguin in Polynesia” (2013) the problematic “preference for a reading of sexual relations between young Polynesian women and white men as gift, as opposed to threat.”[362] This is likely to be the result of what psychiatrist Carl C. Bell (1947-2019) would call the psychopathological condition of a narcissistic personality disorder. Bell applies a psychoanalytical model to the social phenomena of racist attitudes and lists several key characteristics of the racist individual. Some of them are—a grandiose sense of self-importance, a preoccupation with fantasies of power and domination, entitlement, indulgence in interpersonal exploitation and a complete lack of empathy for “inferiors.”[363] The megalomaniacal fantasies and absurdities of the colonial regime are exposed through their logical contradiction. Stringfellow Jr. asserts that “logical contradiction” is found “at the very heart of irony,” he writes, “When we attack the powerful with our ironies, we are accusing them, in part, of logical self-contradiction.”[364] When Kihara ironically repeats the ethnographic imagery of colonial visual regimes, the repetition, now detached from the source of its authority, attacks the absurdity of its premise.

The concoction of male voyeurism and the Occidental, colonial gaze are directed towards the native female body with the arrogant assumption of its openness to Western penetration; vacuously absent, is a consideration of reciprocity. A compelling irony presents itself with the third triptych (see Fig. 59), richer still when seen in conjunction to this egotistical sexual assumption. Kihara, still positioned as the dusky maiden, reveals her penis, which was deliberately concealed in the previous image so as to make her body appear as female. The expectations of the Western colonial heterosexual male libidinous gaze are ironised. The display of not just her body but also her sex and her identity as ***fa’afafine*** in this context engenders multi-layered discussion. Her performance is not just of culturally constructed identity but is also a performative simulation of diverse gender identities. This **transgresses** western binary notions of sexuality and differentiated gender roles while also parodying and disturbing the naturalisation of the dusky maiden archetype. The **subversion** is achieved in the OPPOSITIONAL function of irony (Fig. 5), as Kihara both conforms to and confronts the ethnic and gender stereotype, undermining it from within.

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[362] Caroline Vercoe, “I Am My Other, I Am My Self: Encounters with Gauguin in Polynesia,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 13, no. 1 (2013): 118.
[363] Carl C. Bell, “Racism: A Symptom of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder,” *Journal of the National Medical Association* 72, no. 7 (1980): 662.
[364] Stringfellow Jr., *The Meaning of Irony*, 99.

Judith Butler, who first propounded the theory of the performativity of gender, observed that gendered identities are formed through a series of performances or repetitive acts that are naturalised over time to constitute the 'idea' of a woman or man. This 'naturalisation' establishes the foundation of the concept of an 'original,' which Kihara's triptych parodies and ironises, while also highlighting the substantial part that role-playing occupies in the construction of gender identity. Butler neatly summarises the nature of parody and the concept of originality—"the parodic repetition of "the original" . . . reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and original."[365] Gender identity is therefore formed through a series of social and political acts that constantly shift and evolve based on a repetition of behavioural performances that become identifiable as queer, transgender, woman or man. Kihara uses the integral role-playing aspect of gender to highlight difference and **subversively**, to eliminate polarity.

Butler is of the opinion that "there are norms into which we are born—gendered, racial, national—that decide what kind of subject we can be, but in being those subjects, in occupying and inhabiting those norms, in incorporating and performing them, we make use of local options to rearticulate them in order to revise their power."[366] Cultural codes typically prescribe the gender one is expected to perform. In Samoa, the influence of Christian missionaries and colonial governments altered native gender roles and relations. *Crimes Ordinance 1961*, an act that criminalised males 'impersonating' females in public spaces, demonstrates the effect of colonial laws on traditional Samoan structures of gender. The law could be used specifically to target ***fa'afafine***.[367] While ***fa'afafine*** identify as a third gender and have specific roles in Samoan family and culture, they are often conflated with western understandings of sexual groups and are categorised using western sexual terminologies such as 'transgender' or 'homosexual.'

In an interview with Katerina M. Teaiwa, Kihara observes with concern that ***fa'afafine*** expression is regrettably singularly and stereotypically associated with drag.[368] While noting the importance of the performative and subversive aspects of drag,[369] which she admits *is* very much an important part of the ***fa'afafine*** community, Kihara wishes for people to look beyond just this one flamboyant aspect. Pulling away from simplified western assimilations of this indigenous gender identity, Kihara draws attention to *Faleaitu* (house of spirits) or traditional Samoan comedic theatre, where elements of cross-dressing are

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[365] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*: *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 41.
[366] Vasu Reddy and Judith Butler, "Troubling Genders, Subverting Identities: Interview with Judith Butler," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, no. 62 (2004): 117.
[367] The Independent State of Samoa decriminalised this law with a new legislation that came into effect on 1st May 2013.
[368] Katerina M. Teaiwa, "An Interview with Interdisciplinary Artist Shigeyuki Kihara," *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, no. 27 (November 2011), para. 6, http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue27/kihara.htm.
[369] As Butler notes ironically in *Bodies That Matter*, "it seems, drag is a site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and, hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes." Page 85. While drag may be used subversively to destabilise heterosexual gender norms, it could paradoxically also risk rival application in the maintenance of those very norms. Such runs the risk of an ironic medium.

used to present social and political satire. The skits address issues that are usually considered cultural taboos and use parody, irony and satire to critique the dominant norms of society. Performing anthropological stereotypes, Kihara's aesthetic drama induces alterity into the mimesis of a mimetic medium and confronts the problematic stereotype. Acknowledging the influence of *faleaitu* in the subversive play embodied in her series, Kihara's performative contestation challenges not just the colonial gaze but also reified heterosexist notions of gender.

Kihara, commenting on her artistic process in "Ulugali'i Samoa" where she Photoshopped her head onto a male body remarks, "The most ironic thing about this whole process is that I was born male to begin with and yet I had to utilize make up to appear 'masculine,' adding beards and all via make up because I already appeared feminine to begin with."[370] Influenced by Samoan poet and novelist Albert Wendt's conceptualisation of the Samoan concept of 'va' or space, Kihara employs it not only in her practice but also draws upon it to articulate her mixed ethnic background and her identity as ***fa'afafine***—as occupying the *va* between men and women. Written in the context of the relationship of *va* to Samoan *tatau* (tattoo), Wendt in his paper *Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body* (1996), elaborates:

> Important to the Samoan view of reality is the concept of Va or Wa in Maori and Japanese. Va is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships/the contexts change.[371]

While the West conceptualises space as empty, in the pan-Polynesian concept of *va*, space is generative. It forms associations, links and connects rather than isolates. Tongan scholars 'Okusitino Mahina and Tēvita O Ka'ili have additionally discussed the socio-spatial relations of *va*. Ka'ili writes, "Va (or wa) points to a specific notion of space, namely, space between two or more points."[372] These points could be construed as people, places or things. This is reminiscent in a way of the interactive, interstitial space between fixed identities that Bhabha believes can hold difference unaccompanied by hierarchy: a space for the articulation of cultural hybridity. Wendt, however, is wary of the term 'hybrid,' preferring the term 'blend' instead, as he feels the former is entangled with the notion of purity.[373] Wendt declares that the term "'Hybrid' no matter how theorists, like Homi Bhabha, have tried to make it post-colonial still smacks of the racist colonial."[374] For Wendt, *va* is a communal space of negotiation. Kihara perceptively notes, "I am interracial, intercultural, and intergendered. I am not a clashing point but a meeting point where all these factors meet and have a dialogue, and the artwork is an outcome of it."[375]

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[370] Erika Wolf quotes Kihara in "Shigeyuki Kihara's Fa'a Fafine; In a Manner of a Woman: The Photographic Theater of Cross-cultural Encounter," *Pacific Arts* 10, no. S (2010): 26.
[371] Albert Wendt, "Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body," *NZEPC*, http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/authors/wendt/tatauing.asp.
[372] Tēvita O Ka'ili, "Tauhi Vā: Nurturing Tongan Sociospatial Ties in Maui and Beyond," *The Contemporary Pacific* 17, no. 1 (2005): 89.
[373] With reference to the postcolonial body, Wendt describes it as a body that is coming into being, defining itself, amongst and in conjunction with outside influences that are absorbed and incorporated into the blend of its own image.
[374] Wendt, "Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body."
[375] Wolf quotes Kihara in "Shigeyuki Kihara's Fa'a Fafine," 32.

And with irony at play at every stage of her series, she reveals the protean and multi-faceted nature of the *fa'afafine* postcolonial body.

Tejal Shah. "You Too Can Touch the Moon—Yashoda with Krishna," *Hijra Fantasy Series*, 2006.

Colonially imposed taxonomies of gender, and sexual orientation have led to the replacement and elision of alternative ways of understanding sexuality. In the late-nineteenth century, the emerging Indian middle class—formed through the intersection of colonialism, missionary colonial Christianity, the aspiration for a democratic state and a developing capitalist economy[376]—sought to emulate colonial ideas of modernity and respectability. They, therefore, increasingly reshaped their own notions of intimacy, morality, conjugal life and gender practices to match those of their colonisers. Spurred by class dynamics and politics, the 'middle-class,' which comprised of upper-caste Hindus, high-born Muslims, wealthy Indian Christians, Sikhs and others, strove to distinguish their class-identity by mirroring colonial notions of sexual morality and echoed sentiments of shock and revulsion when discussing sexual deviance and the 'immoral' social practices of Hijra communities.[377]

The classificatory authority of the colonial matrix of power has narrowed the scope and understanding of gender. Jessica Hinchy writes of several factors that made the Hijra community an ungovernable population to the British. One such aspect was that their gender expression did not fit binary gender categories. It undermined classification and, in turn, legibility in terms of the Indian population. For instance, regarding the census of 1871 in colonial India, there were only two gender categories. While the colonial officials viewed Hijras as men, they self-identified as female, and therefore both 'male' and 'female' Hijras were recorded. In Hinduism, religious and ancient texts have several references to sexual ambiguity, androgyny and fluid gender roles. For instance, the composite androgynous form of the Ardhanarishvara (see Fig. 60) embodies both deities Shiva and his consort Parvati or Shakti, symbolising the union of the male and female principles of Purusha and Prakriti. While queer sexualities have been accorded a place in Hinduism, it is also known to be deeply patriarchal and casteist. The current moral legitimacy and hegemony of heterosexuality is a result of the complex confluent layering of colonial encounters, historical influences, multiple religious faiths and socio-cultural factors.

Several laws in India were inherited from the colonial period. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code is one such law whose formation dates back to 1861 in British ruled India. It was modelled after England's Buggery Act of 1533, which was the country's first civil sodomy law. But while homosexuality was decriminalised in Britain in the 1960s, under Section 377 in India, one could be imprisoned for ten years to life and was liable to pay a fine for "unnatural offences" that were considered "against the order of

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[376] Surinder S. Jodhka and Aseem Prakash, "The Indian Middle Class: Emerging Cultures of Politics and Economics," (KAS International Reports, 2011): 45.
[377] Jessica Hinchy, *Governing Gender and Sexuality in Colonial India: The Hijra, c.1850-1900* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 85.

nature."[378] Part of the section essentially criminalised consensual sex between adults of the same sex. The judicial action surrounding this section of the law oscillated precariously between the High court and the Supreme Court and between support and opposition. On 6th September 2018, a proud moment for our judicial system, the Indian Supreme Court deemed part of this draconian law unconstitutional, and homosexuality was finally decriminalised.

Ironically, several religious leaders from diverse faiths with chronically irreconcilable views expressed solidarity in response to the abrogation of Section 377 and stated that it was against Indian tradition, culture, scriptures and nature itself. The violent domination of heterosexual normativity pushes nonnormative sexual minorities to the fringes of society.

This homophobic and transphobic law has often been used to harass transgender people and strip them of their rights, particularly in the Hijra community. Historically and presently, Hijras are the most publicly visible queer community in India. They are MTF transsexuals, recognised by the Supreme Court as persons of the 'third gender'.[379] The Hindi/Urdu word *Hijra* refers to a 'hermaphrodite' or a castrated man or intersex or transgender people. Still, this alone would constitute a reductionist translation, as there are hosts of cultural traditions associated with the community. Known alternatively as Hijdas, Aravanis, Kinnars, Jogappas or Thirunangais, in Hindu mythology, Lord Rama is said to have granted them the power to confer blessings on auspicious occasions. Hence, their traditional occupation involves singing and dancing, usually at marriages or at the blessing of a newborn child. They receive customary gifts as well as cash for these ritual performances. However, their historical and contemporary reality differ radically from their traditional standing in the scriptures. Shunned, harassed, abused or disowned by their families and peers, they flee to Hijra communities searching for acceptance. The work of Tejal Shah reclaims such marginalised identities.

Born in 1979, Shah grew up in central India and graduated with a bachelor's degree in photography from RMIT University, Melbourne and a Master's in Fine Arts from Bard College, NY in 2008. Adopting a multi-disciplinary practice, their range of media embraces photography, performance, video, installation and sound. With a personal interest in the LGBTQ+ community, their work is primarily based on their own experiences of being queer in India. They tackle problematic assumptions of sexuality and dismantle formulaic narratives introduced, articulated, and standardised in Indian culture through art history and cinema. By employing irony, fantasy and expressing alternative desires in their work, Shah attempts to vocalise repressed and marginalised voices.

The *Hijra Fantasy series* of 2006 by Shah sheds light on culturally and chronically repressed desires; it emerged from their activist work and close association with the *Hijra* community of Bangalore and

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[378] Section 377 IPC.
[379] A landmark ruling in 2014 by the Indian Supreme Court recognized transgender peoples as the 'third gender,' thus acknowledging a separate legal category.

Mumbai. Exploring the interstitial space between binary categorical notions of gender, the series of photographs first premiered as part of the multi-media exhibition *What Are You?* in New York at the Thomas Erben Gallery in May 2006. Shah, however, was glad to have a showing in their hometown of Mumbai in September of the same year, where the photographs could be viewed in the cultural context from which they originated. **"**You Too Can Touch the Moon—Yashoda with Krishna" (Fig. 61) features a transgender named Malini and dramatises her desire to be a mother. Displaying parodic interpictoriality, the photograph draws its reference from Hindu mythology and the popular imagery of the divine mother, Yashoda with the infant Lord Krishna. Parodying a painting from the 1890s by the celebrated artist Raja Ravi Varma (see Fig. 62), the work queers a classical image of mother and child, thus displaying the OPPOSITIONAL function of irony through its **subversion** (Fig. 5). In order to establish context, let us first examine the rhetorical premise of Shah's work and the factors surrounding its production.

Born in 1848 to an aristocratic family, Ravi Varma showed a precocious talent from a young age. He learnt how to paint in the Indian tradition from a palace artist and in the oil painting technique from a visiting European artist. Ravi Varma, known as the 'Father of Modern Indian Art', is renowned for his expertise in Western academic realism that he adapted to traditional Indian themes. His work appropriated imagery from a wide variety of sources such as photographs from theatre productions and art journals from England, Germany and France; even his knowledge of human anatomy was primarily from European prints and art books.[380] He then decontextualised the imagery by using it to illustrate classical Indian mythology, history and religious stories. Thus, the figures do not necessarily resemble the temple idols fashioned as per Hindu scriptures or their sculptural traditions.

Shah elaborates on their choice of the Ravi Varma painting as a rhetoric premise for the photograph:

> The reason I choose Varma's painting as a reference point of departure is because it is an uncontested fact—and an irony of history—that the problematic utopian vision infusing these paintings became emblematic of colonial India's fraught modernity. This photo-fantasy of Malini is clearly meant to function as a perverse "queering" of Ravi Varma's mythological pictures, and of the colonial history that produced them.[381]

As Scott indicates, "An echoic mention without attendant attitude qualifies as simple allusion, homage or inter-textuality rather than irony."[382] The queering of a sanctified Indian religious painting brings about a **shift in perspective** (Fig. 5); we hear its ironic tone of voice and note the irreverence and subversion in the attitudinal change.

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[380] Partha Mitter, "Mechanical Reproduction and the World of the Colonial Artist," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 36, no. 1–2 (February 2002): 7-8.
[381] "You Too Can Touch the Moon—Yashoda with Krishna," Tejal Shah, Brooklyn Museum, accessed November 24, 2019, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/about/feminist_art_base/tejal-shah.
[382] Scott, "Picturing Irony," 52.

Several taboos surrounding sexual expression and desire in India originate from colonial rule and the laws formed to enforce Victorian ideas of sexual morality. Colonial law sought to ingrain an order of succession based on patrilineal descent and procreative sexualities. The gender-diverse identity of the Hijras and their sexual practices posed a challenge to colonial efforts. Their feminine sartorial choices, asking for alms, and their animated performances in public spaces undermined colonial efforts to discipline and spatially control them. The language of 'pollution', 'contamination', 'contagion', 'filth' and 'disease' characterises colonial accounts of Hijras and served to stigmatise and further their social exclusion.[383]

Dusky, earthly characters replace the divine, fair-skinned characters set in the landscape of Ravi Varma's portrait—Malini masquerades as Yashoda, and the young boy plays the role of Lord Krishna. Racism and Colourism, which is discrimination based on skin colour, was prevalent in British India, where lighter skin tones gained privilege in education and employment; and the caste system further reinforced its dissemination. Light skin is associated with privilege and high status, while dark skin is associated with socially and economically disadvantaged persons. The photograph features Malini commanding the child's attention as she points with outstretched arm toward a moon in the background. Bejewelled and draped in a red sari, she looks regal and performs the role of the ideal mother figure with ease. Yashoda is symbolic of the epitome of motherly love and affection, a role that mainstream society would vehemently deem unfit for a Hijra. Notions of motherhood are not trans-inclusive, and the biological determinism of the maternal instinct immediately proscribes its presence in a transwoman. Shah evokes the paradoxical hierarchies present in the intersectionality between colour, class, caste and gender in their photograph; the ironic contrast made dramatically apparent in comparison with its rhetorical premise. The ironic juxtapositioning of Malini with the character of Yashoda, the divine mother, prompts the audience to delve into the relationship between the two seemingly incongruous elements that warrant the irony. A Hijra as a mother figure to a little boy presents itself as ironic for multiple reasons. An understanding of the cultural nuances relating to Hijra communities is essential to locating ironic intent.

The significance of the castration ritual that some sects of Hijras undergo is associated with renouncing pleasure and sexuality and achieving the elevated position of a religious ascetic. This renunciation is said to imbue them with the power to confer fertility on couples seeking to conceive, thus echoing the attributes of their patron goddess *Bahuchara Mata* who is the Hindu goddess of both chastity and fertility. Most hijras are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and as castration or sex reassignment surgeries are expensive, several hijras become sex workers in order to support themselves and their transformations. Although the Supreme Court has directed the government to provide equal opportunity to Hijra communities, attempts have been tokenistic and have not manifested into tangible economic and social reforms addressing access to education, employment or healthcare, property inheritance

[383] Hinchy, *Governing Gender and Sexuality in Colonial India*, 46-50.

and adoption laws. The Transgender Persons Bill of 2019 provides a recent example where Courts have ignored bill amendments that trans communities have asked for and have retained transphobic actions like 'medical certification' to grant 'third gender' identity. Therefore, begging and sex work becomes the only available options to Hijra communities, and they are thus ironically associated with both asceticism and eroticism.

One of the pervasive colonial narratives regarding Hijras typecasts them as kidnappers of young male children and alleges that they forcibly castrated young boys and adults in order to increase their fold. Intending to reduce and eventually exterminate Hijras, the Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) of 1871 facilitated this very purpose. The law painted certain tribes and entire communities as hereditary criminals based on their religion and the history of their caste occupations. Consequently, Hijras, their livelihood, bodies, economic and domestic arrangements came under great scrutiny and policing.

The illustration of Malini's desire invalidates the colonial stereotype and **subverts** (Fig. 5) normative gender fundamentalism. Despite the noticeable studio set up—with painted backdrop, chair, drapery and carpeted ground—Shah seems to have captured a genuine moment of interaction between mother and son, which normalises an otherwise unlikely probability of a Hijra being a mother to a boy child. How strange that the gendered identity of the flesh and body that holds love for an unparented child is considered of more import than the love itself that it stores and transmits. An interesting detail is that Yashoda is not Krishna's biological mother as his birth parents had to give him up on account of his uncle, who planned to slaughter him based on a prophecy. This narrative of Yashodha as an adoptive mother presents itself as an underlying ironic congruence and adds yet another layer regarding the biological essentialism of motherhood, which is a patriarchal oppression on women in general but doubly affects transwomen such as Malini.

It is important to note that through the ironic mimesis of the Ravi Varma painting, notions of class, caste privilege as well as heteronormative gender are regrettably still present. Hutcheon flags this limitation of irony and cautions that ironising authoritative discourse runs the danger of misreading, of misapprehension in the communicative space between the ironist's intention and the interpretation of the audience.[384] Therefore, it might serve to reify the very constructs that it seeks to subvert.

Irony can be seen as **exclusionary**, limiting its performance for only those who are accustomed to it, but such an irony **includes** as well creating a collaboration, a community or complicity between the ironist and the interpreting audience.[385] This AGGREGATIVE function of irony could prove useful, especially in the context of unequal power, for instance. It could prove **inclusive** (Fig. 5) in its representation of a marginalised, underprivileged, disadvantaged cultural group and be used as a positive, effective tool for the minority who have been perennially excluded from the conversation. An

[384] Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 14-15.
[385] Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 54.

audience equipped to recognise the irony of the piece might savour a deep understanding of the layers of **subversion** or **transgression** as it destabilises heteronormative univocalism.

Viewed through the analytic lens of its irony, we encounter in one image the merged identities of mother and whore, asexual ascetic and prostitute, along with the **complex** (Fig. 5) associations between pleasure, desire, impotence and procreation. By offering alternative perceptions to the dominant narrative, irony enables us to question not just content but also helps recognise the ability of a voice or an artistic position to generate multivocal subject positions.

3.3 Curating Irony: Fred Wilson

Fred Wilson. *Mining the Museum*, 1992-1993.

Contemporary artist Fred Wilson earned his BFA at SUNY Purchase in 1976. Employed as a museum guard when he was an art student, Wilson went on to work as a freelance museum educator in the Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In the 1980s, the postcolonial critique of museums led to the rise of New Museology, resulting in greater awareness of the social and political role of the museum. The privileging of the history of certain social groups and the exclusivity of collections were examined. Reflecting the concerns of his time, in 1987, Wilson used his intimate knowledge of the inner workings of museums to experiment with an unusual curatorial practice for an exhibition called *Rooms with a View: The Struggle between Culture, Content, and the Context of Art*, which presaged the work that he has come to be known for. Experimenting with the works of thirty multi-ethnic contemporary artists living in New York City, he designed the gallery space to simulate a minimalist 'white cube' contemporary art space, a Victorian-inspired salon space with ornate isolated pedestals and an ethnographic museum space where objects were grouped and labelled, identifying the artwork's medium but not its maker. Placing the works within these three premeditated sections, Wilson relates that "Depending on the room, the art looked and felt either cold and calculated, or authoritative and valuable, or exotic and foreign."[386] This was a turning point in his artistic trajectory when he went from making monumental, outdoor sculptures to creating what he describes as "faux museum installations," which focussed on the effects of display strategies and the politics of museum culture.

Born in the Bronx to a Caribbean Indian mother and an African American father, Wilson credits the influence of his parents and his mixed ancestry in the development of his artistic practice. Living and working in New York, he uses the museum as raw material for his installations to encourage critical

[386] Leslie King-Hammond, "A Conversation with Fred Wilson," in *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, ed. Lisa G. Corrin (New York: New Press), 31.

dialogue that interrogates the inherently colonial environment of the museum and its relationship with people of colour. Satire and irony thrive in his clever juxtapositions and staged narratives.

The Contemporary, an innovative museum of a peripatetic nature, based in Baltimore, Maryland, collaborated with Wilson to create *Mining the Museum*. When asked to choose to work with a collection in any institution, Wilson picked the Maryland Historical Society, and the exhibition was presented from April 1992 to February 1993. These two cultural institutions of Baltimore, antithetical in the most obvious way—one the oldest most traditional iteration of the museum in Baltimore and the other, a new and experimental one—worked in collaboration with the artist to realise not only an overwhelming response from the community but also a perspectival transformation of the role of museums in interpreting histories and representing cultures.

Wilson's 'mining' of the museum involved the intensive browsing, excavation and examination of the extensive archival collection of the Maryland Historical Society, which subsequently led to the unearthing of narratives and objects that had been marginalised or routinely repressed by the museum for their controversial nature. Delving also into the history of the institution and its community, Wilson shaped his approach to highlight minority histories hitherto rendered invisible. The collections of the Maryland Historical Society, similar to the American nation's other early historical societies established soon after the American Revolution, were amassed by amateur naturalists and historians from affluent families with the narrative focussed on honouring Maryland's patriots, statesmen, military heroes and its cultural elite. As curator Lisa G. Corrin notes, portraits of these prominent personalities, their diaries and maps along with Greek vases, models of ships, seashells and other phenomena of the natural world, reflected "a "gentleman's" interests of the antebellum era."[387] Painfully apparent were the largely inadequate references to African American experience with all but two vitrines dedicated to jazz pianist and composer Eubie Blake. With no references to the significant impact of the civil rights riots on the city of Baltimore, information on native populations and slavery featured deficiently in a teaching section.[388]

Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal writes that "museums belong to an era of scientific and colonial ambition."[389] With a majority of its collection forged through colonial ventures and territorial conquest, she identifies the institution's unease in staying relevant in a postcolonial era and its anxiety to preserve itself, leading inevitably to its ironic status as a "metamuseum." Bal writes, "The double function of the museum as display of its own status and history (its meta- function), as well as of its enduring cognitive educational vocation (its object-function), requires the absorption *in the display* of that critical consciousness."[390] Toward the end of the 1980s, the discourse of New Museology raised deliberations around the acquisition of material objects, their interpretation and the prevailing modes of presentation,

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[387] Lisa G. Corrin, "Mining the Museum: Artists Look at Museums, Museums Look at Themselves," in *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, ed. Lisa G. Corrin (New York: New Press), 11.
[388] Corrin, "Mining the Museum," 12.
[389] Bal, Mieke, "Telling, Showing, Showing Off," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 3 (1992): 560.
[390] Bal, "Telling, Showing," 562.

which often exclusively reflected the interests of particular social and racial groups. The role of the museum in society, its presumed neutrality and its status as an authoritative cultural institution were critiqued and challenged. The museum was thus pressured to engage in critical reflection, to acknowledge and reflect on its ideological position and the problematic foundations of its colonial past.

Wilson embarked on a collaboration with The Maryland Historical Society, which would ultimately deconstruct the ideological edifice of the museum. On his choice of the museum in Maryland, Wilson paradoxically states that "It was the perfect kind of museum for me to work with because it was so antithetical to my desires for museums."[391] He found himself feeling alienated amongst the many very "American" objects and used this feeling to propel and shape his artistic response. The ground rules of the agreement between the artist and the institution required the museum to grant the artist full access and relinquish its power and vision for its own collections to accommodate Wilson's requests. Wilson became a member of the project staff, shifting between multiple roles as archivist, trustee and curator.[392] His unfettered 'mining' led to an almost year-long exploration of the institution's archives and basement, which unearthed objects that had either been forgotten by the museum or ones that it wished to forget about, such as a Ku Klux Klan hood and slave shackles.

The audience at the museum first encounter a video playing in the lobby featuring a dreamlike sequence of Wilson at the museum, which he states is a place "where anything can happen."[393] In the video, he narrates a dream that occurred to him the previous night where he envisions the collections of the Maryland Historical Society, but with a difference. Wilson comically gazes in contemplation at the paintings and runs about the museum as if in confusion; this pose of naiveté is a feature that characterises an ironist. While denying competence and knowledge, he uses **self-deprecation**, making himself a victim of his own irony, as his voice urges the audience to expect the unexpected, to think and to feel.[394] Stringfellow writes about the self-directed quality of irony and the 'unknowingness' that affords the ironist defence against a counterattack. Wilson's **self-deprecating irony** (Fig. 5) could have been used defensively to protect his presence as a person of a colour directing the audience in a chiefly Eurocentric institution, thus performing the SELF-PROTECTIVE function of irony. I read into this a little differently however, I believe Wilson's unflattering representation of 'inexperience' also allowed him to align himself with the layman visitor or even the regular museum-goer who might be 'unaware' of the bias embedded into collections and their patterns of display, or their own for that matter. The posed confusion and contemplation helps to alert the visitor to the possibility of questioning the status quo, while the comicality serves to de-sanctify the authority of the museum environment to facilitate and set the stage for such an intervention.

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[391] King-Hammond, "A Conversation with Fred Wilson," 32.
[392] Corrin, "Mining the Museum," 12.
[393] Corrin, "Mining the Museum," 13.
[394] Stringfellow Jr., *The Meaning of Irony*, 20-1.

Wilson envisions the video as a mediating device, to clarify to the public that this was *his* vision of the museum and also, so they might strategically recognise that he was a person of colour, in an institution with a historically exclusive Eurocentric bias, visible not only through its collections but in its administration as well.[395] The comical format also contrasts with the solemnity of the museum space and primes the visitor (before the exhibition on the third floor) to guess that something unusual was happening at the traditional site. A sudden departure from the expected provides clues to the detection of irony.

> The use of irony as a tool in exhibition praxis promises to temper the inclination to be overly constructive (metaphor), overly reductive (metonymy), or overly simplistic (synecdoche). Ironic representations in museums, as some suggest, may recognize the intrinsic differences and contradictions which compromise their own positions.[396]

A large part of the irony in Wilson's work stems from strategically locating his critique of the politics of museum culture within the very same site of the historical museum. The irony is further amplified as he uses its historic collections as his palette of ready-mades, with stylistic influence taken from the museum's conventional methods of display. Wilson's considerable experience in curation and working in museums complements his artistic practice. Wilson argues for the significant distinction between his installations being perceived as art rather than as a traditionally curated exhibition:

> Having worked as both a curator and an artist, there is a big difference between the two. With curating, the whole notion of irony is not involved, often for good reason—because the public in the museum space often expects some form of universal truth or knowledge, a notion I hold suspect.[397]

Using the traditional tools of curation to create his **subversive** installations, he provokes the customarily passive observers at a museum, persuading them to interrogate the veracity of truth-narratives dispersed via the authority of the institution.

Dividing the third floor of the museum into sections broadly based on themes, Wilson labels areas as "Metalwork 1793-1880," "Modes of Transport 1770-1910" and "Cabinetmaking 1820-1960," mirroring the clinical compartmentalisation of museums and keeping to the temporal dictates of chronology in his labelling. However, the exhibits display anything but a sanitised denial of history; for example, the display innocently labelled "Metalwork 1793-1880" contains the striking juxtaposition of antique silver hollowware with iron slave shackles (see Fig. 63). A towering collection of gleaming pitchers, cups and chalices evoking an almost sacramental Christian aesthetic surround the lone prostrate pair of rusty manacles. The intricately patterned Baltimore repoussé speaks of a lifestyle of luxury, but the ironic presence of the shackles speaks to the fact that the air of opulence was firmly tied and dependent on servitude and enslavement.

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[395] "Artist Fred Wilson in Conversation with Curator-In-Residence George Ciscle," Maryland Institute College of Art, May 19, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSKTbwYVM6g.
[396] Bettina Messias Carbonell, *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, 2nd ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 9.
[397] Buskirk and Nixon, *The Duchamp Effect*, 187.

The logic of Wilson's unusual taxonomical arrangements foreground narratives that are usually hidden in plain sight. Both types of objects, contrasting highly through their surface textures—ornate and unadorned, lustrous and corroded—fit neatly under the thematic of "Metalwork." American historian Ira Berlin astutely observes that "The fine silver vessels are as much artifacts of the African-American experience as they are of the European-American one, and the shackle is as much a part of the European-American story as it is a part of the African-American one."[398] Within a traditional pattern of arrangement in the museum, the history of the silverware would be tamed by its categorical separation from the shackles; the degree of the coalescing histories of the objects are revealed through their joint occupation of the display. "…those who possess both power and the categorial eye… attempt to split… for the purposes of control," writes Lugones.[399] The ironic grouping of the objects follows curdled logic; the intertwining of classes of people and their histories urge the audiences to make connections between seemingly unrelated objects, ultimately pushing toward a more transparent understanding of social realities.

The rooms, roughly themed, also exhibited an emotional sequence through their coloured walls in impersonal greys, imperial greens and violent reds. In the first room, the visitors are confronted with a silver-plated copper trophy in the form of a globe, with the word "TRUTH" emblazoned in brass capital letters over the polished sphere (see Fig. 64). Standing tall on an acrylic mount, it is flanked by three pedestals each on either side (see Fig. 65). Two classic fluted Doric column plinths feature amongst the group to its left, with busts of Henry Clay, Napoleon Bonaparte and Andrew Jackson. This group of white pedestals and busts is in prominent contrast to the other assembly of black pedestals that remain unoccupied, bearing only brass nameplates of Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass and Benjamin Banneker. These leading abolitionists were not only prominent African American figures, but their accomplishments should have also ideally stirred local pride as Marylanders; however, their presences remained conspicuously unacknowledged at the local museum.[400] They are invoked by the nameplate, but their absence underscores their erasure. Wilson's installation gets us to question the politics and significance of what gets left out of collections as well as what is put in. The supposed neutrality of the institution's comprehensive epistemic dispersal is challenged.

The arrangement reveals the importance that history has exclusively accorded to the men animated in marble busts, while black history remains "uncollected" and invisible. While the three remarkable personalities are ironic in their absence on the display pedestals, the presence and central positioning of the Truth Trophy augments the **satirical** (Fig. 5) mood. The trophy, as Wilson's label implies, "Truth Trophy awarded until 1922 for Truth in Advertising," is self-explanatory, which is ironic in itself, considering the advertising industry's historic manipulation of "truth." First awarded in 1913 to the

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[398] Ira Berlin, "Mining the Museum and the Rethinking of Maryland's History," in *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, ed. Lisa G. Corrin (New York: New Press), 44-5.
[399] Lugones, *Pilgrimages/ Peregrinajes*, 101.
[400] The last section of the exhibition, dedicated to the eighteenth-century astronomer and mathematician Benjamin Banneker, displayed a collection of his journals that were buried in the archives of the Historical Society.

Advertising Men's League of New York, the trophy now stands in as a "sardonic welcome to an exhibit in which truth, universal truth, is at best contested terrain."[401] Through the arrangement of objects whose presences (and absences) inform each other, the conventional historical commemoration of a singular truth is exposed.

Roughly congruent to the thematic of advertising, the next installation displays carved wooden figures of Cigar Store Indians that were used by tobacconists as early as the seventeenth century to advertise their business (see Fig. 66). These large commercial figures in elaborate feathered headdresses display exoticised elements and hold out rolled cigars. They functioned as strong visual symbols of the trade, while authenticity, in terms of Native American features, was a trivial concern with most carvers. In the grey room displaying Native American heritage, we see a display of these typecast life-size portrayals unexpectedly positioned with their backs turned to the visitors. Their ironic non-display is subtly metaphorical; by denying the audience access to identification, the stereotype is deprived of the power to control otherness.

Further elevated by their pedestal bases measuring a total height of approximately six feet, the figures turn their gaze toward a wall that is mounted with black and white photographs of "real" Native American Marylanders. Wilson's label "Portraits of Cigar Store Owners," tells us that the presence of the carved figures reveal more about the **offensive** (Fig. 5) stereotypical notions held by their owners *about* Native Americans than the indigenous tribes themselves. Wilson's research even revealed, somewhat ironically, that one of the Cigar Store Indians was made in the likeness of the daughter of the carver, John Philip Yeager, who was a German immigrant. We see both resistant denial and revelation in this usage of irony via confronting arrangements, juxtaposition and even in Wilson's fictional labelling of one of the Cigar store Indians, as "Portrait of John Philip Yeager's Daughter."

Traditional presentations at museums employ glass vitrines, theatrical lighting effects, coloured walls, text panels, pedestals and acrylic mounts. Inscribed within the presentation of the artefact, specimen or artwork—its location within the museum, the design of its display and its categorical organisation within bodies of material—are cues that can be picked up by a visitor and tend to structure the historical narrative surrounding the material object. The design and layout of the arrangement of objects transfer meaning and guide the museum visitor to interpret the objects or cultures on display. Museum displays often function as information centres that provide windows into the past and distant 'exotic' lands. Wilson's installation provides insight into the perceptually subtle but massive subliminal impact of display techniques on how objects or cultures are interpreted or received. Visual regimes are constructed through representations of our natural environment and cultural histories, which tend to shape our views of the world and our sense of reality.

The 'othering' of non-Western cultures is apparent in the museum via the distortion of a colonial lens, where native objects are organised by Western knowledge. With their original contexts or functions

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[401] Berlin, "Mining the Museum and the Rethinking of Maryland's History," 35.

disregarded, as Indian historian Gyan Prakash keenly observes, the Western museum's "accumulations of otherness produce cultural difference, but disguise them as pre-existing cultural diversity."[402] In the room devoted to Native American history, a vitrine filled with stone arrowheads demonstrates Wilson's critique of the museum's compulsive accumulation and display of otherness that negates the object's context or significance. The arrowheads are arranged so as to draw attention to their inscribed acquisition numbers, black letters on a strip of white contrasting against the dark stones. The numerals, which are typically meant to be unobtrusive to viewing the object, are positioned to be on full display. Wilson labels them "Collection of Numbers 76.1.25.3-76.1.67.11;" (Fig. 67), and completely circumventing the medium of the object; he adds the medium of the inscriptions themselves, 'White drawing ink, black India ink, lacquer.' By injecting irony into the semantics of conventional museum labelling, the inverted hierarchy draws attention to the museum's practice of devoting more value to the cataloguing, quantification and archival labelling of objects rather than the native communities they are supposed to represent. The ironic labels and juxtapositions re-address our perception and interpretation of the cultures on display, simultaneously deepening our understanding of the cognitive effects of the nuances of display strategies and selection processes underpinning the items in the collection.

Another vitrine in the room displays miscellaneous items from the Historical Society's collection, such as additional arrowheads, axes, an oyster shell tool, a model of a canoe and images of Native Indians riding canoes. This scant collection of objects were the sum total of the items from the permanent collection of the Historical Society that were representative of Native American culture. On the positioning and re-presentation of 'exotic' artefacts and cultures, Prakash writes:

> Rescued from history and authorized as authentic remains, they become collections-in-order that represent other cultures as integrated wholes, unaffected by the structure of power that collects and exhibits them… Encased and exhibited in separate halls devoted to a slice of time or to a part of the history of Man, discrepant histories are entombed as tradition, continuity, essence.[403]

The objects from the collection display Native American culture as frozen in time, and the contributions of Native American descendants to the history of Maryland, remain occluded and unworthy of consideration.

The significant performance piece by Payómkawichum, Ipai, and Mexican American performance artist James Luna (1950–2018), titled *Artifact Piece*, 1987 (Fig. 68), similarly addresses the museum's perpetuation of the idea of Native American culture as static and unchanging, with its peoples extinct and fixed in a romanticised past. Installed in a section of Museum of Man, San Diego representing Kumeyaay Indians, Luna's living breathing body, lying still on a bed of sand encased in a glass vitrine, ironises this notion. Dressed in just a leather loincloth, Luna further objectifies himself by mimicking the museum's labelling conventions and has placards positioned around him, that amongst other things, reveal intimate details about burns, scars and callouses on his body associated with "excessive

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[402] Gyan Prakash, "Museum Matters," in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, 2nd ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 318.
[403] Prakash, "Museum Matters," 318.

drinking" and a failed marriage.[404] Elements of humour, vulnerability, irony, and critical insight function alongside. Luna says, "I think we Indians live in worlds filled with irony and I want to relate that in my works."[405] Posing as an 'extinct' ethnographic specimen, his living body ironically and literally presents to us the corporeal experience of being 'encased' in posthumous memory by a dominant culture that denies Native American presence in its contemporary society.

Like Luna, Wilson's imitation of museum display strategies is ostensible in his mimicry of the museum environment, its spatial arrangements, categorisations and display techniques. Wilson terms the use of this technique as "trompe l'oeil curating." Used in the context of painting, "trompe l'oeil" is a French term that means to "deceive the eye" by achieving visual verisimilitude.[406] The ironic details are apparent in the subtle manipulations to these particulars, which serve to expose and **subvert** institutional bias while simultaneously encouraging a more engaged and conscious viewing from the museum's audience.

American art critic, Hal Foster, is wary of art that engages with institutional critique, especially when it manifests as site-specific work inside the institution. He writes, "site-specific work often seems a museum event in which the institution *imports* critique, whether as a show of tolerance or for the purpose of inoculation (against a critique undertaken by the institution, within the institution)."[407] He elaborates on his concerns:

> the ambiguity of deconstructive positioning, at once inside and outside the institution, can lapse into the duplicity of cynical reason in which the artist and the institution have it both ways – retain the social status of art and entertain the moral purity of critique, one a complement or compensation for the other.[408]

Foster worries that this ethnographic approach by the artist who the museum commissions could lead to a more insulated and narcissistic institution that denies true access to the public. He mentions examples of collaborative site-specific work where communities were involved disingenuously. His hesitations are valid and such projects saturated with irony could potentially also suffer the pitfalls of a reversed hierarchy—the artist now replacing the museum as a cultural authority.

Delving into the details of Wilson's artistic practice helps alleviate such reservations. Writing on his process, Wilson elaborates on the centrality of community involvement in his project:

> I don't just come into a community and say, "There it is. Now you have to figure it out." Sometimes it just doesn't translate…The meaning changes depending on the environment where it is located. The context is critical… It is extremely important that I know where people are coming from so that I don't make vast assumptions. I want people to get involved in a work that is very important to that community…In *Mining the Museum* what made it important is that my project was not only about the artworks on the wall. It

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[404] Jane Blocker, "Failures of Self-Seeing: James Luna Remembers Dino," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 23, no. 1 (2001): 21.
[405] Quoted in *The Trickster Shift* by Allan J. Ryan, 8n.
[406] In painting, the technique refers to the precise imitation of an object so as to create an optical illusion of three-dimensional reality on the flat surface of a canvas.
[407] Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century* (MIT Press, 1996), 191.
[408] Foster, *The Return of the Real*, 196.

> was about how the whole museum environment affects us. If no dialogue arises, then to me the work is not so successful. [409]

Wilson's background of working in the educational wing of community centres and teaching for community programs at museums has filtered through into his artistic practice and serves to bring about genuine community engagement. There is a sense of activism in revealing the perpetuation of institutional bias, and the ideological prejudice unconsciously conveyed through the techniques of exhibition and display. Adding sound, projections, unusual labelling and innovatively juxtaposed non-traditional combinations of objects, Wilson's installation inspires dialogue and **complex** readings. Even his labels do not plainly communicate 'facts' or information like the customary didactic label at the museum but also leave room for multiple ways of understanding, encouraging self-reflexivity.[410] Of the Maryland Historical Society, Wilson says, "I think there was a certain naiveté about what I might do. They hadn't ever worked with a contemporary artist, but they really wanted something to happen. They wanted to change something."[411] The ironic force of utilising the museum as the site of its own critique and intervention makes it that much more effective. Delivering a powerful decolonial statement from within the core of an imperial/colonial institution produced a resonance that it is unlikely to have had if the intervention was undertaken outside of it.

Wilson's extensive research literally vocalises lost histories and retrieves obscured identities within another room. The paintings are dimly lit and predominantly feature aristocratic families. Spotlights and sound effects are connected to timers to selectively illuminate the African American children composed unobtrusively into the paintings, who commonly featured as compositional counterpoints in classical group portraiture.[412] In the portrait of the son of a Maryland planter, Henry Darnall III as a young child of eight (Fig. 69), the spotlight is positioned on an enslaved boy who gazes up at his master. With a metal collar around his neck, the audio loop animates him as he asks, "Am I your brother? Am I your friend? Am I your pet?" The inconspicuous and incidental presence of the enslaved children takes centre-stage with their voices and stories being recovered and articulated. Structures of inversion are adopted to highlight marginalised narratives, while a shift in focus is affected by replacing certain titles to centre the identities of the enslaved peoples in the paintings, thus unveiling them from their customary anonymity. Several of these identities were recovered from a plantation's inventory book that Wilson found in the museum's collection. The names of slaves were listed alongside cattle and poultry, lumped together as mere business capital.[413]

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[409] King-Hammond, "A Conversation with Fred Wilson," 33.
[410] One could draw a parallel to Magritte's *Treachery of Images* to see that Wilson points to the treachery of labelling—the danger of relying on a label's clinical transmission of 'fact.' We are alerted to this, for instance, by the positioning of the slave shackles under the label of "Metalwork," which implies what it literally is, but also clearly isn't.
[411] King-Hammond, "A Conversation with Fred Wilson," 32.
[412] Corrin, "Mining the Museum," 14.
[413] The inventory book featured in the exhibition, is strategically and symbolically laid open in a glass vitrine beneath a replica of a slave ship.

Wilson continues to apply his 'curdled' logic to manipulate conventional museum categories in "Modes of Transport" (see Fig. 70). In the room painted a colonial green, the model of the slave ship is juxtaposed with a sedan chair used by a governor of Maryland. A painting nearby animates the use of a similar chair. Wilson uses selective lighting on the painting to mark who carried whom in the extravagant chair.[414] Two antique baby carriages are displayed near the sedan chair while one of them, a black metal pram with a black leather pull-up hood, conspicuously cradles a white muslin Ku Klux Klan hood amongst its linens. The uncanny presence of the Klan hood in the pram creates a distinct sense of unease (see Fig. 71). As Freud explains it, a feeling of the uncanny actually stems from something familiar which has been repressed.[415] The repression of the trauma and adult savagery associated with the Klan hood makes its ironic conjunction alongside the innocent linens of a baby's pram **offensive** (Fig. 5) and almost unbearable. Wilson's irony functions noticeably as OPPOSITIONAL and ASSAILING. While Freud notes the 'uneasiness' associated with the uncanny, Shklovsky positions this as something to aspire to, where the familiar is made strange, enabling a new way of perceiving. This novel perception unravels our conditioning, thus making room for alternative patterns of cognition. By effecting displacement through a collocation of unusual categories, the frightening transformation in the baby carriage confronts us with the socio-cultural implications of the dissimilar components of the uncanny arrangement.

A photograph nearby shows black nannies caring for their white children, posing beside a comparable pram. We are gently led to 'read' into the significance of these series of confrontational arrangements that by virtue of their juxtapositional ironies, interact with each other's contexts, thereby producing meaning. We infer the tragic irony that the "black nannies pushing similar prams" are in effect "rearing their future oppressors."[416] The ironic presence of an object can completely change the context of a viewing, provoking us to question how these objects might relate beyond the confines of existing categories. The painting, the sedan chair and the prams that might have otherwise been viewed with a purely aesthetic lens are ironically charged by the presence of the model slave ship and Klan hood, as well as Wilson's use of strategic lighting and his caustic mimicry of the museum's methodical labelling. The layers of subversion manifest through the manipulation of these multiple display techniques.

The deep red of another room, symbolic of the brutality of the history of slavery, offsets the violence of a large punt gun (see Fig. 72) positioned to target the toy figure of a black soldier in a Zouave uniform. Enormous decoy ducks dwarf the figure, while enlarged broadsides plastered around the boundary of the room advertise printed information regarding runaway slaves and bounties for their return. The consequences of their physical ill-treatment formed their marks of identification specified on the advertisements. Positioned beside a broadside offering a reward for Easter, a runaway slave, Wilson

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[414] Corrin, "Mining the Museum," 15.
[415] The Klan hood was incidentally "repressed" within the museum's collections. Although documented in the registrar's files, the staff had been unable to locate it and found it by accident while looking for something else during Wilson's 'mining' of the collections. Corrin, "Mining the Museum," 21.
[416] Corrin, "Mining the Museum," 15.

places a cast-iron bootjack from the Victorian era (see Fig. 73) moulded as a black woman lying on her back, with legs splayed. Used to remove and scrape dirty boots, the vulgarity of the correlation between its form and function is allegorical of the sexual and racial violence endured by enslaved peoples under the literal and figurative heel of their masters. Just above the broadside and the bootjack, sealing the association is a watercolour of female slaves toiling in the fields, while an overseer, a white man wearing boots, watches over them with whip in hand. Wilson's deliberate setting up of seemingly coincidental associations between the objects allude clearly to the brutality of enslavement.

In the same room, four plush Victorian chairs, some upholstered with rich brocade, form an arc surrounding an austere cruciform-like wooden whipping post, which is raised on a platform (see Fig. 74).[417] This section, ironically labelled "Cabinet Making 1820-1960," highlights the medium of the objects, relegating them nonchalantly to the category of furniture. Interestingly, this injection of irony in the labelling and juxtapositioning of objects was not exclusively shaped by Wilson without influence. Unfortunately, it was reflected in the problematic way in which the classificatory system of the museum qualified the whipping post to be stored for several years alongside fine antique cabinets.[418] The aestheticisation of the object represses the corporeal torture residing not just in its history but also, quite possibly, in the subtle marking of its wood. With this installation, we again experience a feeling of the uncanny where the repressed associations of torture surface while the voyeuristic chairs make the 'spectacle' of suffering more perverse.

Other subsequent sections of the show display slave rebellions and shed light on a unique Maryland (legislatively supported) response of physically removing former slaves from the state to settle instead in Liberia. This was despite strong opposition from black people. Only one of the Liberian objects made by enslaved African Americans had been exhibited prior to *Mining the Museum*. Wilson had stumbled upon the objects by chance and discovered that they had passed into the collection due to the Historical Society's ties to the Colonization Society, which was responsible for removing former slaves to the new settlement in Liberia.[419]

The powerful source of Wilson's irony comes from his clever juxtaposition of the symbolic weight of objects. The ironic tension creates difficult but necessary dialogue by confronting the unpleasant aspects of the object's history and encouraging an alternative mapping of what is considered as 'historical fact' by considering new perspectives. When Burke discusses the 'literal' or 'realistic' application of the trope of irony, he suggests that "for irony we could substitute *dialectic*."[420] Broadly speaking, dialectics may be defined as an enquiry into the existence of conflicting opinions and their possible resolution. Ultimately, dialectic encourages an interaction of perspectives, all of which

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[417] Lashings at the whipping post of the Baltimore City Jail were endured until the 1950s, not just by African slaves but also free people, as Maryland's legal code made even petty crimes punishable by the lash.
[418] Corrin, "Mining the Museum," 16.
[419] Corrin, "Mining the Museum," 17.
[420] The word dialectic, like irony, has also had multiple formulations of meaning. It is of Greek origin and is delineated in Plato's writings as a medium for the truth, determined through discourse, steered by rational arguments.

contribute to the resultant resolution; Burke concludes that irony can be seen as a dialogical medium for constructing an inter-subjective truth or "a perspective of perspectives."[421] As it manifests in Wilson's installations, irony works as a catalyst for the perception of multiple viewpoints and affords increased transparency in the interaction between objects. For example, in the case of the Baltimore silverware and the slave shackles, rather than the objects surrendering to the forces of a singular history of either extravagance or oppression, it is made clear that these narratives are intimately entangled, that the labour and bondage of one class sustained the other. Burke elaborates on this polyvocal ability of irony:

> Irony arises when one tries, by the interaction of terms upon one another, to produce a development which uses all the terms. Hence, from the standpoint of this total form (this "perspective of perspectives"), none of the participating "sub-perspectives" can be treated as either precisely right or precisely wrong. They are all voices, or personalities, or positions, integrally affecting one another.[422]

While Wilson uses irony to produce harsh critique, it is imperative to note the ameliorative nature of his work that tackles a side of history left unaddressed and buried by the weight and violence of a singular narrative. The DISTANCING function of irony is stimulated as Wilson induces **new perspectives** (Fig. 5) through his creative and strategic juxtapositions that expose the discourse of power embedded in the museum's display strategies. Citing Wilson, art historian Leslie King-Hammond writes that the urge for this new language stemmed from "a desire to heal himself and to heal the rifts between the museum and people of colour in this country."[423] Ignoring or denying the truth of African American and Native American experience has resulted in the disenfranchisement of these communities. By acknowledging and recognising marginalised histories, however inconvenient or uncomfortable, Wilson takes a step toward this 'healing.'

> By choosing to do little, interpretatively, with art, you end up doing a lot to preserve existing ideologies and master narratives, so long in place that we barely notice them. And so, in a professedly agenda-free situation, a museum can talk about exploration without mentioning exploitation, address the theme of leisure without bringing servitude into question… The issue here is not one of political opinion, right or wrong, but of full disclosure, of making the mechanics of persuasion operating in a museum—any and every museum—transparent.[424]

Alison Bailey, in her essay on "Strategic Ignorance" (2007), writes that epistemologies of ignorance are often "an active social production."[425] She continues to argue that while the word "ignorance" typically suggests an accidental omission, ignorance from positions of power, however, "can take the form of those in the center either refusing to allow those at the margins to know, or of actively erasing indigenous knowledges," or more subtly seen, in the prevalence of "epistemic blank spots that make privileged knowers oblivious to systemic injustices."[426] Bailey's writing was inspired by Jamaican

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[421] Burke, "Four Master Tropes," 432.
[422] Burke, "Four Master Tropes," 432.
[423] King-Hammond, "A Conversation with Fred Wilson," 23.
[424] Quoted by William H. Truettner in the essay "Museums and Historical Amnesia," in *Museums and Difference*, ed. Daniel J. Sherman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 361. Originally taken from the article "A Bounty in Salem from Globe-Trotters" by Holland Cotter in the New York Times, 1 August 2003.
[425] Alison Bailey, "Strategic Ignorance," in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, eds. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 77.
[426] Bailey, "Strategic Ignorance," 77.

philosopher Charles W. Mills's essay "The Racial Contract" (1997). Deconstructing the model of the social contract, originating in the Age of Enlightenment, Mills reveals the racial lines on which it is drawn to clearly support white supremacy. Mills writes:

> the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made.[427]

Mills envisages it as an "agreement to misinterpret the world… but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority, whether religious or secular."[428] With regard to the museum, however, an omission may not always be a conscious decision but is conceivably due to the fact that the museum's collections bear a strong trace of the socio-political and cultural values upheld by the institution and society at the time of their acquisition. "There is a lot of unconscious denial in art museums… I don't go in looking for racism. I go towards the denial," Wilson clarifies.[429]

The epistemic asymmetry of the cultures then represented at The Maryland Historical Society tacitly presupposes an officially sanctioned view of historical reality. The omission to address the horrors of slavery and America's racist past on the part of the Western museum has been critiqued extensively. This unconscious or cultivated ignorance of the effects of racial, colonial domination no doubt emerges from the pressures to preserve a sense of historic and patriotic pride. The disruption that an inconvenient truth would cause breeds the reluctance to address race, gender and class-based ignorance. By suppressing marginalised histories and presenting a partial truth, the museum perpetuates racial hierarchy and is made complicit through its omission. Paradoxically, the exhuming of problematic objects such as the shackles and hood, which underscore the horrors of slavery and white supremacy, along with the particular nature of their ironic reveal, could also bring cathartic value to the table. With regard to the role of irony in oppressed systems, scholar Katharina Barbe writes, "The populace requires an outlet for the frustrations induced under an oppressed regime. In this regard, irony acts as a vent for frustrations when critical political comments are not permitted."[430] I would argue though, that the nature of Wilson's outlet does not take the form of a burst of frustration but instead, through calculated, thought-provoking, non-didactic incongruous juxtapositions, he tackles difficult, unspoken and pervasive issues, addressing grievances in order to heal.

King-Hammond situates Wilson's socio-historical background at the heart of his impulse in creating his radical intervention *Mining the Museum*, she writes, "Growing up as a child of mixed ancestry in the midst of the movement toward racial integration gave him a perspective on American culture and the

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[427] Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 18.
[428] Mills, *The Racial Contract*, 18.
[429] Robert Enright and Meeka Walsh, "Degrees of Subversion: An Interview with Fred Wilson," *BorderCrossings*, March 2016,
https://bordercrossingsmag.com/article/degrees-of-subversion.
[430] Katharina Barbe, *Irony in Context*, (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1995), 98.

American museum that is crucial to our understanding of his work."[431] Through both subtle displacement and jarring juxtapositions, Wilson's use of irony brings to light the contradictions inherent in the logic of categorisation and reveals the politics of visibility and invisibility inscribed in the repository of the museum's artefacts. The irony animates the object by raising conversations around it about the history of its making, its existence, and ownership but upsets the linear, 'sanitised for viewing' Eurocentric historical narrative that is characteristically presented at American institutions. Wilson's strategic juxtapositioning liberates powerful narratives of occluded histories that have been routinely glossed over, thus performing irony's **inclusionary** AGGREGATIVE function. The sanctity of the museum and the undisputed authority of its epistemic omniscience is disturbed through the contextual interaction between seemingly disparate objects. This new sensation, novel to the traditional museum environment, provokes active engagement and circumvents a didactic tone, urging visitors to analyse and re-evaluate their own assumptions and biases.

3.4 Performing Irony: Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña

Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña. *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West*, 1992-1993.

In *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (1999), Ryan writes of an interview with American scholar Joseph Epes Brown, in which the latter describes the role of the traditional Native American clown. Brown says that this earthly counterpart of the legendary Trickster figure performs ritual clowning and repeatedly and creatively opens doors to a new perspective leading to an alternate realm of reality. He achieves this chiefly by two means:

> There is first of all the element of shock. [Sacred] clowns among the Pueblos [of the American Southwest], for example, in the context of their ritual dance dramas, engage in, among other activities, sexual types of display which normally are quite taboo in such societies, and this causes a rupture with the ordinary everyday pattern of life. It does that by immediately catching the attention; it helps the people forget their petty little concerns about the routines of daily life. It shocks them out of that. Secondly, once that awareness, that alertness and openness, has been achieved through the initial shock, then it is possible to communicate on another level through the use of humour …
>
> I see it as a technique to translate the formal rite or to break through it into an area of deeper meaning and deeper awareness on the part of the participant. It is you might say a shattering of the structure of the rite in order to get at the essence of the rite. It seems to ridicule, thus destroy, but it does this so that deeper truths contained within the rite can come forth and reveal themselves.[432]

Barbara Babcock confirms Brown's thoughts, affirming that the sacred clown "creates a reflexive and ironic dialogue, [and] an open space of questioning."[433] This liminal space holding possibilities for dialogic encounters encourages polyphonous voices. A collaborative performance piece from 1992

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[431] King-Hammond, "A Conversation with Fred Wilson," 23.
[432] Brown is quoted in *The Trickster Shift* by Allan J. Ryan, 10-11.
[433] Babcock quoted in *The Trickster Shift*, 11.

titled *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (Fig. 75) performed by Cuban American interdisciplinary artist, writer and curator Coco Fusco, in collaboration with Chicano performance artist, activist and writer Guillermo Gómez-Peña, embodies many of these elements in its public performance of irony. A **satirical** sociocultural commentary on the deplorable practice of human zoos, the performance combines ritual, humour and the ASSAILING function of irony (Fig. 5).

Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West was performed as part of the exhibition *The Year of the White Bear* (1992-1993), which explored and critiqued over five hundred years of coloniser-centric representations of the 'discovery' of the Americas. The piece was staged in several different locations across America as well as internationally. Drawing on the history of human zoos, an odious phenomenon of European racism, Fusco and Gómez-Peña presented themselves in a locked cage for public display. The performance piece was staged in public venues, including plaza's, public gardens and museums as well. Posing as volunteer specimens of aboriginal inhabitants from the fictional island of Guatinau, a previously undiscovered and uncolonised realm in the Gulf of Mexico, Fusco and Gómez-Peña supplemented their performance with imaginative fabricated texts, informational plaques and even fictitious maps that located the island geographically to reify the reality or authenticity of their existence to the public.

Adorned with face and body paint, an animal tooth necklace, shell adornments, a leopard-skin printed bikini top and a raffia fibre skirt, Fusco, adequately looking the stereotypical part of the exotic native Other also dons sunglasses and Converse sneakers. Gómez-Peña wears a Mexican wrestler's mask with feathered headdress, sunglasses, wristbands and boots while the couple pace about the cage, enacting supposed daily Guatinaui rituals. These include watching television, eating fruit, drinking Coca-Cola and making voodoo dolls. The golden cage is filled with miscellaneous commonplace objects that are intermingled with artefacts used in rituals, the mise en scene supposedly emulating their natural habitat. A television set, table, Polaroid camera, bedpans, brightly coloured plastic objects and textiles, create an intriguing kitsch setting. The elaborate props present a delightful ironic contrast between signifiers of 'traditional' cultural objects and those ushered into postcolonial nations through neo-colonial capitalism.

When performed at the Fine Arts Gallery at the University of California-Irvine, some of the students and staff members were drafted to guard and assist the couple by feeding them fruit or disposing of waste accumulated through the performance. Evocative of the dehumanising ethnological exhibitions and the scientific racism pervasive in the nineteenth and twentieth-century Europe, some of the locations of the performance were environments linked with the brutal affair. Performed in eight locations, including the Columbus Plaza in Madrid, Covent Gardens, London, and natural history museums, including the Smithsonian Museum and Australian Museum, the performance spanned four countries. The performance across the many venues of its exhibition was also documented as a thirty-minute video titled *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinaui Odyssey* (1993), directed by Paula Heredia and co-directed by Fusco.

In the exhibitions during colonial times, anthropologists working in conjunction with colonial administrators organised these elaborately staged events as demonstrations of racial superiority while keeping the public invested in colonial efforts. Expositions of native peoples provided a dehumanising frame with which to view them and served as the perfect occasion to make vainglorious comparisons of Euro-American progress and development when set against the rest of the 'uncivilised' world. The 'primitivism' of the "vanishing savage," exhibited alongside pavilions of technological advancements, machinery and items of trade, served to contrast negatively with the cultural and technological dominance of 'civilised' nations.[434] As celebratory testimonies to the successes of American and European imperialism, world exhibitions also served as educational encounters and 'authentic' experiences of the colonised world for the European visitor. Governments even provided subsidies to support ethnographic endeavours to amass material collections that resulted in exhibits at these large fairs.[435]

Fashioned as a staged object, the colonial native was metonymically projected as a slice of the outside world that explorers scouted for colonial exploitation. Native specimens and their 'peculiar' cultural artifacts were offered up for inspection to the touristic and colonial gaze of curious crowds of spectators. Writing on the touristic gaze, Nancy Parezo and Don D. Fowler note the trope of strangeness and the anthropological framing of living "exotic" peoples as objects of curiosity:

> The living exhibits, official and unofficial, at expositions became sites of social interaction. There Euro-Americans and Europeans met Native peoples and interacted with them in face-to-face encounters. These engagements were based on curiosity about the exotic and foreign, safe adventure through what has come to be called the "touristic gaze." Indeed these intercultural meetings had "the interest of strangeness" (McGee 1904a, 4). The "living exhibits" at fairs were exciting, disturbing, compelling, and educational for visitors and for Native demonstrators and performers alike, and anthropology could control their meanings.[436]

Far removed from their native lands, framed against the context of European culture, colonial natives must have indeed seemed strange to the onlookers (just as strange as the gawking European visitor must have seemed to them). Seen in relation to Fusco and Gómez-Peña's performance, their deliberate ironic cultivation of strangeness is strategic. They re-create this readily ascribed attribute in their guises as undiscovered natives from Guatinau so as to appear 'authentic'—the 'authentic' version of the colonial native as viewed through a European lens.

The Chicago World's Fair, albeit a year late and officially known as World's Fair: Columbian Exposition, was staged in 1893 in commemoration of the quadricentennial anniversary of Columbus arriving in the Americas in 1492. The city of Chicago had won the contest to host the fair outcompeting rival cities such as New York and St. Louis. The fairgrounds were divided into two separate parts—the White City

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[434] Nancy J. Parezo and Don D. Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair: The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 4-11.
[435] Parezo and Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair*, 4-5.
[436] Parezo and Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair*, 9.

and the Midway Plaisance. The latter and distinctly more disorganised section contained the ethnological exhibits displaying the lives of the conquered 'primitive' peoples—Egyptians, Bedouins, Samoans and Algerians amongst others, with Dahomeans (now the people of Benin) framed as the most barbaric of them all.[437]

Not to be outdone, the city of St. Louis also staged an exposition in 1904, popularly known as the St. Louis World's Fair. Reverend Samuel Phillips Verner, naturalist and minister, captured and purchased Ota Benga, a young man from the Congo Free State, for a pound of salt and cloth for the exposition in St.Louis.[438] Benga proved to be a popular display and was featured as a 'savage cannibal' at the fair and was later exhibited in 1906 in the monkey cage at the Bronx zoo. Scheduled to be exhibited every afternoon in September, the iron cage that he shared with an orangutan was even strewn with bones to imply his practice of cannibalism.[439] Following years of exploitation and an intense longing for his home, Benga tragically took his own life in 1916 with a gun he had hidden. The exposition displayed pavilions of similarly quasi-captive natives—Batwa Pygmies from the Belgian Congo, the Ainu from Japan, Seri from Mexico, and other ethnic groups alongside American Natives.[440] Both the Chicago and St. Louis expositions featured live exhibits wearing native attire, artistically displayed against native architectural replicas and urged to practice their native arts while performing their customs and rituals for the European visitor who was thus educated from a safe distance on their 'curious' ways.

A century after the Columbian Exposition, coinciding with the 500-year commemoration of the voyage of Christopher Columbus to the Americas, Fusco and Gómez-Peña present a satirical counter-commemoration touring with their performance beginning in 1992. As an ironic marking of the historical moment of the 'discovery' of the Other, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* was performed by (make-believe) aboriginal inhabitants hitherto *undiscovered* by Columbus. They confront the dark history of the abuse of non-Western peoples by presenting their **satirical** (Fig. 5) pseudo-anthropological exposition for public viewing.

The performance mimicking the history of exhibiting indigenous peoples is phenomenologically authentic to a pertinent degree, as the performance recreates the experience by preserving the main characteristics of the monstrous practice. The audience experientially encounters the physicality of the bodies of peoples of non-western descent within the cage meant for public viewing. Fusco and Gómez-Peña perform supposed daily activities just as the natives were expected to in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, except for the addition of their ironic interpretation of those tasks displayed in the performance of typical western habituations like watching television or drinking bottled coke or

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[437] Barbara J. Ballard, "A People without a Nation," *Chicago History* 28, no. 1 (1999): 31-33. Poster advertisements and guidebooks to the fair helped with the visual and textual framing and stereotyping of the colonial exhibits.
[438] Pamela Newkirk, "Ota Benga in the Archives: Unmaking Myths, Mapping Resistance in the Margins of History," *NKA* no. 38-39 (November 2016): 172.
[439] Newkirk, "Ota Benga in the Archives," 170.
[440] Parezo and Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair*, 73.

packaged water. The spectator is invited to interact and engage in more than just an ocular manner. Indulging in ironic revelry, the pair script paid entertainment into their performance—pictures could be taken with the couple while the audience member received a polaroid as a souvenir, or they could alternatively request a native dance from the woman and even a story articulated in the 'native' Guatinaui language by the man.

Playing with imaginative constructs of the racial Other, the pair create a witty fictionality, performing and repeating that which they critique. The irony lies within the mimetic act, made even more apparent by the incomplete or partial mimesis. As Bhabha notes with reference to colonial mimicry, "mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference."[441] Through slippages in the pair's mimetic performance of colonial practices, **new identities are perceived**, **subverting** (Fig. 5) and breaking the concreteness of the cultural otherness depicted, thus challenging the authority of the colonial practice. This partial difference, the space between mimicry and mockery, proved to be difficult to perceive as was evidenced by a large number of the audience who believed the scene to be real, completely missing the contrived performative and ironically mimetic aspects of the piece. The unintentional and ultimate irony is that despite the mimicry designed to be a mockery, the pair appeared as "authentic" to a good number of their audience. Plainly, irony is not universally accessible, and its interpretation is often culturally dependent.[442] The spectators who missed the irony of the performance thus become the unsuspecting victim or butt of the irony.

Jones in her essay "Meaning, Identity, Embodiment: The Uses of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology in Art History," opines that:

> The identity we ascribe to a particular image or object (an identity connected, inevitably, with a posited making subject) is intimately connected to our own psychic desires, fantasies, and projections… The identity we ascribe to the work is circumscribed in relation to the visual image – to our perception of its structure, its content, its history, its "context," … Our perception of the work and the identity it suggests to us, in turn, informs our own sense of who we are…

The goal of the performers was to create a satirical commentary to address the politics of representation, appropriation and the degrading historical treatment of non-western peoples. The ironic deception underscoring the performance was meant to be picked up by the audience. In this case, despite explicit markers of irony, such as the pair of volunteer specimens being led on leashes by the guards or the fact that there were humans in a gilded cage, it did not prompt all to conclusions of an obvious inconsistency with prevailing human rights laws. In this cross-cultural interaction, the meaning ascribed to the piece varied dramatically according to the capacity of the receiver to grasp the signals of the message—a capacity intimately based on their own individual preconceptions. Perhaps the failure

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[441] Bhabha, *LOC*, 86.
[442] Ryan notes how Native American tales of the Trickster reveal an intimate connection between cultural confidence and ironic competence, thus marking the centrality of the cultural appreciation of ironic competence. *The Trickster Shift*, 9-11.

to grasp the irony is a sign of the historical myopia that comes with the imposition of a universal (and sanitised) history.

The choice of certain venues and their juxtaposition with the satirical performance is strategically ironic. Situated at venues historically associated with these kinds of viewings of non-western peoples, such as a Natural History Museum and public gardens, the performance becomes subversively charged by the association. The unquestioned authority vested in institutions such as a museum (a venue for the performance) might have also led the audience to misplace confidence in the authority of the people playing the part of guards or exposition officials. For many, it was sufficient proof of epistemological authenticity that the guards presented the pair as uniquely native to the island of Guatinaui, assisted in their explanations by fictional maps and plaques of information that they endorsed. This distinctive set-up of the experience of viewing non-western peoples recreates the subject-object relation, the dichotomy that Quijano sees as the "European paradigm of rational knowledge..."[443]

The reductionist, singular logic of Western epistemologies and the imposition of racial, social categories under European colonialism fashioned the world's population into a false and damaging relationship of "biologically and structurally superior and inferior."[444] Quijano finds that the disciplines of Ethnology and Anthropology have by definition taken other cultures to be the 'objects' of study, thus propagating "'subject-object' relations between the 'Western' culture and the rest."[445] As objects of study, the racial Other is made a known quantity, objectified in accordance to the coloniser's own subjectivity.[446] *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West*, however, is steeped in ambiguity that unsettles the observer.

The pair theatrically animate the 'native Other' stereotype through a 'costume' primitivism consisting of an odd pastiche of elements—animal prints feature in Fusco's bikini top and Gómez-Peña's luchador mask. Grass skirts, animal tooth necklaces and body paint contrast absurdly with American branded footwear, sunglasses and other accessories. Additional **ambiguities** are designed into the Guatinaui's daily rituals wherein sewing voodoo dolls and listening to Mexican rock music are interwoven with stereotypical Western activities like typing into a keyboard, munching crackers or guzzling Coca-Cola. In her article, "The Forgotten Flesh" (2018), Celia Martínez-Sáez makes a keen observation on the tactical use of ambiguity in the performance, "The provoked confusion can be understood as a way of being opaque to protect against the Western epistemology of the scientific necessity of always *knowing* and *discovering*."[447]

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[443] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 172.
[444] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 171.
[445] Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 174.
[446] However, the claim to scientific inquiry has historically lent neutrality to the position of the coloniser/researcher.
[447] Celia Martínez-Sáez, "The Forgotten Flesh: Confronting Western Epistemologies through Parody in Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco's "The Couple in the Cage" (1992)," *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 51, no. 2 (2018): 20.

Both Anzaldúa and Lugones mention the importance of ambiguity and of employing it as a weapon of resistance to univocal ordering. Lugones likens the ambiguity of curdled expression to not just a creative strategy of resistance but also to social commentary.[448] The impurity that it engenders threatens the fiction of the oppressive purity of colonial logic, of social ordering, of control through categorising and homogenising, thus leaving room for plurality and self-definition. Hutcheon identifies ambiguity as a trope related irony but identifies a critical edge as something that differentiates it from ambiguity.[449] Rather than an association with vagueness, the element of ambiguity in ironic usage connotes an openness to interpretation and a refusal to follow the assumption of a fixed principle. The irony embedded opens up the performance to countless possibilities and invites the spectator to entertain a range of interpretations.

Although the success of irony is traditionally dependent on its communication from intention to interpretation, in this case, the failure on the part of some audience members to decode the contextual markers reveals an uneasy reality that adds gravity to the performance. bell hooks talks about a contemporary revival of interest in the "primitive," the secret fantasies and "longings about contact with the Other embedded in the secret (not so secret) deep structure of white supremacy."[450] With regard to the exploitation and commodification of 'dangerous but desirable' racial Otherness, hooks research reveals that a major concern people identify is that "cultural, ethnic, and racial differences will be continually commodified and offered up as new dishes to enhance the white palate—that the Other will be eaten, consumed and forgotten."[451] Although the irony embedded into the performance was consciously and deliberately designed to be overt and accessible, the unintentional situational irony that unfolded (when some perceived the performance as non-ironic) essentially amplified the critical edge of the performance. Critical irony tends to provoke to expose, sounding a subtle but distinct call to reveal.

The video *The Couple in the Cage* is particularly interesting for its documentation of the varied reactions of spectators. It begins with the couple being accompanied by guards as they walk towards the gilded cage; they are led on chain leashes attached to collars around their necks. The impersonal voice of a newsreader introduces the Guatinaui's as voluntarily embarking on world travel upon invitation by several Euro-American cultural institutions so as to be "officially" discovered by Western civilisation. Scenes of the performance are juxtaposed powerfully against images of the "Hottentot Venus," an Australian aboriginal woman and illustrations of the practice of craniometry—chilling reminders of the invasive anthropological methods used to violate the bodies of indigenous peoples with the purpose of creating hierarchical racial difference. Analogised alongside are also texts and images of their continued

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[448] See pages 68 and 117 of *Pilgrimages/ Peregrinajes* by Lugones.
[449] Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 66.
[450] hooks, *Black Looks*, 22.
[451] hooks, *Black Looks*, 39.

exploitation as curiosities in circus acts such as the Ringling Brothers, interspersed with unflattering representations of indigenous peoples in Hollywood cinema.

In "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," Abdul R. JanMohamed observes that "The perception of racial difference is, in the first place, influenced by economic motives."[452] The development of slave trade, new markets and the exploitation of native labour and resources sustained the growing appetite of an imperial capitalist economy. In his essay, JanMohamed distinguishes between "dominant" and "hegemonic" phases of colonialism. While the dominant phase stretches from conquest to a colony being granted its independence, the transition to the hegemonic phase begins with the natives internalising Western culture. He writes, "…in the hegemonic phase (or neocolonialism) the natives accept a version of the colonizer's entire system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions, and, more important, mode of production."[453] In the video, a young man in an American navy uniform observes without a shred of irony, "They pick up traditions really well," referring to the indigenous couple's very 'American' consumption of Saltine crackers and Coca-Cola.

The soft drink, a potent symbol of capitalist America's pervasive global economic influence, has been the subject of many contemporary artists invoking commentaries on commodity fetishism and also coca-colonisation or the globalisation of American culture. In 2017, an article in the newspaper *El Pais* found the Coca-Cola addiction partly responsible for putting indigenous populations in Mexico at high risk for death from diabetes. Abandoning indigenous diets based on pulses and vegetables, sugary drinks become staple leading to malnutrition and obesity amongst native populations. Soft-drink manufacturers and distributors strategically market their products in indigenous languages and create situations where Coke is more accessible than drinking water and even cheaper than milk. An article from *BBCNewsMundo* in 2020 mentions the interesting and ironic integration of Coke into indigenous religious offerings of nutrition to the gods, where it has replaced the traditional corn and sugar cane liquor. This transformative ritual aspect of Coke as a religious artefact has elevated its prestige and, in turn, its ironic symbolism. Fusco's consumption of Coca-Cola, amongst other 'rituals,' becomes a tragically ironic symbol of the native's mimicry of the West that has led to its continued harm and exploitation.

A frame in the video slaps the words "Authentic Guatinauis" across an image of the pair in the cage (see Fig. 78). Part of the audience that believed the performance to be an "authentic" and non-ironic exposition of indigenous peoples ("a tradition first started by Christopher Columbus," explains a docent, while Fusco is seen looking at a picture book on Columbus), seem eager to make 'clever' observations

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[452] Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gate Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 80.
[453] JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory," 81.

and offer patronising comments on the couple and their engagements with modern objects like the television. In *Irony in the Age of Empire: Comic Perspectives on Democracy and Freedom* (2008), Cynthia Willet asks: "Could satire's ironic and mocking stance toward our social bearing allow us to reclaim what is otherwise in our cynical postmodern times a nostalgic and narcissistic idea of authenticity?"[454] Interestingly, another set of onlookers who also believed the performance to be non-ironic exhibited a very different response. They were upset by the inhumane treatment of the aborigines in the cage. A person even wished to withdraw their membership to the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, as they were disgusted with what they believed to be a dehumanising display.

In Minneapolis, a woman from the audience remarks—"I feel like I've been put on…it's kind of offensive, I guess." Martínez-Sáez observes that this comment "is only a confirmation of the parodic effects that the "not knowing" what is happening with the exhibited humans can produce."[455] Hutcheon observes that a "hermeneutic failing" on the part of a spectator could lead to embarrassment, irritation and even anger.[456] She continues:

> Irony can also make you edgy, nervous about how to fix meaning securely and how to determine motivation…If interpreters are faced with such "emotion-charged value judgements" (Booth 1974: 44), it may not be surprising that there is a certain build-up of tension (Heller 1983: 444) involved in the simple (or not so simple) act of attributing irony to an utterance.[457]

In this instance, of course, the operative irony is not purely verbal but also embodied in the performer's actions. The woman's comment records her displeasure at feeling deceived and **offended** at the ambiguity of it all—she may recognise the deception involved but seems to miss the critical nature of the irony at play. Diana Taylor speculates that perhaps what made the performance troubling for many spectators was that they were forced to "see themselves as implicated in these colonial fantasies."[458] In Madrid, another woman comments that "They're too white…" to be considered as indigenous. A bystander seems more than content with a clarification from a docent insisting that the sun's rays did not penetrate into the heart of the jungle where the couple lived. These comments indicating ironic ineptitude implicate both women by what Lugones might call "seeing with the lover of purity's eyes." She writes, "The reader needs to see ambiguity, see that the split-separated are also and simultaneously curdled-separated. Otherwise, one is only seeing the success of oppression, seeing with the lover of purity's eyes."[459] Taylor makes a keen observation on the startling fact that despite little illusion of authenticity, there were people that either believed the show or felt offended by it. She writes,

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[454] Cynthia Willett, *Irony in the Age of Empire: Comic Perspectives on Democracy and Freedom* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 65.
[455] Martínez-Sáez, *The Forgotten Flesh*, 20.
[456] Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 38.
[457] Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 38.
[458] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, 72.
[459] Lugones, *Pilgrimages/ Peregrinajes*, 104.

"gullibility and deception are flip-sides of the same will to believe. The first accepts "the truth" of the colonial claim; the other sees only the "lie.""[460]

Bakhtin's observations of the sixteenth-century French writer Francoise Rabelais in *Rabelais and his World* (1940, trans. 1968 and 1984) introduce the theorisation of the concept of the carnivalesque. The carnivalesque refers not only to a historical phenomenon but also to a literary mode that subverts dominant hierarchies, thus creating room for dialogue and the freedom of expression without censorship. Bakhtin used the term 'carnival' or 'carnivalesque' to refer not only to specific feasts and festivals but also to include ritual spectacles, comic compositions, staged parodies and a whole range of other festive practices that developed during the Middle Ages. Fusco and Gómez-Peña's performance is a satirical parody of colonial expositions. It is an ironic carnivalesque spectacle producing an ostentatious, embarrassing and disquieting reminder of the colonial past where people were captured and shipped from former colonies to be exhibited alongside animals for public viewing.

The very nature of carnival includes a disregard for hierarchy and values inclusivity, accepting people irrespective of social ranking, age or physical deformity. The distinctive traits of the carnivalesque are a relaxation on strict moral codes and permissible boundaries, a dialectical atmosphere and the merging of binaries. The Carnivalesque's numerous characteristic components—parody, satire, irony, the grotesque body, hybridity, death, masquerade, abjection, excess, comedy and laughter—potentially had the power to subvert class distinctions and revise the social order. Many of these elements feature in Fusco and Gómez-Peña's theatrical work as **transgressive** (Fig. 5) strategies.

An intimately corporeal embodiment of irony is realised in a paid act scripted into the performance, a fee of five dollars to see the male specimen's genitalia. In the video, we see Gómez-Peña obliging *but* with his penis tucked between his legs. It is interesting to draw a parallel to Kihara's performance where a similar act was meant to perform the trope of the dusky maiden while disguising her identity as *fa'afafine* and resisting neat categorisation (see Fig. 58). As stereotypes of the Oriental male have oscillated between dangerously oversexed to passively effeminate, with Gómez-Peña, the act might be construed as symbolic of the Oriental male stereotype as emasculated childish primitive or could be seen as an act resisting the vulgar determinism of colonial ideology.

Through such provocations, the audience is implicated by their engagement with the performance and, more specifically, through their voyeuristic fascination with the bodies of the exotic Other. A telling response by *Art Forums's* Jan Avgikos (featured partly in the video), illustrates the performance's success in pointedly recreating the objectified body of the Other, historically consumed for pleasure and entertainment. She states: "The only thing the piece offered me, was amusement. I mean, I can't stand there and suddenly realize that cultural genocide is a horrible thing… What I did think about was how

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[460] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 71.

beautiful Fusco's scantily clad body was—which is probably what just about everyone else was thinking too."[461] The performance ironises the scopic pleasure of the objectifying gaze of imperialism that has historically reduced human life to a purchasable commodity.

Excess and comedy are observed in the histrionics of the performers; amusing acts of dance and storytelling are performed for a price of fifty cents for the entertainment of the audience. The female performs a 'native' dance to rhythmic music while the male specimen solemnly performs a story in an imaginary Guatinaui language with the comical aid of a suitcase and a rubber snake. Bakhtin also wrote of laughter as opposed to seriousness, where laughter was considered liberating and genuine while seriousness was calculative, mistrusted and regarded as hypocritical during the Renaissance.

> Playfulness is, in part, an openness to being a fool, which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred, and finding ambiguity and double edges a source of wisdom and delight.[462]

The above quote from Lugones contemplates the concept of playfulness as opposed to seriousness. She regards herself as having the attribute of playfulness in certain "worlds" and not having it in certain others. She refrains from offering a fixed definition of a "world," but indicates that it could encompass anything from a society given its dominant culture's description or a society given an idiosyncratic construction, or even just a tiny portion of a particular society.[463] English Anthropologist, social scientist and semiotician Gregory Bateson, in his essay from 1954 "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," identifies that a metacommunicative message either explicitly or more often implicitly defines a "frame." In his own words, "every metacommunicative message is or defines a psychological frame."[464] One could extrapolate Bateson's "frame" to mean a "world." However, in the case of Fusco and Gómez-Peña's performance, their use of ironic parody frames a protean temporal hinge between "worlds," accommodating both seriousness and playfulness. The parodic effects in real-time are **playful,** and LUDIC (Fig. 5), but their source from the dark history of the animalisation of indigenous peoples is a grave matter.

Metacommunicative messages aid the receiver in distinguishing whether the message is to be taken "seriously" or as "play." As Carlson notes, these concerns of metacommunication and framing are significant to thinking on performance. Although the performance is staged to promise real, tangible aborigines from an 'undiscovered' island, hyperbole is manifest in—the exaggerated costumes, the peculiar compilation of props, gilded cage and is also embodied in the actions of the performers—the excesses are metacommunicative signals of ironic intent. Irony, from the times of Aristotle, has often been assigned suspect moral character as it has been seen in opposition to truthfulness and therefore

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[461] Jan Avgikos, "Kill All White People," *Art Forum International*, May 1993, 11.
[462] Lugones, *Pilgrimages/ Peregrinajes*, 83.
[463] Lugones, *Pilgrimages/ Peregrinajes*, 77-78.
[464] Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 188.

likened to deception and insincerity; however, a deeper understanding reveals it to be a complex and artful rhetorical practice. Hutcheon identifies that the difference between lying and irony is in their intention. She writes that "lies are not usually intended to be interpreted or decoded *as lies*; on the contrary, ironies are really only ironies when someone makes them happen."[465] While seriousness/reality/truth is customarily seen in opposition to non-serious/fiction/falsehood, irony permits a realm where these concepts may co-exist without necessarily being mutually exclusive.

Fusco and Gómez-Peña take a colonial practice from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and transport it to the end of the twentieth, creating a dialogic temporal hinge through their ironic parody. The Other, already considered as strange, has its stereotypes augmented to the level of irony in the performance with additional 'strangeness' in terms of layers of contradiction, ambiguity and incongruity. Judging by the reactions of varied audiences, these complexities paradoxically served to easily mark the absurdity and satirical nature of the performance for some, while for others, **complicated** and deferred perception. As Shklovsky indicates, the elongation of the aesthetic experience of perception is favourable and, in fact, essential to an artistic experience. Irrespective of the mixed interpretations, the act of mulling over or the slow percolation of multi-sensory perceptions seems to have transpired with all that came into contact with the performance. Some audience in the video are seen in solemn contemplation as the performance evoked transgenerational trauma and accounts of the violence inflicted on their own ancestors. Towards the end of the video Gómez-Peña in the green room talks about the slow dawning in real-time of the critical message ensconced in the irony, a deferred signification. He says, "...sometimes people don't realise… the implications of the game until an hour later or a day later…and then they get upset."

The video ends with a conspicuous ironic reversal, where the docents are put on leashes and led away from the cage by Fusco and Gómez-Peña. Irony that is politically motivated is inherently critical and satirical. The aural messages of the docents, the literary and non-literary images in terms of the plaques and maps, the props, electronic items, the bodies of the performers and the entire visual spectacle of the performance are all suffused with layers of irony. The re-inscription of historical violence into the bodies of the performers releases historically suppressed stories of colonial violence, transporting the past into the present, offering the opportunity for a dialogic encounter. An alternate reality is presented through this dual temporal framing, one that is released by the critical edge of its irony from the burden of the dominant discourse of the past.

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[465] Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 66.

Conclusion

The presence of irony in a work of art and its (successful) interpretation enhances the experience of the audience by veiling and/or revealing layers of meaning and expression that might otherwise have been buried just beneath the surface. Irony tends to produce shifts in perception, at times instantaneous and at others, a deferred comprehension. The involvement of the audience in the process of making meaning may render them more invested in the work. Apart from the skilful, communicative abilities of the ironist artist, the success of irony as a discursive strategy is highly dependent on the interpreter. In addition to misinterpretation, a hazard of employing an essentially contested concept such as irony is that it could also risk rival application or use. As Bhabha reminds us, colonial discourse is rich with irony and mimicry and has often exercised its authority through equivocation and dissimulation.[466] Therefore, while irony may possess the ability to destabilise a meta-narrative, one must recall its complicity in the very construction of that self-legitimising meta-narrative. The use of subversive irony from a postcolonial political position is tricky, as one may run the risk of replacing one form of hegemony with another. But as Colebrook points out, "Only irony can, at one and the same time, judge the tyranny and moralism of a certain context *and* display its own complicity in that tyranny."[467]

While irony may be perceived as contradictory and duplicitous, the very same characteristics inscribed in the heart of colonial meta-narratives permit irony to affect its critical function in the subversion of such univocal narratives. This study establishes important theoretic-practical links between postcolonial and decolonial theory and contemporary ironic practices that subvert colonial logic. The specific vocabulary used by postcolonial and decolonial authors that are essentially analogous to the working dynamics of irony unearthed and presented in the form of a table illustrates how these kinds of literature exhibit irony via diverse expressions buried in the text. This discovery strengthens the argument that there is an implicit link between postcolonial/decolonial expression and ironic subversion. There is no prior study that has brought these areas together in detail.

The ambiguity of irony enables it to allow differing perspectives to co-exist. As Derrida has demonstrated, a hierarchical dichotomous model of thinking forms the core tendency of mainstream Western thought. Contemporary artists try to undermine these dualisms with multiplicities, ambiguities or irony. But irony can also work to raise the subordinate term over its deemed superior. For the purposes of this thesis then, the importance of studying irony as a subversive anti-colonial artistic practice essentially lies in its ability to destabilise binaries such as 'Us' and Them', 'Self' and Other'—the rigid orientations of which have led to an unjust and unequal distribution of power between races, genders and even religions. Binaries fail to reveal complexities and are tied to a reductionist logic of

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[466] Bhabha, *LOC*, 85.
[467] Colebrook, *Irony*, 120.

purity, whereas the multiple layers of meaning produced by irony are well suited to destabilise binary thinking and univocal readings, encouraging openness to interpretation.

The study explores and analyses this form of non-binary subversive irony and the many ways in which it manifests visually through:

Ambivalence

Deception

Mimicry

Inversion

Contrast

Contradiction

Incongruous juxtaposition of symbolic objects

Paradoxical locational association (between an artwork's expression of dissent and its site of installation or display)

Replication of stereotypes for the purpose of subversion

Cultivation of strangeness or ambiguity

Satirical contextual layering

These manifestations are also traced across different media, thus, building upon the current verbal/textual understanding of irony by making room for pictorial, structural, performative and site-specific modes of irony.

Binary structures function through mutually exclusive systems where a view is singularly only either right or wrong, with the norm established through domination, leaving no room for overlapping or alternate perspectives. While subversive irony certainly immerses us in conflict and is forged through contradiction and opposing views, it does not necessarily present us with an either/or perspective but rather with a both/and form of thinking. This mutually inclusive system allows for polyvocal expression and overlapping viewpoints. For instance, Shonibare's ambivalent deceptive medium of the African batik textile, which embodies multiple cultural identities (and curdled logic), is in itself emblematic of a 'both/and' philosophy. Further, his juxtapositioning of this medium with dissonant contexts serve to COMPLICATE (see Fig. 5) histories and identities. This method activates the DISTANCING function of irony and refuses the dominance of a singular narrative presenting instead, hybrid **perspectives** acknowledging the contingency of ethnic and cultural identity. Across the cases studied, it is interesting to note that irony lends itself to varying forms of resistance. Some are more polemical than others.

With the imitative parodies of Pushpamala, Kihara and Shah, we find that their methods of subversive resistance are presented through inversions and ironic echoes of dominant narratives, fashioned by hierarchies of race, class, gender and sexuality. English literary theorist Terry Eagleton is of the view that "all oppositional politics… move under the sign of irony, knowing themselves ineluctably parasitic on their antagonists."[468] He elaborates:

> Ironically, then, a politics of difference or specificity is in the first place in the cause of sameness and universal identity—the right of a group victimized in its particularity to be on equal terms with others as far as their self-determination is concerned. This is the kernel of truth of bourgeois Enlightenment: the abstract universal right of all to be free, the shared essence or identity of all human subjects to be autonomous. In a further dialectical twist, however, this truth itself must be left behind as soon as seized; for the only point of enjoying such universal abstract equality is to discover and live one's own particular difference. The *telos* of the entire process is not, as the Enlightenment believed, universal truth, right and identity, but concrete particularity. It is just that such particularity has to pass through that abstract equality and come out somewhere on the other side, somewhere quite different from where it happens to be standing now.[469]

Eagleton's view is applicable to the working politics of Pushpamala, Kihara and Shah. In their artwork presented in the final chapter, we observe that by installing their critical responses (to the subjugation of racial, gendered and sexual identity) by colonial logic, they REINFORCE it so as to unmask its supremacist falsehoods. A purist colonial logic is co-opted in order to curdle it. The source of oppression via ethnographic document, reductive stereotype or exclusionary tactic is repeated ironically while its narrative is interrupted in order to move beyond it. For instance, Pushpamala and Kihara go beyond the passivity typical of the ethnographic subject to reclaim agency in their ironic echoes of ethnographic portraits. This enables the SELF-PROTECTIVE function of irony and is at once both **self-deprecating** and **defensive**, appearing on both positive and negative sides of Hutcheon's table (Fig. 5). Likewise, Shah enacts her oppositional politics with the **transgressive** queering of a classical, sanctified mother and child image, disturbing strictly maintained hierarchies between genders and classes, transforming social relationships and notions of family and parenthood. Both Kihara and Shah reject the domination of the heterosexual norm through their transgressive gender expressions. In Kihara's performative act, there is also a sense of trickery, as she ridicules categorical purity and induces ambiguity as she masquerades effortlessly and deceptively across gender identities.

A number of works in the final chapter mimic stereotypes ironically in order to disrupt and destabilise the fixity of cultural and ethnic otherness. Apart from Pushpamala and Kihara's subversive mimicry of ethnographic portraits, the seemingly frivolous and LUDIC irony of Fusco and Gómez-Peña's parodic performance undermines assumptions of primitive otherness. The cultivation of strangeness and satirical contextual layering is particularly notable in this performative piece. We observe the phenomenological aspects of incorporating and encountering irony through their corporeal embodiment of the stereotype of the 'primitive' other. They ironise it through their carnivalesque spectacle involving

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[468] Terry Eagleton, "Nationalism: Irony and Commitment," in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 26.
[469] Eagleton, "Nationalism: Irony and Commitment," 30.

plastic props, paid entertainment and excesses while satirically attacking the practice of exhibiting indigenous peoples. Walker, on the other hand, does something different in her handling of the black mammy stereotype. Applying massive scale and imbuing the stereotype with associations to the sphinx, she transforms it into an object that demands reverence and veneration. By Eagleton's account, a self-conscious irony seems to be an important and almost inevitable component of emancipatory politics.

Another common thread observed in some of the artworks discussed is the paradoxical use of the 'site,' where it is simultaneously and profoundly associated with both a historic (and maybe continuing) oppression and its contemporary opposition. This symbolic locational association between an artwork's expression of dissent and its site of installation is seen in Walker's choice of the sugar factory to pay tribute to enslaved workers. Likewise, Fusco and Gómez-Peña's satirical pseudo-anthropological exhibition was performed in locations associated with the dehumanising display of natives, such as museums of natural history and public gardens. Additionally, the performance coincided with the quincentennial anniversary of Columbus's voyage to the Americas and was also performed at the Columbus Plaza in Madrid, marking his complicit role in facilitating the brutal practice of displaying indigenous peoples. This contrasting contextual layering of problematic moments in history with a satirical counter-commemorative performance staged in memorialised locations augments irony's OPPOSITIONAL and ASSAILING functions.

Wilson is another artist who exploits paradoxical locational associations as his critique of the museum is positioned deliberately within the heart of its hallowed halls. While his juxtaposition of seemingly incongruent objects highlights difference, they also reveal nuances of the interrelatedness of the objects on display. Objects from the museum's collection, otherwise buried, are exposed to the spotlight along with their uncomfortable histories and the questionable nature of their acquisitions. His perceptive metaphorical layering of contexts further enhances the satirical tenor of his installations. His irony-imbued installations challenge the cultural homogeneity of the artefacts and objects that were on display at The Maryland Historical Society.

Ever so often, homogeneity assumes the language of totalitarianism, giving one cause to be discerning of purportedly unifying principles. Universalism cloaked in the garb of a higher purpose has historically served to create discriminatory structures of hierarchy. Conveyed through contradictions, aberrations and reversals, irony as a postcolonial discursive strategy seems a canny tactic to strike at the foundation of Eurocentric bias, bringing about a reckoning of imperial history. The ironic act unravels the principles of hierarchy and exclusion inscribed in colonial logic while mobilising awareness of its harmful and enduring impact. We observe a transnational approach in employing irony to record resistance to the many relative experiences of colonialism and coloniality from the examples cited. But in that resistance, we also find room for dialogue and the creation of new and alternate perspectives. While this demonstration of resistance courts a risk of misinterpretation, the liminal space that it offers—the thresholds and borders—are often left ungoverned by the laws of both/multiple sides, allowing for a tangible polyvocalism; one that can be experienced in dynamic, visual, haptic and spatial dimensions.

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