

Displacements—Beyond the Coloniality of Images

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Abstract

Dynamic mental images are co-constitutive of the determinations of reality and possibility under which our senses of life open and unfold. Ultimately, this dynamic sense of images introduces the difficulty of thinking in light of their role in the configuration of human knowledge and their power over interpretations and determinations of the many senses of beings. This relationship between images and philosophical knowledge is further complicated when one looks at it from the perspective of a colonized consciousness. In such cases self-knowledge and the very possibility of philosophical knowledge depend on images that are not one's own. This makes the articulation of the senses of distinct existences an impossible project. By looking at the work of Fanon, Anibal Quijano, and Alfredo Jaar, this article discusses how such pernicious images occur in spite of one's distinct sense of existence, and how the distorted displacement of existence may be challenged and overcome.

Keywords

displacement, coloniality, surrealism, coloniality of knowledge, temporality

Introduction: Towards Engaging the Coloniality of Images

The following discussion focuses on dynamic mental images that are co-constitutive of the very determinations of reality and possibility under which our senses of life open up and unfold. Such images appear in their originary sense, as *imago*, as the play of imagination in the unfolding of existence. Dynamic images are the expression of senses of life, and they are configured by the complex concentration of concrete experiences, histories, lineages, memories, forgetting, loss, anxieties, and incapacities. This last sense of images refers us to philosophical knowledge in that images mark the leeway for any possible articulation of senses of being in their dynamic transforming unfolding. What is at stake is not merely an element among others in a mechanism or movement that underlies philosophical knowledge. Dynamic images concern the possibilities and limits for the articulation of lives that may be understood in

their humanity, i.e., as images affirm and give occasion for the articulation of one's distinct senses of being. This occurs through the experience of an imagination that also figures the leeway for transfiguring and giving rise to new determinations of identities and senses of being beyond already established systems of conceptual knowledge (for example when we “change our minds,” when one sees a problem differently, when one has “an idea,” and when a child is born into a family or community). Ultimately, this dynamic sense of images introduces the difficulty of thinking in light of their role in the configuration of human knowledge and their power over our interpretations and determinations of the many senses of beings.

This relationship between images and philosophical knowledge is further complicated when one looks at it from the perspective of a colonized consciousness, be it in Latin America, Africa, or any other such situation in which images are determined by conceptions of existence and conceptual and cultural expectations from outside a specific living context. As Peruvian philosopher Anibal Quijano explains about the Latin American case,

The Eurocentric perspective of knowledge operates as a mirror that distorts what is reflected, as we can see in the Latin American historical experience. That is to say, what we Latin Americans find in that mirror is not completely chimerical, since we possess so many and such important historically European traits in many material and intersubjective aspects. But at the same time we are profoundly different. Consequently, when we look in our Eurocentric mirror, the image that we see is not composite but also necessarily partial and distorted. The tragedy is that we have all been led, knowingly or not, wanting it or not, to see and accept that image as our own and as belonging to us alone. In this way, we continue being what we are not.¹

In such cases as that of Latin America, self-knowledge and the very possibility of philosophical knowledge are dependent on images that are not our own. This makes an articulate Latin American existence, which deals with its reality, an impossible project. But the central issue here is not a natural underdevelopment; rather, it is by virtue of the kinds of images that situate Latin American consciousness and colonized consciousness in general that the underdevelopment occurs. Thus, images hold sway over knowledge by limiting existence. Here the force of imagination over the very possibility of knowledge becomes exposed in its particularly pernicious ways. It is this difficult issue of how such

¹) Anibal Quijano “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification,” in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (London: Duke University Press, 2008), 204. Hereafter *CP*, followed by page.

images occur in spite of one's distinct sense of existence that I will discuss in the following pages, ultimately with the aim of showing how this distorted displacement of existence may be challenged and overcome. The discussion begins with a brief sketch of a colonized life under the powerful sway of Eurocentric images in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*. We will then move to Anibal Quijano's analysis of the structures of power and knowledge that sustain the Eurocentric image (the coloniality of power and knowledge). The closing section considers how, in particular works in modern contemporary art, there occurs a displacement of images from the structures of power, knowledge, and thought that situate them in their Eurocentric configuration. Ultimately, I will show how this displacement, exemplified by the work of the Chilean conceptual installation artist Alfredo Jaar, figures a way of unsettling and overcoming the coloniality of images.

As Quijano indicates above, the problem is that the colonized see themselves through a *Eurocentric image*. I take Eurocentrism to be a specific characteristic of modern Western European and then North American philosophy (as an extension and development of principles first held by European philosophy). In both cases the problem is a certain ego-centrism that situates these modern traditions around the idea of a rational subjectivity (the *ego cogito*) that figures the center of all knowledge and the most advanced form of understanding available to humanity in general. As we will see below, this place of the *ego cogito* is secured and sustained by a specific order of power, knowledge, and thought. I must emphasize that the fundamental problem for my discussion is not that of a transformation in the European or North American attitude concerning their self-understanding or their understanding of the colonized; this is undoubtedly necessary but not my primary concern here. The issue is the articulation and critical dismantling of the Eurocentric images that the colonized take to be their own. Therefore, my discussion primarily situates itself and arises out of the perspective of the colonized, towards the liberation of the colonized from the coloniality of images.² However, given that Europe and North America and the colonized are at many levels inseparable, my discussion must also include a critical assessment of European and North American modernity, particularly of those aspects of modernity that prove most pernicious to other peoples and cultures by sustaining the Eurocentric and Westernizing structures of power, which consolidate the images that distort the senses of existence of the colonized. Last, I believe that this discussion is crucial to any claim of philosophical knowledge with

²) The only perspective possible given the author's concrete historical situation.

the intention of arguing for humanity and freedom, claims that are the foundation of modern Western philosophy. In this sense, exposing the issue of the coloniality of images is not an appendix to the philosophical exploration of the senses of images and imagination for philosophical knowledge but central to philosophy in many of its delimitations today.

Fanon's Paradox: Existence Without Images

In the fifth chapter of *Black Skin White Masks*, titled “The Lived Experience of the Black” (*L'expérience vécue de Noir*), Fanon gives a detailed analysis of the experience of alienation undergone by him as a colonized colored person.³ As the title of the chapter indicates, the discussion moves through various images of the Negro in an attempt to begin to give articulation to the identity of a living experience that has been alienated by Eurocentric images. The limitation of images and the distortion of existence become painfully evident once Fanon moves beyond stereotypes about the Negro and attempts to affirm his distinct existence.⁴

Fanon's first attempt to find recognition is by turning to the rational principles of the dignity found in a common humanity. As he concludes, “In the abstract there was agreement: The negro is a human being. . . . But on certain points white man remained intractable. Under no condition did he want any intimacy between the races” (*BW* 120). Even if at a rational level a sense of equality could be tolerated, ultimately the human equality of the Negro's existence remains questionable. Even in rational agreement a racial “natural” hierarchy would prevail. “I had rationalized the world and the world had rejected me on the basis of color prejudice” (*BW* 123).

Given the impossibility of finding equality by seeing himself as a rational being among other rational beings Fanon turns to its opposite. “From the opposite end of the white world a magical Negro culture was hailing me. . . . Since no agreement was possible on the level of reason, I threw myself back toward unreason” (*BW* 123). Here the Negro figures an intuitive sensual being

³) Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove University Press, 1967); hereafter *BW*, followed by page.

⁴) “I resolved, since it was impossible for me to get away from an inborn complex, to assert myself as a BLACK MAN. Since the other hesitated to recognize me, there remained only one solution: to make myself known” (*BW* 115). For reasons of space I will not discuss Fanon's careful articulation of the frame of reference that organizes the objectification of the person of color (*BW* 109–12).

identified by his/her non-rational intuition. “Little by little... I secreted a race. And that race staggered under the burden of a basic element. What was it? Rhythm?” (*BW* 122). The image of a rational being is replaced with that of a rhythmic life that in its movement has a direct connection with existence. “Eyah! The tom-tom chatters out the cosmic message. Only the Negro has the capacity to convey it, to decipher its meaning, its import” (*BW* 124). This image seems to make the articulation of the singular existence of the Negro possible for the first time in Fanon’s analysis. “So here we have the Negro rehabilitated, ‘standing before the bar,’ ruling the world with his intuition... [H]e is not a Negro but the Negro, exciting the fecund antennae of the world, placed in the foreground of the world... I am the world” (*BW* 127). Fanon’s statements are sustained by quotes from the poetry of Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire, by images of roots that go back to ancient Africa and ultimately to the heart of cosmic existence and knowledge.

But this is not a moment of overcoming Eurocentric images, rather one of self-recognition through the image of the Negro as the dialectical opposite of European rationality.⁵ At this point of his reflection, Fanon’s new discovered self-image places him from the start within the order of the colonial world. His image is that of the negativity of reason, of the dialectical opposite of the white world: “Up to the neck in the irrational” (*BW* 123). As the opposite of rationality, the poetic and mythical image of the Negro is subject to three criticisms.

First Fanon points to the rational objection to his abandonment of reason: “Black magic, primitive mentality, animism, animal eroticism, it all floods over me. All of it is typical of people who have not kept with the evolution of the human race. Or, if one prefers, this is humanity at its lowest” (*BW* 126). Now Fanon’s image comes under scrutiny in light of Western modern progress. The images he finds have already been colonized by the Eurocentric idea that those who do not know the world in a Western rational manner cannot be civilized, fully human; this is the expectation that puts Fanon’s affirmation of his blackness through images of the irrational into question. In response to this, Fanon has no choice but to insist on his resistance against rationality. Thus, he repeats Senghor’s famous statement, “Emotion is completely black as reason is Greek” (*BW* 127). But in spite of his best argument for the distinctness of the black person in terms of his or her particular mystic knowledge, Fanon’s position is still appropriated by the conceptual expectations of the white/colonizing modern world.

⁵ “From the opposite end of the white world” (*BW* 123).

I made myself the poet of the world. The white man had found a poetry in which there was nothing poetic... I had soon to change my tune... [T]he white man explained to me that... I represent a stage of development: "Your properties have been exhausted by us. We have had earth mystics such as you will never approach." (*BW* 129)

Again, the challenge comes from a Eurocentric colonialist position. This time the argument refers to the timeline of development that would recognize other people's cultures as examples of a distant past consciousness already overcome by a modern contemporary world. In this sense Fanon's image would simply fit into a moment already overcome in the development of the West and would represent a lesser stage earlier in the development of human life.

Fanon responds in light of anthropological and historical evidence and shows that what is considered white Western culture was already predated by vast developments precisely in the black world. "Ségou, Djenné, cities of more than a hundred thousand people; accounts of learned blacks (doctors of theology who went to Mecca to study the Koran). All of that exhumed from the past... The white man was wrong, I was not primitive, not even a half-man, I belonged to a race that had been working in gold and silver two thousand years ago" (*BW* 130). With this argument Fanon finds "a place in history." The image of the instinctual life is supplemented and strengthened with that of that life's own history, such that blackness becomes a rational and yet intuitive existence.

However, the specific modern Western ideal of industrialization and scientism as the highest accomplishment of humanity returns to claim Fanon's identity. This time, in response to Fanon's rational argument about the historical past of his identity, appears the claim that Western white consciousness is superior by virtue of its maturity, a maturity that is apparent in the highest development of the industrialized and scientific world.

Lay aside your history, your investigation of the past, and try to feel yourself into our rhythm. In a society such as ours, industrialized to the highest degree, dominated by scientism, there is no longer room for your sensitivity... Oh, certainly, I will be told, now and then when we are worn out by our lives in big buildings, we will turn to you as we do to our children—to the innocent, the ingenuous, the spontaneous. We will turn to you as to the childhood of the world... In a way you reconcile us with ourselves. (*BW* 132)

Given the industrial development, Fanon's claim to a historical past may only represent an acceptable and even golden age that must now be put aside in the name of the real world. As Fanon puts it, here his reason encounters "'real reason'" (notice his quotation marks) (*BW* 133). The image of a historically

distinct being becomes secondary to the present, and the present belongs to the most developed culture, to the industrialized white modern Western world. The image of the native intuition of the world and the image of its historical consciousness, both are appropriated under the same Eurocentric time line. Human history has one course, and it leads to the highest development of human knowledge occurring with modern Western culture. Moreover, this development also holds the future of all human existence in its present. This moment of appropriation of the present in the name of a future that belongs to the development of modern Western consciousness will be the last step in the collapse of Fanon's attempt to find an articulate image for the distinct existence of the Negro.

The idea of looking to the naïve black as an occasional reconciliation of white culture with its naïve or childlike self, with its innocence, precludes a much deeper appropriation of the series of experiences Fanon articulates in his work and leads to his difficult encounter with Sartre. Fanon's controversy with Sartre arises from what the French philosopher writes in his "Orphée Noir," the introduction to a francophone poetry anthology written by blacks from the French colonies (*Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*).⁶ The anthology presented poetry that gave articulation to the identities of blacks from the colonies in their own terms and included some of the major figures of the negritude movement in France and Africa. As Fanon explains, Sartre's interpretation takes this movement as a moment of negativity against white racism. In Sartre's words, the articulation of black identities becomes a single moment of "anti-racist racism" (*BW* 132). Thus, the poetry that would represent the articulate existence of the black human being turns out to be but a moment in a Western dialectical movement. Ultimately this means that Sartre resituates the poetry of negritude back in the larger Western project of the development of a universal consciousness. Sartre's conclusion:

In fact negritude appears as a minor term of a dialectical progression: The theoretical and practical assertion of the supremacy of the white man is its thesis; the position of negritude as an antithetical value is the moment of negativity. But this negative moment is insufficient by itself, and the Negroes who employ it know this very well; they know that it is intended to prepare the synthesis or realization of the human in a society without races. Thus negritude is its own destruction, it is a transition and not a conclusion, a means and not an ultimate end. ("Orphée Noir," xi; cited in *BW* 133)

⁶ Jean Paul Sartre, "Orphée Noir," preface to *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948), p. xi.

For Sartre the dialectical movement has a European resolution in that the liberation of black consciousness becomes subsumed under the Marxist labor movement of the industrialized Western nations. For Fanon this is a great blow to the whole generation of black poets and thinkers. This is not because Sartre has exposed their transient character, but because he has once again appropriated the very images aimed to give a distinct presence to black existence and identity. For Fanon this appropriation results not from an insight but from a mistake in Sartre's thinking. Sartre, in a universalizing gesture, overlooks the distinctness of those lives, those existences Fanon seeks to bring to light. Indeed, the implications of this subsuming negritude under the dialectical movement of history ends up taking away not only the present but also the future: "Without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood. Not yet white, no longer black, I was damned" (*BW* 138). Fanon's existence has been placed in a space of non-identity, in limbo. Once again Fanon's existence occurs too late, in a white man's world. Limited to Eurocentric images Fanon cannot find an image that will give a place of articulation to his existence. There are no images beyond those that will allow appropriation and reduction of the existence of the colored person, and therefore there is no place for those existences. Thus, Fanon closes by finding himself nowhere: "Without responsibility, straddling Nothingness and infinity, I began to weep" (*BW* 140).

Images and the Coloniality of Knowledge

In "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification," Anibal Quijano exposes the origins and perpetuation of an economy of global power that begins with the colonization of America and continues to date under the name of globalization (*CP* 181). As we will see, the elements of coloniality organize and sustain the kinds of Eurocentric images we have been discussing.⁷ As Quijano explains, the origin of globalization occurs with the birth of colonial/modern Eurocentered capitalism as a new global power: "the social classification of the world's population around the idea of race, a mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination and per-

⁷ Nelson Maldonado-Torres develops Quijano's insight in terms of the coloniality of being. A very important step that adds to this analysis is its recognition of the concrete experiences and lives that are in question throughout this discussion (Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept," *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2 and 3 [March/May 2007]: 252).

vades the more important dimensions of global power, including its specific rationality: Eurocentrism” (CP 181). Here Quijano puts his finger on the idea that holds in place the colonizing of images Fanon articulates. As Quijano explains, “race” is not a natural fact but a mental construction, one that serves as the foundation of colonial domination and Eurocentrism. According to Quijano the two basic axes of the new model of world power are the new structuring of control of labor and production, and the development of the idea of “race” as a natural fact, i.e., “a supposedly different biological structure that placed some in a natural situation of inferiority to the others.”⁸ On the one hand, these two elements together, labor and race, lead to the formation of new historical identities such as Indians, blacks, and mestizos. On the other hand, central European identity is configured as a matter not of geography but of race. These basic racial identities serve as the instruments for basic social classification (CP 182). Moreover, with these races socially identified, a systematic division of labor appears based on race. The system works according to wage-labor rules: “First, it was based on the assignment of unpaid labor to colonial races (originally American Indians, blacks and, in more complex ways, mestizos). . . . Second, labor was controlled through the assignment of salaried labor to the colonizing whites” (CP 187). Finally, based on race and salary, a hierarchy develops that places those who deserve wages in an epistemically privileged position with respect to possible knowledge. With these brief steps a system of domination/exploitation based on race/labor has been configured through the colonization of America, a system of power Quijano names “coloniality” and that will remain operative beyond post-colonialism to date. The last step in the coloniality of power points to a second aspect, the coloniality of knowledge.

Through the development of coloniality Europe comes to believe it is not only the center of power but the cultural and historical apogee of humanity. The *ego cogito* takes its place at the center and as the highest expression of knowledge. With this development heterogeneous cultures, intellectual lives, are relocated according to a single configuration.⁹ “In effect, all of the

⁸ CP 182. Indeed, this “natural” difference was assumed as constitutive of the relations of domination that the conquest imposed.

⁹ In his analysis at this point, Quijano follows the general lines developed in the work of Raúl Prebisch, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Enrique Dussel and explains that the formation of race and its application to wage-labor result in the formation of a world-system made up of a center and a periphery (CP 188). See Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1985); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the*

experiences, histories, resources, and cultural products ended up in one global cultural order revolving around European or Western hegemony” (CP 189). This occurs through various steps: the expropriation of that knowledge and culture useful to the West, the repressing of other possible forms of production of knowledge by the colonized, and the forced learning of the dominant culture and ideals (CP 189). It is through these processes that Western European and then North American rationalism become ethnocentric. And, according to Quijano, this ethnocentrism is not empty. As he explains: “the Europeans generated a new temporal perspective of history and relocated colonized populations, along with their respective histories and cultures, in the past of a historical trajectory whose culmination was European.”¹⁰ With this creation of a single temporality in which Western European and North American ways of understanding the world are the most advanced, all other cultural manifestations and possible production of knowledge become by definition outdated, “behind,” and practically useless. From this perspective modernity and rationality may only belong to the European and North American forms of production of knowledge. Here appears a strong play of new and determining categories all too familiar to both Western and colonized intellectuals: Eastern-Western, primitive-civilized, magic/mythic-scientific, irrational-rational, traditional-modern, etc. (CP 190).

Fanon’s plight in his attempt and failure to find an image that will allow for the articulation of his distinctive existence results from the fact that whatever image he summons is already by definition situated by the ordering of the coloniality of power and knowledge. When Fanon turns to the affirmation of his blackness, he finds at each turn objections that arise from a progressive temporality that follows from the coloniality of power. That is, not only is he answering to the “natural” race hierarchy created under the coloniality of power, but every image he summons has been placed under the specific temporality that underlies the colonial structures of power and knowledge. According to this idea of temporality, there is one single historical development—going from the naïve state of nature of the savage to the highest development of humanity—that is the accomplishment of modern Western rationalism. As Fanon makes his first turn towards the articulation of his experience in a

Sixteenth Century (New York: Academic Press, 1974) and the subsequent volumes II and III. Also see Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1996).

¹⁰ CP 190. See also Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2003) and *The Idea of Latin America* (London: Blackwell, 2005).

positive sense, he finds himself forced to choose between the rational and the irrational, thus repeating the duality sustained by the coloniality of time. In affirming his blackness Fanon has no choice but to take the opposite of rationality, he must choose either rationality or being primitive, magical, irrational.¹¹ The two objections to his claim to an identity through irrationality directly point back again to the temporality that underlies coloniality. In the first case Fanon's a-rationality is suspect of being savage, uncivilized: a step back from civilization. The second objection reminds Fanon of modern progress and answers to his acknowledgment of history by dismissing it in the name of the modern rational scientific world, the highest form of humanity. Finally, Fanon encounters this colonizing temporality in its strongest form in Sartre's dialectic, in which the future belongs to that single historical development, and therefore even if the present makes negritude evident, this is but a moment in the development of Western rational knowledge. Ultimately, Fanon's humanity will not be presentable beyond the constraints of images possible under and within the Eurocentric and racial temporal line of progress. In short, the images Fanon discusses in chapter five of *Black Skin White Masks* are always Eurocentric by virtue of the order of power and knowledge that situates them.

¹¹ In contrast to this reception of the claim to knowledge through rhythm made by the negritude movement, one may refer to Eboussi Boulaga's *La crise du Muntu: authenticite africaine et philosophie* (Paris: Presence africaine, 1977). Boulaga writes concerning the vital force behind life, between past and present: "Succeeding generations determine and assess the place of individuals according to the extent to which they are closer or farther from the distance that separates them from their origin or which reflects these origins in the present and makes them contemporary through their representation. . . . Authenticity is nothing but the permanent authorization of origin; it is the permanence of original force." And concerning this hermeneutical moment of existence he says: "Time passes and returns, the force that expands and begins again manifests the eternity of Power in its incessant emanation and expansion from its origin. . . . Periodicity is the substantial time of things. . . . Everything is alternation and rhythm. . . . Rhythm is vital. . . . It is rhythm which produces ecstasy, that flowing out of one's self that is identified with the vital force. . . . It would not be exaggerated to affirm that rhythm is the *architectural framework of the self*, which for the human being of the civilization for which this philosophy is expounded, is the most fundamental experience, which eludes all of the trappings of malign genius [as Descartes would put it], which remains free of all doubt, and which is *Je danse, donc je vie* (I dance, therefore I am alive)." The insight on hermeneutics and temporality in these passages is simply lost to philosophy if one remains within the coloniality of power, knowledge, and thought. Indeed, one could reread not only Hegel (as Enrique Dussel suggests in *Ética de la liberación* [Madrid: Trotta, 2006], 85n151) but also Gadamer, Heidegger, and Bergson outside the coloniality of modernity and in light of Boulaga's insights.

A last aspect of the coloniality of power and knowledge helps to complete the analysis of how Eurocentric images function. This is one element in what I call the coloniality of thought (the set of expectations that underlie what is taken to be conceptual or philosophical knowledge in modern Western philosophy). In terms of the history of modern philosophy, one of the primary characteristics that distinguishes the *ego cogito* from all other ways of knowing is that, by virtue of being transcendental, its knowledge is objective. The ground of Western modern thought is transcendental knowledge, i.e., as understanding moves beyond empirical knowledge.¹² The question for us is how this transcendental move operates in relation to the coloniality of power and knowledge.

In his work the “Hubris of Zero Point,” Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez shows that, with the setting of the coloniality of knowledge and its hierarchy in the Americas, there appears also a sense of a thinking that orders reality while remaining outside of that which it orders.¹³ Once the hierarchy of epistemic possibilities has been established, the rational principles that have ordered knowledge withdraw and become the transcendental site of the hierarchy. Castro-Gómez shows how this occurs in the settling of Nueva Granada, where the colony is ruled by *criollos* (sons of Spaniards with indigenous mothers), who identify themselves with European principles. But these principles that order the colonial and arising modern city become a point of origin beyond all empirical reality and, therefore, ultimately unquestionable. In other words, having gained its position through the coloniality of power and knowledge, the *ego cogito*, the site of modern Western reason, becomes an invisible, untouchable, and yet all-pervading system of knowledge. This transcendental move serves to conceal and put the operation of the system of power and knowledge beyond any factual critique or transformation from without its system. In fact, viewed from the point of a rational Western transcendental position, Fanon’s argument seems to only affect the empirical realm

¹² One sees this in Descartes’ split of body and mind, and in his discussion of knowledge in the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, where ultimately knowledge of existence must be analogous to mathematical knowledge. This is also the case with Kant’s “second Copernican revolution” in his first *Critique*, in which the *a priori* conditions for the possibility of empirical experience are exposed as a matter of rational synthesis. The transcendental turn also occurs with Hegel’s recognition of the movement of history beyond empirical fact and towards absolute knowledge. Interestingly, in all three cases there is an attempt, complicated by the sharp separation between rationality and its others, to get back to the phenomena.

¹³ Santiago Castro-Gómez, *La Hybris del Punto Cero* (Bogotá: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2005).

and not the higher form of thinking associated with transcendental knowledge. However, as Castro-Gómez shows in his detailed study, the transcendental claim is part of the coloniality of power and knowledge that grounds the place of the *ego cogito* at the center of all knowledge. The coloniality of power and knowledge puts the *ego cogito* at the center of all knowledge and humanity. Ultimately, as one learns from Quijano, the *ego cogito*'s claim to transcendental knowledge hangs on the system constructed through the hierarchical placement of lives during the invasion and exploitation of the Americas. Therefore, focus on the transcendental character of experience and its principles will not serve to escape the pervading and invisible power of coloniality but only conceals it. In light of the transcendental turn in coloniality, one may see Fanon's problem as the result of an inclusive exclusion (to use Giorgio Agamben's language) whereby Fanon's images are always already included by a system of power that through action at an infinite distance situates them, delimits them, and at the same time remains untouched by them, untouched by Fanon's experience.

At each point in Fanon's discussion, the images he finds are framed by a system of power that limits their meaning. Therefore, the images he finds may make visible only possible existence under the order of power and knowledge. Furthermore, because the images are read only in terms of that colonizing time line, no matter what the image may be, it will be defined by the single project of the coloniality of Western objective rational consciousness. Indeed, this is the background of Sartre's mistake when he cannot summon an image that will allow him to see negritude for itself. To say it in another way, perhaps more urgent for the reader: The only images that appear are those that respond to the hierarchical and temporal frame of coloniality, and in this sense one's vision, one's very possibility of knowledge through images has been colonized. Without undermining or putting aside Fanon's crucial point about the difference in the lived experience of colonizers and the colonized, one must wonder about the extent to which Fanon's paradoxical existence without images spills over into Western existence; and this raises a question about the extent to which Western thought may think freely and speak of philosophical knowledge when all images have been placed under the economy of the coloniality of power, knowledge, and thought.¹⁴

¹⁴ In this sense one must ask about the extent to which the Western discourse of "the other" operates as a series of inclusive exclusions (no matter how sharply they affirm the metaphysics of the other over against totalizing ontological discourses).

Buñuel's Gesture: The Liberating Displacement of Image

Given the limitations of images under coloniality, it would seem that one's possibility of seeing the world is also narrowed down to those specific framings of the phenomena that answer to the coloniality of power, knowledge, and thought. In other words, we live in a world that, although flooded with images, is image poor when one considers the possibilities of experiencing vision. One may see the visible, but the visible is but a function of those expectations that organize any possible image. One goes about the world as a thinking thing, an object that then sees other objects. One spends hours watching images on television that visually repeat the same formula, pictures of people speaking (speaking shadows). As Gadamer so well puts it in *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, at least since the Middle Ages and the advent of Christianity, the work of art has its justification and sense founded in language. Images will answer to the expectations of a world organized around modern rational subjectivity and its investment and development as a universal project of knowledge defined by language. This of course is not the case for certain European artists, for example, Artaud, Beuys, and Picasso. Of the three, the latter seems the most controversial to my claim. But if one pauses for a moment to consider his work, it is immediately evident that he does not simply repeat the production of expected images, of what may be seen as an image. Rather, from his cubist period on, his work seems to tag, deform, rip, and shatter traditional perception. And he does so without abandoning the rational world but, rather, reconfiguring it, putting together pieces into constructions that seem simply out of place with what the world should look like. I believe this process of displacement may have the leaping creative effect Fanon seeks, particularly for the sake of overcoming the coloniality of images.

More than once Picasso remarks on the fact that he does not make images, but that painting for him is an activity that goes against the image.¹⁵ Picasso's painting figures a perpetual destruction of images, which leads to other unexpected visual experiences. Moreover, the images Picasso ultimately presents not only upset one's expectations of what an image is supposed to show, but with their disparate appearing, his works also displace the viewer's gaze. What

¹⁵ "A picture used to be a sum of additions. In my case a picture is a sum of destructions. I do a picture then I destroy it" (*Theories of Modern Art*, ed. Herschel B. Chipp [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968], 267). "When you begin a picture, you often make some pretty discoveries. You must be on guard against them. Destroy the thing, do it over several times. In each destroying of a beautiful discovery, the artist does not really suppress it, but rather transforms it" (*ibid.*, 270).

is most upsetting about Picasso is that one cannot look away and that that looking disturbs one's parameters of visibility. It is "I," the viewer, that ultimately must learn to see again. Therefore, Picasso's work does not merely present a new image, but its shock to date and its legacy for Western culture is that it requires, it brutally forces the viewer to go beyond the expectations of knowledge and power that order the very possibility of saying what is and what is not an image. Looking at *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)* (1907) today is still an unpleasant and unacceptable experience for most people, not because of the image, but because of the violation of the order of knowledge and the displacement of the viewer's gaze that occurs when confronted with such monstrous experience as that larger-than-life flesh-colored canvas. Looking at *Guernica* (1937) one finds the gestures of hundreds of years of painting turned inside out, as the comfort of oil paintings turns to the discomfort of a shock that forces one to think again; the shock that forces a transformation of consciousness by means of the displacement of traditional forms. In our sophisticated consumer-driven world, millions of people will look at those canvases. They will be endlessly photographed and reproduced, but only to make an image of something as unlikely as a painted body, a mask, or a teacup. And the evidence of the impossibility of our absorbing the displacement of the image and viewer is that, in spite of all the reproductions, nothing in public images today, nothing in popular newspapers, magazines, television shows, or Hollywood movies looks like Picasso's works. Of the millions of images one sees a year, most of them will remain repetitions of the framed image under the framing order of knowledge.

We find the displacement of images also at work in Luis Buñuel's filmmaking. The Cuban cinematographer Nestor Almendros, one of the legends of cinematography in the history of filmmaking, tells a revealing story about Buñuel's sense of images.¹⁶ Almendros said he (Almendros) would spend hours preparing the lighting and setting the shot. Then, Buñuel would arrive, turn the camera 180 degrees and begin to shoot the scene. It is this gesture of dis-enframing that organizes my discussion. Buñuel's gesture resulted in at least two crucial elements for our discussion: in turning the camera Buñuel would begin from what would otherwise remain exterior, invisible, in the periphery of the scene. Furthermore, in that same gesture, the scene would be displaced and brought into another context in which it would emerge in ways neither Almendros nor Buñuel could control or predetermine. In short, Buñuel's gesture remained liberatory for the image and an opening for that which did not

¹⁶ Nestor Almendros, *Días de una cámara* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1990).

have an already determined place but certainly was at play in the periphery of Almendro's preset image. One may point to this gesture in contrast to the poverty of images under coloniality. In the turning of the camera, a displacement of image and background occurs, much as it occurs in Picasso's painting and sculpture. Except that, in the case of Buñuel, the displacement is more explicit. The scene that has been set up, the space in which it may occur and be contextualized, and the visual parameters that respond to the requirements of the construction of the image—all is violated as the actors are forced literally to appear under a different light. Anything can happen in that situation, and what unfolds—and was first to be an image in a controlled context—lives now from a tension founded in displacement.

The Displacement of Images from their Eurocentric Configuration in Alfredo Jaar

Artists like Picasso, Artaud, and Beuys only carry the principle of displacement I have been discussing to a limit. Their work is within their tradition and the displacement of images occurs within a system of images that is almost canonical in its symbols and allusions. The principle of displacement takes a different form in the work of the Chilean conceptual artist and filmmaker Alfredo Jaar. Jaar's displacement of images engages directly the limits or expectations imposed by the coloniality of power and knowledge.

Alfredo Jaar's work is perhaps best known in North America for his 1987 work "A Logo for America" in Times Square, New York. Jaar projected in the central screen in Times Square a series of images. First appears the silhouette of the North American continent, then at the center of the silhouette and transgressing the borders of it appears the sentence "THIS IS NOT AMERICA." This would be followed by the projection of a United States flag, which would then be filled with the words: "THIS IS NOT AMERICA'S FLAG." Then the words: AMERICA would appear with images of North America, Central America, and South America at its center. This image would multiply to diversify the image of the three continents and the word AMERICA. Besides the obvious point, the series of images works to displace the popular conception of the United States as America. Moreover, in projecting this in the large screen in Times Square, at the heart of Manhattan, Jaar calls to mind the fact that there, where the viewer is standing, that place is not what one has thought it is. Where is the viewer standing? What claim could the viewer make to America in the awareness of a colonizing gesture that has

become so commonplace that up to that moment has gone unnoticed? The exposure of an implicit and yet obvious colonizing position in the simple gesture of calling the United States “America” may serve as the occasion for reflection, or not. However, the image of America is no longer that of the United States, and the United States has lost its implicit claim over the Americas. Moreover, a question remains: does America exist specifically somewhere?

Jaar’s later work, from 1994 to 2000, concerns the genocide in Rwanda, and it is a cycle titled “The Rwanda Project.” This cycle of works takes further the displacement of image, context, and viewer. During the retrospective of his work in Milan in 2008 titled “It is Difficult,” some of the works from the cycle were presented at the Spazio Oberdan. First of all, Jaar’s works do not offer a single image of the genocide itself. Instead, the images that one finds compose a large space within which the viewer moves. It is the space that is the work. The images that do appear are pictures of simple people (*Epilogue* [1998]); of two children embracing each other as they look on at an undefined public event (*Embrace* [1996]; Figure 1); and fields, tree lines, and a church steeple under pure blue skies (*Field, Road, Cloud* [1997]; Figure 2). These passages never suggest directly the violence that has taken place. They do not answer to the requirement of the spectator looking for an image already constructed and delivered as a complete fact.

In contrast to the images, the words in the exhibition point directly to the genocide, by documenting the increasing number of deaths over the long period of events, and by telling what happened to one particular family. In *Searching for Africa in LIFE* (1996), Jaar shows a mosaic like wall of images from the covers of *LIFE* magazine that covers the period from 1936 to 1996. The viewer is invited to look for Africa in those thousands of covers. The colonizing gaze and disregard for Africa’s reality become obvious given the images of exoticism, animal life, and “savage” beauty. This is also accentuated by another work, *From Time to Time* (2006). The disregard for Africa’s reality becomes powerfully explicit in *Untitled (Newsweek)* (1994). In this work Jaar shows the covers of *Newsweek* during the months of the genocide and the absolute disregard for what has been happening (from April to August 1994). The factual weekly numbers of the deaths are placed under the glossy covers of the weekly magazine. Africa appears here not in images but in the absence of its representation. The juxtaposition of words and images from Western mass media makes this explicit. In *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita* (installation, 1996; Figure 3), Jaar once again displaces image and word by telling us about Gutete Emerita’s story and then offering us not images of what she has seen but a thousand slides on a light table. Gutete Emerita, at thirty years old, saw her



Figure 1: Courtesy of Alfredo Jaar. *Embrace* (detail). 1996.

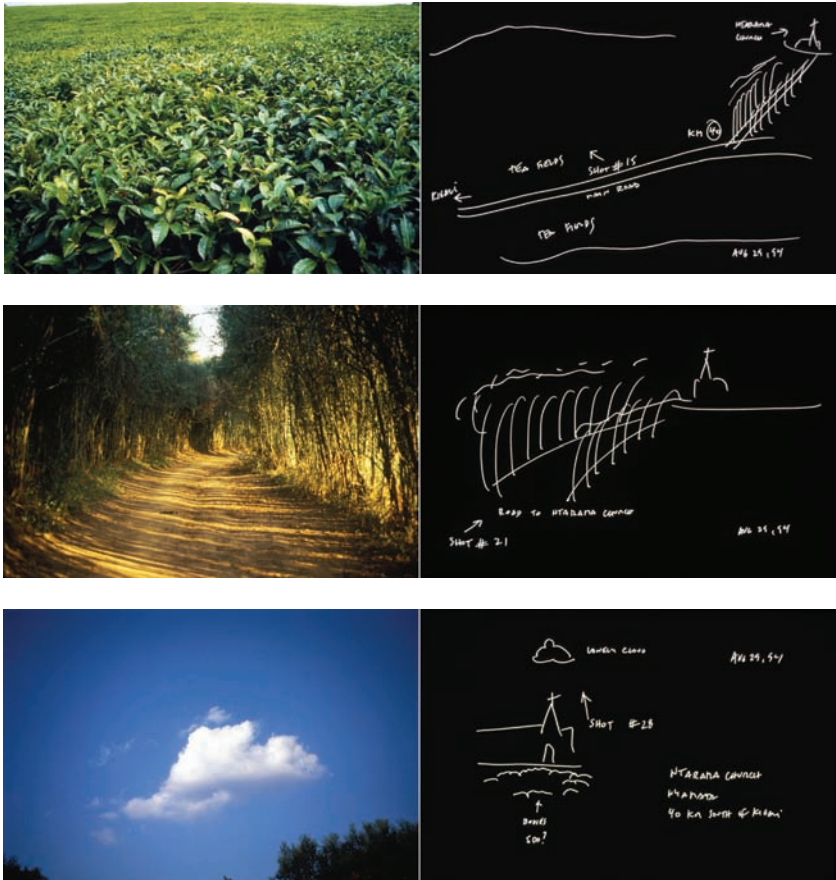


Figure 2: Courtesy of Alfredo Jaar. *Field, Road, Cloud*. 1997.

husband and her two children massacred in front of her eyes during mass at the church of Ntamara in Rwanda. The story of the family is made of words that lead not to matching images but to a light table covered with thousands of copies of one single image, an image one only sees by leaning over and looking through a magnifying lens at a single slide. There one encounters her gaze, the gaze of a survivor looking back. There is nothing to see except that gaze. There are no images for what she has seen, for her experience, and yet one does stand with her gaze.

With this cycle of works Jaar accomplishes something analogous to Picasso's *Guernica*, in that he manages to take the commonplace materials of popular culture today and transform them into a moment of profound transformation of consciousness. But Jaar has gone further, since he has created not an image but a space that cannot be made into an image that will serve the economy of the coloniality of power, knowledge, and thought, and its pernicious temporality. In entering the space there is no image of the genocide; the images from mass media prove misleading; and the words recall nothing that may be delivered to the objective rational spectator, except for the awareness of the absence of images in Western mass media for Africa and those massacred. There is not



Figure 3: Courtesy of Alfredo Jaar. *The Eyes of Guetete Emerita* (detail). 1996.

an image to be colonized, and the colonizing images in *LIFE* and *Newsweek* have been exposed as that. This absence creates a second effect. Without the image or object to see and appropriate, one's place—that rational objective position with its expectations—becomes obvious. Furthermore, whatever does appear will ultimately have to do with the viewer as much as with those fragments that compose the space. The word “nigger” will be one's own word; the mystification, the idealization, the indifference towards other distinct lives perpetuated in one's comfort will be one's exposed action. Here the image has been displaced from the pornographic expectation, and the objective mind has been displaced from its complacency. What remains? One's gaze has found a mirror—a most damning image, the gaze of the damned that no longer stands outside of one's “objective” viewing and comprehension, outside of one's claim to objective (untouchable) rationality and humanity. It is here that the coloniality of time no longer holds. The gaze is now constituted by a consciousness exposed to its constituting it, a consciousness that must reconfigure itself in light of what it comes to see, having being exposed to its role in the configuration of the image. The temporality of this experience does not allow for one's claim of a position beyond the fact of the gaze. We are speaking of an originary temporality in which past and future hold together in a decisive present shared by Gutete Emerita's gaze and one's own gaze. There is no possible escape into a present that would relegate the experience of Gutete Emerita to a savage uncivilized past. Indeed, if there is something savage and profoundly disturbing, it is found in the evidence of the images from Western mass media, in the abandonment of our reality to images that do not allow us to see that reality and articulate it.

As Quijano explains in the quote at the beginning of our discussion, the colonized suffer under the distorting Eurocentric images they identify with their own existence. As we have seen, these images are sustained by a system of power and knowledge that effectively exploits, destroys, suppresses, judges, ignores, and ultimately condemns to nonexistence what is distinct. In light of Jaar's work the damned now gazes at his/her self and begins to see that those images that once framed existence at a distance will no longer serve as knowledge, comfort, or an alibi.

Conclusion: It is Difficult, of Truth and Images

In the last section we engaged moments of displacement in which one finds a possibility for the liberation of images from the coloniality of power,

knowledge, and thought. In Alfredo Jaar's "It Is Difficult," images are displaced from this order from outside the Eurocentric Western hegemonic gaze. This occurs because the themes, structures, and very possibility of knowledge and representation have been altered and are no longer operative in terms of the rule of coloniality. What happens to our sense of images in this engagement from the periphery? If the discussion has had any success, we are left with the possibility of looking for new configurations of images, for other knowledge, but always in the awareness of the overwhelming flood of ready-made colonizing images that seem to almost secure our existential blindness towards the distinct lives that offer unsuspected new paths towards world philosophies.