

DETOURS AND *DÉRIVES*  
ON INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN DECOLONIAL  
AND ARTISTIC PRACTICES

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The production of knowledge often arises in the process of deviating from already known paths. In the history of artistic research, there is a long tradition of practices of detours. Among the best known are the situationist *dérives*. Guy Debord, a member of the Situationist International, wrote *The Society of the Spectacle* in 1967, in which he treats the *dérive* as the opposite of the quotation with its theoretical authority. In his *dérives*, quotations are detached from their context and their original text in order to reappropriate them and thus transform them into a “malleable language” (Debord 1967, 208). The Situationists followed these *dérives* not only in their readings and writings, but also in their explorations of cities, using various strategies to transform the given paths of the city into labyrinths.

Leaving predetermined paths and a dominant logic is also an important practice of decolonial movements. The aim is to break the mechanisms of colonial domination and to emancipate oneself from its epistemic order. New paths are taken in which the knowledge of oppressed regions is empowered and practices that have been stigmatized and declared “barbaric” or “irrational” are recovered. This should serve not only the emancipation from a western-colonial aesthetic and economy, but also the emancipation of the way in which people encounter the world, how we understand it, experience it and act within it.

This publication proposes asking how artistic practices connect with decolonial strategies or to show where they have crossed paths in the conference *De/Colonizing Knowledge*. Although these intersections cannot be easily cataloged, we have tried to organize them into four thematic blocks. These are some shared perspectives on knowledge production:

Part I, “Written, spoken and unspoken knowledge”, focuses on strategies for using different communication media that aim to communicate more than what is explicitly said. It also encourages reflection on the hierarchies of communication systems, on the dominance of linguistic media, and on how emancipatory strategies can emerge alongside established languages through images or other non-linguistic communication systems.

Part II, “Situated Knowledge”, shows how important it is to think about one’s own perspective on knowledge production: Where do we speak from? What different perspectives are available? Which perspectives are excluded? And which perspectives could convey a different view of the world? In any case, art can provide a field of experimentation in which new ways of looking at the world can be practiced. A field in which it is possible to engage with forms of knowledge that western reason tries to exclude from experience as “superstition” or “magic”.

Part III, “Body Knowledge”, refers not only to a knowledge of the body that often cannot be verbalized, but also to a knowledge that emanates from and is embedded in the materiality of the non-human body.

And finally, Part IV, “Transformative Knowledge”, suggests thinking about how not only sign systems but also institutions of research and learning can be changed through detours. In this academic-institutional framework, there are important intersections between artistic and decolonial strategies that can open up spaces for a different kind of knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to see that in all these detours there is a history of conflict between different modes of knowledge production. As Hito Steyerl notes in her text *Artistic Research as Discipline and Conflict* (Steyerl 2010), it is necessary to always view disciplines from the perspective of conflict. Conflicts that not only unfold outwards, towards other disciplines, but also take shape internally. The plurality of currents in artistic research that have emerged since the institutionalization of this “new” discipline is illustrated by the manifestos and counter-manifestos that have appeared in recent years.<sup>2</sup> These are stories of competition, of inclusion and exclusion, which are also familiar from the history of the artistic avant-garde. In the history of decolonial studies, too, there are manifestos and counter-manifestos, exclusions and inclusions. And the question always arises about where people speak from, who speaks for whom, or who only becomes a ventriloquist (Cusicanqui 2018, 90, 78) for voices that are not given the floor.

In the sociology of knowledge, it was above all sociologist Karl Mannheim’s merit to have developed a method to analyze competition in the field of art and knowledge production at a time when National Socialism was spreading its violence into all areas of society.<sup>3</sup> In his sociology of knowledge, he not only undertakes an analysis of the plurality of thinking styles as a history of conflicts, but he also makes it a central task of research to analyze self-reflection regarding one’s own perspective. Today we are familiar with new formulations of this imperative of “situated knowledge” from the well-known texts by Donna Haraway (1995). It is as if, on this path of self-reflection, there is a kind of amnesia about the methodological considerations that preceded Haraway. In Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge, for example, we find not only an imperative, but also a concrete method for analyzing the situatedness of one’s own perspective and for putting an intersectional analysis of competing styles of thought into practice.<sup>4</sup> And we also find an approach to thinking about this plurality of thin-

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On transformative knowledge, see the publication on the *Konzept Campus* conference by the publishing arthistoricum/ Heidelberg and the introduction to the artistic contributions in Barboza 2022.

2

See, among others, the *Manifest der Künstlerischen Forschung. Eine Verteidigung gegen ihre Verfechter* (Henke/Mersch/Strässle/Wiesel/van der Meulen 2019), or *Die Wiener Erklärung zur künstlerischen Forschung* (2020) and the response to it by Florian Cramer and Nienke Terpsma: *What Is Wrong with the Vienna Declaration on Artistic Research?* (2021).

3

Karl Mannheim 1929, 2023. On Mannheim’s sociological method of knowledge see Barboza 2025. On the extent to which epistemic violence is not considered in the sociology of knowledge, see Brunner 2020. According to Brunner, the term “epistemic violence” (Foucault 1969, 1979) is primarily used in the post- and decolonial debate (Said 1978), as well as in the postcolonial-feminist theoretical tradition (Spivak 1988), also in the context of global inequality and violence (cf. Brunner 2020, 12).

4

On self-reflection in the sociology of knowledge, see Barboza 2017.

Hito Steyerl mentions one example in her text: the essay film by Chris Marker and Alain Resnais *Les statues meurent aussi* (Steyerl 2010, 2). On artistic research and decolonial perspectives, see also Kaufmann 2011 and Bauer/Figge/Großmann/Lukatsch 2023.

king styles not in terms of relativism, but in terms of a relational recognition that resembles the model of a “pluralistic transmodernity” in the philosophy of liberation (Dussel 1999).

From the perspective of analyzing the plurality of styles of thought and art, it would be possible to trace different currents and methodologies in order to show how the history of artistic research in the twentieth century intersects with the history of struggles for emancipation, and thus also with the history of anti-colonial resistance.<sup>5</sup> In order to create such an overview of intersections, we would have to consider not only the various currents of *dérives* in artistic research, but also look at the diversity of decolonial movements in reverse, considering, among other things, the anti-colonialism of the 1950s and 1960s; the post-colonial studies of the 1980s; subaltern studies or decolonial studies, especially from the Latin American social sciences, from the 1990s to the present day; and work out what role artistic interventions have played in these. However, it is not our aim to provide such an overview, even if a history of artistic research, as an aesthetics of resistance, could be recorded in any place and time where social movements and political struggles merge with aesthetic and life-world objectives.

The intention of this publication is more modest. We set out to illustrate how various artistic and performative practices were linked to decolonial strategies in the context of the conference *De/Colonizing Knowledge*, which took place in 2021. This book is, if you will, an inventory of those artistic methods and interventions that aim to expose colonial taken-for-grantedness and go beyond European art; and in doing so, as Walter Mignolo suggests, to be open to an *aisthesis* that enables other ways of perceiving, recognizing and experiencing the world (Mignolo 2010).

In decolonial theories, the *dérives* certainly have other names, such as *desprendimiento* (Quijano 2019) or *desobediencia epistémica* (Mignolo 2011). Conversely, these terms could be brought into play for artistic research, as this also goes hand in hand with a struggle for *desobediencias epistémicas* (epistemic disobedience). For this reason, in recent years in the Department of *Artistic Knowledge Practices* at the University of Art and Design Linz, we have proposed giving a central place to decolonial strategies by inviting artists working in this field on a lecture tour (*Atelier de Recherche*). (See p. 22) Various seminars were also held to explore these questions with the students. One example was the seminar on Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, which I held together with Mariel Rodríguez in the summer semester of 2022. The seminar resulted in a workshop on the art of ventriloquism in order to reflect on the perspectives of those who speak through or represent others (see the contribution by Luisa E. Standop). Another seminar in which decolonial perspectives play an important role is the introductory course on the history/histories of artistic research entitled *Paths and Detours of Artistic Research*, which I have been teaching since 2020. This seminar gave rise to the idea of understanding artistic research as “eccentric research” that goes beyond the boundaries of disciplines and the separation between art, science, everyday life and magic, and questions these boundaries. It

was important in these seminars to discuss questions of cultural appropriation and also to make it clear that the decolonial perspective cannot be equated with an essentialist anti-European critique that is blind to the plurality of thought styles and struggles for emancipation within Europe.

I owe the invitation to co-organize the conference *De/Colonizing Knowledge* to Murat Ates, who already insisted on the importance of devoting ourselves to decolonial theories when we were working together at Saarland University in the Research Training Group *European Dream Cultures*. I have Marion Porten to thank for recommending the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), which were important for pursuing this focus in 2019, at the beginning of my time at the University of Art and Design Linz.

#### CONCERNING THE DIAGRAMMATIC OVERVIEW (P. 6–7)

Gerhard Dirmoser, known for his diagrams<sup>6</sup> has accompanied all the seminars on *Paths and Detours of Artistic Research* since the beginning of my work at the University of Art and Design Linz and through his diagrams has always helped to illustrate the immense plurality of the paths artistic research has taken up to the present. In the seminar of the summer semester of 2023, he suggested that all dissertations completed to date at the University of Art and Design Linz should be reviewed in order to see which artistic research paths have existed at the institution. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for accepting the suggestion to create a diagram from the contents of this publication in order to visualize the overlaps between artistic methods and decolonial strategies documented in the contributions to this book. He chose a relevant phrase or concept from each chapter. The diagram shows us that the proposed themes (unsaid-knowledge; situated knowledge; embodied knowledge; and transformative knowledge) are present in all contributions and that the field of strategic detours spans and expands in many directions.

One difficulty we face on this common path of artistic research and decolonial practices is the danger of institutionalization as closed disciplines with marked boundaries. The intersections in this book are therefore open to variation and interpretation. It is advisable at this point to follow the Zapatista proposal to seek *espacios de encuentro* (*spaces of encounter*), and in *caminar preguntando* (*move forward asking questions*)<sup>7</sup>, to remain in dialogue, to look back, and if necessary, to reread the history of knowledge production from the perspective of conflict and resistance.

6

See: [http://gerhard\\_dirmoser.public.linz.at/](http://gerhard_dirmoser.public.linz.at/) [last access: 21.05.2023].

7

*Caminar preguntando* “based on the insistence that the path forward cannot be fixed in advance but is shaped by those one encounters in struggle along the way.” (Subcomandante Marcos 2022, XXVI).

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