

Shameless Ethics, Honourable Dissent:
Curious Encounters as a Decolonial Strategy in Contemporary Educational Praxis

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“When we meet the unknown, we believe that we are out of place. But, in fact, I believe that we are reoriented” - Rene Magritte

Abstract

Curiosity is studied, by an interdisciplinary body of work, as a pursuit or the motivation for the pursuit of knowledge. According to Pam Grossman and John L Jackson Jr in *Curiosity Studies: A New Ecology of Knowledge* (2020), the social currency that avows innovation as critical over curiosity, places curiosity as merely a personal pursuit, a wilful enquiry to satiate personal desires. But they claim that certain cultivated forms of curiosity are ‘would-be-elixirs’ without which innovation wouldn’t reach the potential it claims to have (Grossman and Jackson Jr, viii). Without attempting to focus too much on the ontological interrogation of – What is Curiosity, this thesis attempts to understand how curiosity is practised by examining contemporary educational praxis. To do so, I ask – *How do practices of curiosity in contemporary educational praxis contribute to decolonial work?* By answering this question, I hope to support my claim that the decolonial value of contemporary educational praxis is related to how knowledge and by consequence curiosity, is done by performing for and at encounters.

This paper focuses on the ‘*How?*’ to observe *what is done* in the process of knowledge production and transmission. With this intention, the thesis first develops an initial theoretical framework that takes lessons from performance studies to propose that the practice of curiosity should be examined within an event of knowledge. Thereby applying the same to examine how knowledge is conceived, produced, and managed in contemporary educational praxis. The thesis aims to enumerate ways in which contemporary educational praxis is transforming what it means to teach and learn, how it perceives knowledge formation and transmission differently, and finally, how it contributes to the decolonial project.

Acknowledgement

Anyone who has completed a task may know that you don't know when it's done until you do. It is a moment of realization, so subtle that one could miss it in a blink. It is the moment when you can take the next step, whether to continue the task or move on to another one. This moment for me hasn't arrived yet. I hope that it does, sometime in the future. But that I can hope for its closing, one that I was unable to imagine until now, is all attributed to those I mention below. It was their response of *I know it could be done* to my surprising realization that *I think I will be okay*, that made it bearable for me to be thoroughly uncomfortable through the process.

To two of the most challenging individuals that didn't contribute to my thesis in any direct way. But here they are. These two individuals are my parents.

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Introduction

Decolonial theory and practice have been gaining new momentum since 2011. Decolonizing the Curriculum, a continuation of the paradigm (or a subset) of Decolonizing the University, saw its formal emergence with the Rhodes must fall movement at the University of Cape Town, South Africa¹. The students demanded pulling down the Cecil Rhodes statue as a way to intervene in the colonial history it represented. Recognizing that the statue stood, not only for a history of oppression but also for the continued alignment of the university with the colonial history, highlights a key aspect in the current practice of Decolonizing educational institutions and practices. Similar movements have ensued across the globe and resulted in manifestos (Keele Manifesto²), reports (Let's do Diversity led by Prof. Gloria Wekker³), student-led zines (UAL's Decolonising the Arts Curriculum: Perspectives on Higher Education), and journal issues (student-led Junctions Journal issue 6.1 - Decolonising the University⁴) to name a few.

On one hand, the diversity of such movements indicate that the practice of decolonizing the curriculum or university entails a reconfiguration of the literature studied (mainly consisting of strategies that aim to include perspectives outside the dominant western perspective), but also of the architectures that house the curriculums (mainly consisting of strategies that seek to transform organizational structures). Therefore, decolonial work, is not and cannot be a practice at a single level but needs to consider the systems that reproduce coloniality. While such practices do achieve to demonstrate the myriad ways decolonisation in the educational space can be understood, the adoption of the term and movement by neo-liberal institutional practices highlights the risk of applying the strategies without context.

Thus, such strategies aim to dismantle entirely the colonial history that had engulfed lands, cultures, ideologies, and discourses, it risks contributing to the essentialism it stands against. Over time, the call to decolonise seems to have failed the project for which it had put into motion, the term, the criticality of it, and the recognition for the need to address it, or the lack thereof. This has occurred, partly, due to the rapid conflation with the decolonial efforts of

¹ Similar movements have been visible in UK, Netherlands and USA with statements such as the Keele Manifesto outlining what the task of Decolonising the Curriculum is. Read also: <https://www.keele.ac.uk/equalitydiversity/equalityawards/raceequalitycharter/keeledecolonisingthecurriculumnetwork/>

² Launched on July 7th, 2018, Keele University established their position on what it meant to Decolonise the Curriculum by focusing on how it is different from diversification and inclusion. They also elaborate on guidelines that seem critical for curriculum design through the lens of Decolonial Thought. Read: <https://www.keele.ac.uk/equalitydiversity/equalityawards/raceequalitycharter/keeledecolonisingthecurriculumnetwork/>

³ The report studied diversity in its myriad forms and report what diversity of institution and knowledge is and require. Read the report here: <file:///Users/aishwaryakumar/Downloads/2.-diversity-commission-report-summary-2016-12-10.pdf>

⁴ As a response to the call for Junctions Journals 6.1 issue, I worked with co-editors Diana Willemijn Helmich, Amira Fretz and hosted a panel on Decolonizing the University (to be published) with prof. dr. Layal Ftouni, dr Maaïke Bleeker, Dhr. dr. T. (Toni) Pape, Rolando Vazquez. In line with their call, the panel was a way to contextualise decolonial theory and practice within educational spaces in the Netherlands, so as not to risk transforming it into an empty metaphor.

settler-colonial nations (Tuck and Yang, 2012) with decolonial thought praxis in the field of knowledge production and transmission and partly due to the absolute “...rejection or negation of Western Thought” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 3) solely based on the fact that they constitute western perspectives. As a way to salvage the movement that is born out of a specific colonial history, they give us a sense of what decolonial work could entail in the modern context in *On Decoloniality - Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (2018).

Instead, they state that decolonial thinking and practice embody a situated reading – “...the ways that different local histories and embodied conceptions and practices of decoloniality, including our own, can enter into conversations and build understandings that both cross geopolitical locations and colonial differences and contest the totalizing claims and political-epistemic violence of modernity” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 1). According to them and fellow decolonial thinkers (Tuck and Yang, 2012; Bamba et al., 2018), decolonial work must not elevate or demote knowledge solely based on the ethnic background, theoretical privilege, or historical positionality of the authors because in contemporary realities coloniality and decoloniality aren’t separated by unfathomable distances, specifically when we discuss knowledge production for a networked society. Rather, they argue that colonial and decolonial thought sit together in a matrix that produces them off each other. Thus decolonial work mustn’t assume that knowledge produced with decolonial intentions escapes influences and theories produced by authors from colonial histories.

So, what could decolonial work, which might seem quite a nebulous look like? Instead of departing from decolonial theory, this thesis embarks on an examination of educational projects through performance theories, to understand how educational praxis at the turn of the decade (2019-2020) comply with and contribute to the above-mentioned perspective of decolonial thought. For this, I analyze what these projects aim to do and how they do it and through that, interpret what is different about the practice of curiosity. By exploring the decolonial intentions, productions and management of knowledge production, I hope to understand how and why practices of curiosity are critical to decolonial work.

Social Context

With the onset of the COVID19 lockdowns starting in the first quarter of 2020, the institutions around the world were slowly shutting down, leading to the closure of spaces but also affecting methods of educational praxis that had been employed so far. With no place to congregate, not only were educators hunting for new ways of continuing education and cultural praxis but students and audiences of the cultural sector were also trying to find different ways they could educate themselves. This global crisis saw the emergence of the online space that began as a substitute but soon developed as an alternate way to experience events. While online platforms have long been the platform for counterculture movements, the adoption of this

strategy by educational projects, subjected educational praxis to the contingencies of online networking.

Employing the digital meant sharing the space between the actual and the virtual, which led to the emergence of the new school-goer Thumbelina (petit poucette) and Tom thumb (petit poucet)⁵. They, who were transforming knowledge to be in the *here and now* but also contributing to the production of copies, excerpts, versions for the future, co-producing knowledge through Bricolage⁶ modalities for digital consumption. They, who were questioning the information they were receiving. They, who were producing micro ecologies of knowledge that intervened in grand narratives. They who were learning through wonder rather than compliance. What kind of learning experience does one imagine for such a learner? What kind of theories and methodologies apply to them. Instead of asking how certain methodologies enable learning, this thesis departs from the above context of a learner and tries to understand how learning experience is developed keeping in mind their technological condition.

My hunch is that the learning culture in the emerging phenomenon of digital classrooms is decolonial mainly because it foregrounds different individual and social questions, or individual and social curiosity, as a way to make sense of the topic under question. Such practices resonate with bell hooks call for "...practice[s] of freedom" (hooks 1994). hook's talks about freedom from disciplinary structures and industrial reproductions. Freedom also from the urge to gatekeep, and have authority over knowledge. I explore whether such practices of freedom can be found in contemporary educational praxis and its acts of liberation, from directive teaching and learning. This I link to decolonial modes of thinking knowledge in my conclusion. For wasn't it Fanon who stated that "Decolonization [...] sets out to change the order of the world..."(Fanon 1963, 36). Finding preliminary traces of liberatory intentions, I set out to understand how and what exactly is liberating about contemporary educational praxis. What and how is it decolonial, if at all?

While it could be misconceived that it is the decolonial innovativeness found in the engagement between educational praxis and digital technologies that I substantiate my argument with, I would like to stress that this thesis considers the technological condition as an already existing one and chooses to explore how the condition has transformed educational praxis, what are the particularities and what does it offer to the future of educational theory and praxis. With that, I would also like to disclaim that I speak from a certain position in society

⁵ Serres, Michel, and Daniel W. Smith. 2015. *Thumbelina: the culture and technology of millennials*. In his text, octogenarian Michel Serres tells a tender tale of the young school girl and boy, born in the digital. His three chapter long book, discusses how the individual is different from his own. How "...the classrooms of yesteryear are dead..." (34), how information in 'virtual' (pg. 6) , 'distributed' (pg.11), and how spatial unity formatted by the page can now be envisioned topologically.

⁶ Read: Deuze, Mark. (2006). Participation, Remediation, Bricolage: Considering Principal Components of a Digital Culture. The Information Society. 22. 10.1080/01972240600567170.

where I experience the kind of intimacy with the digital assumed in this paper. Without attempting to supersede or speak for decolonial educational praxis in its entirety, I analyze three projects to showcase the diversity of decolonial work, at the same time highlight certain overlaps. To understand the culture of the contemporary educational praxis that the three projects fall under, it would be best to reconcile the three projects at the outset.

Situating the Projects

The three projects examined in this thesis are IMPAKT [Centre for Media Culture]'s annual 5 day festival in 2020 Zero Footprint – Living and Connecting on a Damaged Earth, an elective offered by Utrecht University to RMA students of Media, Arts and Performance Studies - Ecologies of Curation, and open-source digital syllabus by Stand With Kashmir - The Kashmir Syllabus. It could be argued that the three projects are extremely disparate, in form, size, genealogy and intention, yet I believe there are certain overlaps that are of interest to this thesis.

Zero Footprint would commonly be evaluated as contemporary curatorial praxis. If this were to be examined for the criteria's of traditional curatorial excellence, then it would be examined for "...the pragmatics of caring for collections, planning programs, working with artists, mounting exhibitions, attracting viewers..." (Smith 2015, 14). Criteria's which although continue to be critical, do not comply with the purposes of this thesis. Instead, I consider ZFP as it shows resemblance within the *Educational Turn* since its opening lines specifically indicate an intention to educate the audience with ways to live and die in the ongoing ecological crisis^[13].

Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson in *Curating and the Educational Turn* (2010) establish that contemporary curatorial ideologies and praxis have turned directions by borrowing ideologies and praxis found in the field of education. This does not suggest that education becomes a theme to be explored (that is the purpose of this thesis), but more so that its mechanisms are borrowed to develop curatorial praxis (O'Neill and Wilson 2010, 12). It is this turn that O'Neill and Wilson examine in their book, and it is their observation of "curatorialisation' of education" (O'Neill and Wilson 2010, 13) and discourse as "durational dialogical process" (ibid.) that contributes to the common ground between the three projects.

The foregrounding of discourse as dialogical process is also seen in the two other projects examined in this thesis, Ecologies of Curation and The Kashmir Syllabus. While both share closer ties to traditional educational praxis, The Kashmir Syllabus, could be considered outside classical boundaries that define what the purposes of a syllabus are. Yet, because the organizers hope for the syllabus to be a way to educate the self and the community, and do so by foregrounding dialogical discourse, I believe that it shares similarities to Zero Footprint.

Ecologies of Curation undeniably falls in the realm of educational praxis. Although by designing the course in a way where the students and teacher would produce the discourse and subsequently knowledge, where praxis and theory interact, and where roles of facilitator and students are challenged, Ecologies of Curation, while formally situated within an institutional space, complying to certain institutional intentions and aspirations, attempts to transcend traditional dynamics found in the classroom. Therefore I claim that, all three projects intersect in their intention to educate and decolonize educational praxis by curating/ choreographing/ designing encounters for curiosity to interact.

Background to Research Question

The relationship between decolonial thought and educational praxis is not a novel coupling, as is noted above. Neither is the relationship between curiosity and educational intention and praxis, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 1. If according to authors such as Mignolo and Walsh, the project of decolonization aims to transform knowledge production by foregrounding conversation, then there must be something to be said about how the intention to transform knowledge production affects the practices of curiosity. The analysis attempts to highlight how the educational projects selected for the purposes of this thesis manage to do so. For which I hope to examine how such projects are conceived, produced, and managed.

To frame my question, I have studied scholarly articles and projects in relation to decolonial knowledge production. This preliminary research material deals with coloniality in literature/ syllabus/ archives, but also with the reproduction of colonial dichotomy within institutional operations and social movements. Instead of departing from theories of decolonial thought itself, for the purposes of this thesis, I chose to borrow lessons from performance studies and see how it contributes to understanding decolonial work. I gained further insight into existing theories of decoloniality through the lens of performance studies by reviewing publications from this field

In the past fifty years, a considerable amount of theory on performance studies has been produced. Jon McKenzie and Tim Ingold, the two authors I have studied extensively for this thesis are a part of that field. In their books, they themselves trace a history and transformations of the performance studies field while I choose to depart from the theories they posit. McKenzie attempts to demonstrate how performance is the mode of operation, evaluation, and production, in educational contexts while Ingold expresses that it is the encounter of various practices that produces specific kinds of knowledge offer alternatives to the idea that there is universality in knowledge.

What I like about their theories is that rather than excavating hidden connections between existing institutions and practices, they forge new ways of connecting, knowing and

doing through the lens of performance. It is through their theoretical understanding of the relationship between performance, entanglements, and knowledge production that I answer my main research question and am able to gain insight into the relationship between alternative educational praxis and decolonial thought. With this I ask:

How do practices of curiosity in contemporary educational praxis contribute to decolonial work?

Structure of Argument

My writing attempts to be a theoretical intervention and a proposal for a concept. I also hope to demonstrate the relationship between my scholarly interests in the field of decolonial knowledge production and in the field of performance studies, and my experience in practice-based learning. Studying performance for me is as much the study of how and why things are done and what they produce as it is the practical engagement with the praxis under examination. It comes from a position of embodied knowledge and theoretical analysis, allowing me to make certain claims based on my own experience. That being said, this thesis unfolds over 5 chapters.

I open the thesis with **Chapter 1** by tracing the historical and contemporary perceptions of curiosity. I do so to express the value of curiosity and the need to examine it through refined theoretical frameworks. Briefly examining the Ecologies of Knowledge framework proposed by Perry Zurn and Arjun Shankar, I explain why an ecological framework is needed to examine curiosity while also pointing out certain gaps in the theory. I go on to propose a framework that intervenes in the Ecology of Knowledge framework, as a way to develop it further. For this I borrow theories from Jon McKenzie who is known for his seminal work related to performance theories in the digital era and Tim Ingold who offers insight into the processual mode of knowledge production.

Chapter 2 describes the methodology adopted for the research process, and the materials documented and collected. In **Chapters 3, 4, 5**, I ask a sub-question per chapter. These are:

Chapter 3: Research sub-question 1) How is the production of knowledge conceived in an era of high-performance? How is the experience of learning imagined? What is the thinking that went into the project and why did certain ideas/ methods gain more traction? How does their conception relate to performance theories of McKenzie? How (if) are their conceptions decolonial?

Chapter 4: Research sub-question 2) How did the contemporary condition affect how knowledge was produced? How is the production of the project aligning with the decolonial idea behind the project? How does the concept of the event relate to decolonial production?

Chapter 5: Research sub-question 3) How was the production of said knowledge, managed by foregrounding practices curiosity? What strategies were deployed to manage projects so that they fell in line with the idea that birthed them and could be effective for the contemporary conditions? How is the management style complying with the conception and feeding the decolonial intentions of the project? What is the underlying yet overlapping strategy found in the three projects?

The 3 chapters examine the 3 educational projects to be able to answer my primary research question - *How do practices of curiosity in contemporary educational praxis contribute to decolonial work?* The **Closing Words** answers the primary research question in stating that, strategizing the production of knowledge through the Curious Encounters, the educational projects contribute to the decolonial project, making Curious Encounters an analytical tool that could aid evaluation and production of decolonial contemporary educational praxis.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Debates around Curiosity

In this chapter, I trace the history and contemporary perceptions and theories that frame curiosity for its educational value. I do this by inviting the observations of Ilhan Inan, James Kidd and Tyson E. Lewis who is cited in Perry Zurn and Arjun Shankar's *Curiosity Studies: A New Ecology of Knowledge* (2020). After this, I discuss the framework adopted in the above-mentioned book to emphasize the need for an ecological understanding of curiosity. In partial agreement, yet not entirely convinced with *ecology* as a metaphor, I propose an imaginable and manageable framework that helps analyze curiosity in contemporary educational praxis through an ecological *and* situated perspective. Borrowing dissenting lessons⁷ from performance studies, I present an alternative to the Ecologies of Knowledge framework. For this framework, I connect Jon McKenzie's concept of the event (of knowledge) that replaces the term ecology (of knowledge) to Tim Ingold's theory of knowledge as a becoming, as something that is done and brought forth. Through this, I present the theoretical intervention that will aid the analysis undertaken in chapters 3, 4, 5.

Tell Me Why, More Tell Me Why, Still More Tell Me Why

Philosopher and professor, Ilhan Inan in *Philosophy of Curiosity* (2011), observes that contrary to the popular phrase that ignorance is bliss, the development of language by humans suggests that humans aspired to know more. For which language became a tool to excavate, explore and interrogate. A philosopher at the nexus of thought, language, and reality, Inan argues that this desire to know is what catalyzed evolution. That any form of development and progress would have been unimaginable without it (Inan 2011, 1). This desire is what he calls curiosity, for which language and by consequence discourse became a tool. He anchors his philosophical claim in Hume's notion that "the love of truth was the source of all enquiries" and Hobbes's appraisal of "curiosity as a passion, 'such as is in no living creature but Man; so that Man is distinguished, not only by his Reason; but also, by this singular passion from other Animals'" (ibid., 1-2)⁸. To further appraise the value of curiosity he turns to the observations made by ancient Greek thinkers. Although it should be noted, as it is by him, that at no point in

⁷ The defining mark of performance theory emerged with the recognition of the agency of doing one's existence. Including both utterances and performances, the idea is that performance theory forged resistance against being disciplined into an already existing structure. McKenzie (of the Perform – Or Else fame for the purposes of this thesis), also states the manner in which disciplinary methods fed the colonial imperialist imaginaries of the 18th and 19th century, performance methodologies bring into formation networks that transgress the colonial borders to form "...our post-industrial and postcolonial world" (McKenzie 2001, 18)

⁸ While I borrow this quote to emphasize historical evidence that avows curiosity, I do not agree with Hobbes that curiosity is a human virtue alone. There is scientific evidence that observes curiosity in non-human species. While this could be an argument of its own, for the purposes of this paper, I would only like to share this as a disclaimer.

their observation does the word curiosity appear. Yet, it is Inan's argument, one that I resonate with, that their ruminations about *wonder*, have an uncanny resemblance to curiosity.

Inan writes that the ancient Greek literary scholars, such as Aristotle and Plato, argue that enquiry is motivated by θαῦμα (Thauma). Thauma is particularly different from the experience of the first contact with a novel thing. In that Thauma or 'wonder' goes beyond the initial sensory encounter with the unknown— "...thauma must have contained more than that; it must have had a motivating *force that gave one the first impetus to inquire into things not immediately present to the senses*" (Inan 2011, 2; emphasis added). I believe that 'inquire into' suggests that unlike a momentary sense of unfamiliarity the forces of Thauma transcend the initial reflex and motivates the desire to investigate the unknown further. Although the initial unfamiliarity is necessary for Thauma, the motivation to delve into the intensities of the object underscores the initial encounter. It is not simply "...amazement or admiration, it [elucidated] a kind of inquisitiveness, a way of questioning things unknown; *it had to involve a form of curiosity to serve as the driving force for philosophy*" (ibid.). Inan and the thinkers he thinks with, elevate curiosity as an inexplicable *something* that moves beyond the encounter with the urge to know more.

Similar observations can be seen in Ian James Kidd's essay that discusses curiosity through Confucianism. Confucian way of thinking about the desire to know. Once again, although this desire is not specifically recognized as curiosity, I feel it shows similar forces to those of Thauma. Kidd observes that in Confucianism the "...love for learning and desire for knowledge" is necessary for the formation of a consummate individual (Kidd 2018, 98-99). According to the Kidd, Confucius names three "stalwart and critical virtues" essential for this formation; benevolence, piety, and courage. But without the desire to learn, the cultivation of these virtues only leads to the stagnation of the individual and the society they inhabit at best. At worst, the inevitable disintegration of the individual and denigration of the virtues themselves. To feed and nurture moral self-cultivation, the eagerness to learn should be a motivating factor. In other words, without the motivation to become aware of what we are unaware of, to know more about the things we encounter, to interrogate the logic of things that are presented to us, *we risk becoming morally self-cultivated*.

Such emphasis on the desire to know and enquiry and learning contributed to the philosophical and epistemic value of curiosity. One that has risked becoming a metaphor in educational praxis that believed in unidirectional knowledge transmission. Knowledge of things that were already studied, theories that were already formulated, and curiosities that were already satisfied were shared with students to test them for their memory. For us (and here I do not dismiss the possibility of similar sentiments for generations before us), learning was not the exploration or interrogation of things unknown, it was a predefined body of information, of discoveries, learnings, and understanding of how the world functioned. A new value of curiosity

is visible at this point. The daydreamer – a student who is generally reprimanded for lack of curiosity. Lack of the desire to learn in the confines of the classroom. Whether by literally staring outside the window, focusing on things that were left out or by drawing doodles, feeling drowsy and more, such a student is condemned for being a disturbance to the structure a classroom attempted to enforce. Such learners were a bane of disciplined educational systems, considered less curious than those who were attentive.

In his text *The Dude Abides, Or Why Curiosity Is Important In Education Today* (2020) Tyson E. Lewis contemplates over how distraction is a different form of curiosity. Specifically, how distraction, which is considered to disrupt rigorous scholarship, could actually be a way to dismantle the concrete structures of knowledge ecologies⁹. To support this argument, Lewis interrogates the perception that places attentiveness antithetical to distraction. He suggests that lack of distraction is not necessarily the presence of attentiveness and that we must separate the two notions to give distraction the credibility it deserves.

According to him, distraction is a state of “non-being”, “marginal mental phenomenon” (ibid.), an experience “on the verge of or has already disappeared”, a “nonbeing, a spectre, or a nought within thought” (Lewis 2020, 97). It is something that exposes itself in the process of emerging away from thought, as a corollary, most often, assumed as an anomaly. It is the loosening up of thought from the disciplinary structures of cognition and falling out of line from the normative. While certain arguments claim that “attentiveness is the fulcrum of caring for the world” (ibid.), Lewis considers Paul North’s understanding of attentiveness as a way of “stretching out and taking possession” (ibid.). To perceive attention as control necessitated to be in power then makes distraction a state that punctures the same power.

This two-fold functionality of curiosity, 1) Curiosity that builds scholarship (Inan, Kidd) and 2) Curiosity that disrupts scholarship (Lewis), is what made me formulate my hypothesis that the particularity of contemporary educational praxis is that it foregrounds the doing or performance of curiosity over the question - what is curiosity? Or more specifically that it recognises this two-fold value of curiosity. It is also clear that both functions of curiosity operate under different circumstances. While the former emerged to understand the world we inhabit better, the latter emerged more or less as a gesture of resilience against manufactured knowledge. In the former perspectives by Inan and Kidd, curiosity is given the credit of producing knowledge that would have escaped our radar. To develop as a species and to

⁹ The text is a part of the book project by Perry Zurn and Arjun Shankar. Similar to them and even Vercoulen, Tyson E. Lewis himself suggests that the rhetoric of curiosity as a distraction could risk the potential knowledge that emerges because of the very distraction. With this Lewis also argues that in fact, distracted curiosity, as one kind of curiosity, is potential for its disruptive quality. This distraction, he believes, is a way to prevent the instrumentalisation of curiosity, which is the unfortunate turn curiosity has taken in due to industrialisation. In fact, his notion of curiosity as it manifests through distraction as “a marginal mental phenomenon that always tends toward that which is on the verge of or has already disappeared” should not be equated to lack of attentiveness but rather as a reluctance to possess or be possessed by any social predictability which seeks to control and discipline. For him then, curiosity as a distraction becomes a way to perform anarchy.

produce knowledge that supported the said development, curiosity was harnessed, both for social and personal (Kidd) purposes. It would even be helpful to reflect on Inan's appreciation of the tools produced to pursue curiosity. Since it is the production of such technology that led to the formation of grand bodies of knowledge which the student in Lewis' scenario, gets distracted from. Which is the second function of curiosity. To operate in situations that require an interrogation of said knowledge.

I believe that both functions of curiosity are valuable to the production of knowledge. The desire to know with the aim to construct knowledge contributes to the affirmative and rigorous production of knowledge to satisfy the urge to understand phenomena better. Dissimilarly, but equally powerful is the desire to know by refuting the knowledge produced. Although curiosity through distraction varies slightly from the former kind of curiosity, in that it doesn't contribute to the construction of the larger body of knowledge, it manages, through resistance, to construct methods (if not smaller bodies of knowledge) that interrogate the dominant ecologies of knowledge. Thus, I believe that curiosity, or the desire to know, if employed and performed in the context where, formation or disruption, acts in contrast to the normative operation of knowledge, has the potential to affect the hegemony of knowledge ecologies. Subsequently contributing to the decolonisation of knowledge.

The function of curiosity suddenly becomes as much a political act as it is a productive act, one that demonstrates defiance, either by direct pursuit, or alternative desires – those outside the normative. It is this potential of curiosity that I believe embeds the educational projects discussed in this thesis. I claim that, by examining what is done in educational projects and how, I will find traces of curiosity's above-mentioned functions. And these traces, I claim, are what make the discussed projects key examples of decolonial thinking and practice. To interpret curiosity in contemporary educational projects though requires a theoretical framework that considers the current condition in which curiosity is practised. Perry Zurn and Arjun Shankar offer an 'Ecology of Knowledge' framework that pays attention to the "...historical and political sensitivities" that feed it (Zurn and Shankar 2020, xv). They do so by collecting perspectives from a cross-disciplinary study of curiosity and thereby hoping to demonstrate the political potential of curiosity.

Ecological Anxieties of Curiosity

A recent study on curiosity (which also cites Tyson E. Lewis's examination), conducted by Perry Zurn and Arjun Shankar and is shared through their book *Curiosity Studies: A New Ecology of Knowledge* (2020). It captures dialogue around the topic of curiosity to bridge the gap between the science and social practice of curiosity. They do so by situating curiosity within

the ecology it inhabits, in that they examine curiosity through a framework that foregrounds interdisciplinary examination, encouraging “...scholars to study curiosity curiously” (Zurn and Shankar 2020, xvi).

To establish the contours of this examination, Zurn and Shankar collected cross-disciplinary perspectives within a theoretical framework of ‘Ecologies of Knowledge’. Their book consolidates curiosity and its value and practices in scientific enterprises found in *Exploring the Costs of Curiosity: An Environmental Scientist’s Dilemma* (2020) by Seeta Sistla, *Curious Ecologies of Knowledge: More-Than-Human Anthropology* by Heather Anne Swanson to questions of how curiosity is closely related to how we learn in *A Network Science of the Practice of Curiosity* (2020) by Danielle S. Bassett, *The Dude Abides, or Why Curiosity is Important for Education Today* (2020) by Tyson E. Lewis, and “*The Campus is Sick*”: *Capitalist Curiosity and Student Mental Health* (2020) by Arjun Shankar. Other than environmental and educational purposes of understanding curiosity, the book also covers the atypical, non-heteronormative value, ethical implications, and queer realities of curiosity in Part 3 and the political value in Part 4. While the entire book provides insights into curiosity and how it can be harnessed yet not domesticated, studied yet not classified, freed and yet not diluted, I chose to do a close reading of the text by Tyson E. Lewis for the purposes of this thesis.

The modular architecture found in this book is constructed with 3 broad principles: That curiosity is *multiple, praxiological and political*. Multiple in that it moves across various contexts and situations thereby needing “...flexible analytic attention” (xiii), praxiological in that it is something that is practised, and political in that it is marked with social and cultural hierarchies (Zurn and Shankar 2020, xiii). With these 3 principles supporting the Ecologies of Knowledge framework, curiosity then doesn’t get contained to a field of study, it doesn’t get examined as an inert object, and it is studied through the interrelated inquiry. It is also a practice that is activated by change and activates change. According to them

Curiosity is not an empty, untethered cultural feature of our contemporary era but one of the most important political tools we have at our disposal. There is, in fact, a logic evident in its material and discursive, linguistic and praxiological appearances. That is, despite its various forms and distinguishable types, its simulations and its knockoffs, curiosity is a coherent and powerful phenomenon (Zurn and Shankar 2020, xii).

In other words, curiosity, whether its pursuit or the choice of disbanding from the dominant ways of pursuit, is rife with political intentions. They stipulate, and I agree that to perceive curiosity as a neutral practice does not only do injustice to the potential curiosity holds, but also suffocates the value it could add to social, academic, and political spheres. For these purposes, an Ecology of Knowledge acts as an accurate theoretical framework. By rendering a more

complex visual for knowledge, it makes space for curiosity to be a freely moving desire, “...aids in the development of a functional, political, and cross-disciplinary account” (Zurn and Shankar 2020, xv). Framed in their words –

The term “ecology of knowledge,” popularized by Charles Rosenberg in the 1970’s, *refers to the way in which knowledge functions in and as a dynamic, multilayered environment.* Developing in concert with systems thinking, complexity theory, and network science, the knowledge ecology *refuses to consider the production of knowledge in isolation—* limited to a particular scientist, lab, discipline, or research vector—but *rather analyzes it through interaction:* the interactions among languages, histories, materials, institutions, publishing norms, funding sources, social groups, the natural environment, and the like. While there is a debate over whether the term “ecology” functions here as a metaphor or an analogy, scholars agree that the term does provide a helpful analytical model. Ecology, stemming from the Greek words *oikos* and *logos*, refers to the study of habitation, both *where one dwells and what habits mark that dwelling.* When applied to the study of curiosity, the ecology of knowledge framework attends less to what curiosity *is* than to how curiosity is practiced, when and where it gets problematized, and why its features change. As such, *an ecological view of curiosity aids in the development of a functional, political, and cross-disciplinary account*” (Zurn and Shankar 2020, xv; emphasis added).

While this framework provides a radical lens to study curiosity, I find that it doesn’t unpack the term ecology itself, leaving it open to abstract interpretations. Both, of the *ecology* it elevates and the *interactions* it centralizes. For example, it never clarifies how the ecology they speak of, operates. At some point, Zurn and Shankar do mention that it traverses multiple ecologies, which is also reflected in the authors they invite into the conversation for the book. But what are the elements of each ecology that are traversed? What is it that connects the different ecologies? What is the operation of such an ecology? I do not think that the ecology found under lake waters is the same as that of a human community, not at first glance. Maybe some symbiotic and collaborative processes overlap, but there must be something more that connects them. An operation that runs through all the ecologies for it to be related.

To place them all within a broad theory of ecology (one that was borrowed from environmental sciences), I believe, risks a metamorphization of the term ecology. Although I find value in an ecological view of curiosity that affords evaluation and interpretation outside “parochial border wars” (Zurn and Shanker 2020, xvi), it doesn’t provide me with an explanation of the complexities of the ecology itself – How is it built? Is there anything enveloping the ecology? In that, is there something outside the ecology or is it all consuming? Is it a constant entity? Does it always already exist? In other words, while the Ecology of Knowledge framework is wide enough to be applied to the examination of practices of curiosity

in interdisciplinary projects, it doesn't satisfy my question on curiosity in educational praxis, precisely because of its abstraction.

Zurn and Shankar consider this framework to resist the perception that knowledge is produced in isolation. Instead, they analyze it through interaction – "...the interactions among languages, histories, materials, institutions, publishing norms, funding sources, social groups, the natural environment, and the like" (Zurn and Shankar 2020, xv). But while such a lens "...aids in the development of a functional, political, and cross-disciplinary account" (ibid.), it falls short of two things. Firstly, although curiosity is free-flowing, transgressing borderlands, it does get framed, albeit temporarily, within projects of different kinds. If this is the case, what kind of framing does an ecological view consider. How is curiosity examined at all if there is a willful refusal to examine it from a distance?

Secondly, if curiosity is not neutral, there must be curiosities that differ from each other. Curiosities that seek to transgress, yet, when in contact, believe in different kinds of transgressions. What happens when different curiosity(ies) encounters each other? How is knowledge borne out of the encounter of these different curiosity(ies)? Because of these unanswered questions, I chose not to understand curiosity in this thesis from an Ecology of Knowledge perspective. For the purposes of this thesis, I now turn to the performance theories of Jon McKenzie and Tim Ingold that foreground performances that produce knowledge. But moreover, claim that it is the entanglement of performances that produce complex knowledge.

Event of Knowledge

Rehearsing The Lecture Machine

‘The term ‘lecture machine’ gathers divergent senses”

(McKenzie 2001, 20)

In the introductory chapter of his book *Perform – Or Else* (2001), Jon McKenzie presents the concept of a ‘Lecture Machine’. This concept, that embodies any and all kind of “...lectures and scenes of instruction...” (20) is, in its simplest form, a scene of lecture, consisting of the lectern (the podium where the teacher stands), as a machine that aids the task of education. Since he claims that the lecture machine isn’t just the material object such as the podium, or the space that it is installed in or enclosed within, but also the performances that bring forth this scene of lecture¹⁰, , this form is further developed by extending the machine both materially and affectively.

It is at this point that McKenzie, by turning to Derrida’s claim – “une puissante machine de lecture” – that an entire institution is a lecture machine (McKenzie 2001, 21). This second form can be understood as all the scenes of lecture occurring at the same time or overlapping in parts, within a single university. This means that the machine structured for tasks of teaching and learning isn’t limited to the area of the lectern. That it constitutes the entire architecture, all the props, texts, libraries and administrative offices, the branding and logos, and the entire institution itself. I would like to imagine this as the churning of complex machinery off all parts that aims to fulfil the task of education. If at this point, one zooms further out, McKenzie presents the next form of the Lecture Machine.

If you’re to look from the outside, the entire institution is a collective scene of lectures, part of many such collective scenes of lectures. What connects or separates them are different sets of ideologies and discourse – spilling over spatio-temporal delimitations of classrooms, institutions and even geographies. Suddenly, the Lecture Machine becomes difficult to pin down, it isn’t controlled and structured within singular institutions. Rather, what it works towards and what works towards the aim of education are the abstract ideologies and discourse

¹⁰ The podium can be understood as a lecture machine, only if it gets installed and serves itself up as a platform that affords conducting lectures or instructing. If on the other hand it is installed in a park where park goers use it as a backrest, or a high table, it doesn’t perform for a scene of lecture. It is only if it performs within a scene where a lecture occurs or instruction is uttered, that the podium holds any valence as a lecture machine.

along with the physical manifestations of it. Imagining such a machine as a concrete image in the here and now is probably possible but it would, I believe, only be possible partially. The incomprehensibility of the Lecture Machine in this form only gets further complicated in the digital era.

Reflecting on the current technological condition, McKenzie draws a very specific shift that dictated the expansion of the Lecture Machine

With the emergence of this formation, there has been a radical transformation of our reading machines, an epochal shift in the citational network of discourses and practices: the global emergence of technological media—television, tape recorders, satellites, copy machines, faxes, beepers, and most profoundly, interconnecting and overwriting them all, information technologies such as digital computers and electronic networks. The emergence of this hypermediating media affects all cultures, all organizations, all technologies, for the digitalization of discourses and practices enables them to be recorded, edited, and played back in new and uncanny ways. Highly localized ensembles of words and gestures can now be broken apart, recombined, and hyperlinked to different ensembles in ways unlike anything in the past, at speeds incredible from all perspectives except those of the future (McKenzie 2001, 21-22)

Under such a condition, the Lecture Machine gets dispersed not just once, but repeatedly. Connecting otherwise unrelated scenes and including scenes that would otherwise not be considered. It is now both remote and immediate, here and now and everywhere, found within institutions and at scenes of social movements, in houses, on dinner tables, and even in the online sphere's years after its occurrence. The concept of the Lecture Machine now accommodates a heterogeneous and complicated mix of ideologies, discourse, props, languages. With this final stretch, the LM is no more a collection of scenes of lectures, but a concept and formation born out of a complex set of performances. It is because of this contemporary condition of the Lecture Machine, that McKenzie boldly asserts – “performance will be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth” (McKenzie 2001, 18).

Perform – everything, everywhere, all the time

The Lecture Machine is produced through 3 paradigms of performance. Namely, organizational, cultural, and technological performance. Cultural performances are those sets of performances that produce a socially desired outcome. With postmodern and decolonial imaginaries seeking to construct knowledge and realities that aren't dominated by western or colonial aspirations, to be socially relevant, culture (the gestures and utterances that constitute it) must perform towards the construction of alternative knowledge¹¹. If performance is the

¹¹ “While performance’s efficacy to reaffirm existing structures and console or heal peoples has consistently been recognized, it is its trans- gressive or resistant potential that has come to dominate the study of cul- tural performance’ (McKenzie 2001, 30). In making such a statement, McKenzie and the performance studies scholars that he cites, like Richard Schenckner (1976), John J Macaloon (1984), Carol Simpson Stern and Bruce Henderson (1993), claim that cultural performance, it’s genesis and

“...embodied enactment of cultural forces...”, and if the cultural forces extend from performances that were historically marginalized, sidelined, and invalidated, then the performance challenge is to continuously bring forth precisely those pieces of knowledge that are capable of subverting, dismantling, pulling in, and stretching out the area of knowledge that is considered universal. Thus to perform culturally is to continuously perform to prevent cultural dominance. Thus, the challenge against which cultural performance performs is “Perform—or else: be socially normalized” (McKenzie 2001, 9).

Organizational performances are those sets of performances that affect the dominant work structures. I argue that, as an act of organizing oneself for efficiently completing a task, such performances comply with cultural performances subliminally. To efficiently carry out a postcolonial project, for example, the organizational structure would consider efficiency as the subversion of colonial structures¹² as much as it would the completion of a task. As such, the employee must perform to be able to produce this alternative structure. Therefore, performing organization as opposed to scientific organization doesn't base itself on predefined systems. It expresses itself through the dynamic involvement of those making the organization. At its best, such performances improve creativity in workplaces (Cox in McKenzie 2001, 7), but at its worst, it poses a new challenge one that turns the risk of not performing onto the individual – “Perform—or else: be fired, redeployed, institutionally marginalized” (McKenzie 2001, 7).

Technological performances are those set of performances that need to effectively deliver the task. For the purposes of this thesis, just like I have done with organizational performance, I will understand technology in relation to cultural performance, in that technology must also perform effectively to not reproduce colonial imaginaries or structures. Thereby, intersecting the cultural and organizational challenges with that of technological effectiveness. The way organizational performance challenges human resource, I consider techno-performance implicates technological resource in the growing market. In the context of the kind of performances that dominant cultural performance, technological performance must be effective on three levels 1) to be effective in the completion of a task 2) to be effective in the restructuring of contemporary organizations 3) to be effective in producing cultures that allow the interrogation of dominant discourse – “Perform—or else: you're obsolete, liable to be

development straddles the space in-between. In between theatre and anthropology, theory, and praxis, doing and seeing, thinking, and acting ‘...and seek to reflect upon and transform both the academy and society at large’ (McKenzie, 36)

¹² “How much is this individual's performance contributing to the organization?” but also “How much is the organization contributing to this individual's performance?” (McKenzie, 57). This shift can be connected to the cultural shift that highlights work culture, efficient work culture, doesn't just lead to productivity but also to the empowerment of individuals, groups, and the organization together.

defunded, junkpiled, or dumped on foreign markets. [...] outmoded, undereducated, in other words, you're a dummy!" (McKenzie 2001, 12)

According to McKenzie, these performance paradigms entangle in intricate ways to produce a complexity that is always in the process of becoming. While the LM was a critical springboard to examine how performance has embedded itself in daily operations. It also allows me to imagine scenes of lectures that aren't confined to the imaginaries of a classroom. By opening up the Lecture Machine to everywhere, McKenzie suggests that learning happens everywhere. It's not only inside classrooms but also on the screens somewhere across the world, years after the scene of lecture, or years before a student is studying it at a university. With the Lecture Machine, I can study the 3 educational projects selected for this thesis through the theory of this dispersed and produced machine. Despite this, I choose another concept offered by McKenzie, one produced by the entanglement of the same performance paradigms, yet one that further complicates the Lecture Machine and solidifies the ecological perspective provided by Zurn and Shankar. This is the *Event*.

Between Ecology of Knowledge and the Lecture Machine: The Event

In his book, McKenzie himself points to the impossibility of defining an event as it "...is the inside out of past, present, and future. It is time turned on itself, sheer repetition, the singular anachrony of iterability/alterity which makes and breaks each moment, over and over—interminably terminal repetition" (McKenzie 2001, 253). It is only at the point where he suggests that an event is the reflection of the performances within the event and vice-versa, that we get some semblance of what he means by an event. McKenzie's suggests that an event can be considered as an 'icon' that shows a likeness to the processes occurring within it (McKenzie 2001, 205). According to him, performances of the three paradigms of cultural, organizational, and technological performance form a complex event or is reflected as an icon. In other words, an icon is a symbol of the performances and their entanglement. This event – the happening – or the icon – the reflection of the happening – stretches across space and time. This means that while we could recognise some of the contours of the event, it is impossible to express the event as whole – where it begins and where it ends – since we may never really recognize performances of the past, present, future, we haven't considered. The following description by McKenzie helps to visualise such an event

... event with its liminoid nature foregrounded, almost invariably clearly separated from the rest of life, presented by performers, and attended by audiences both of whom regard the experience as made up of material to be interpreted, to be reflected upon, to be engaged in—emotionally, mentally, and perhaps even physically. This particular *sense of occasion and focus as well as the overarching social envelope* combine with the physicality of theatrical performance to make it one of the most powerful and efficacious procedures that human society has developed for the

endlessly fascinating process of cultural and personal self-reflexion and experimentation (McKenzie 2001, 49)

As mentioned earlier, the same performances that form the lecture machine also feed the event. Although unlike the openness of the lecture machine, the performances that move in and out of the event are certainly delimited by some parameters of space and time. However, I would argue that depending on the event being studied, the distinctiveness of these delimitations may vary. The event reflects the kind of entanglement of performances. But while the event frames and offers a reference against which the performances are gauged, it also always getting implicated by the development of the performances that move in and out of it. Subsequently changing itself, over time. An event then is an ephemeral happening, made actual only through the selection of a certain set of performances. If I was to delimit the three projects like events, I would have to take heed of McKenzie's understanding that it is impossible and futile to believe that an event can be confined. And so, while I claim that the projects are in fact different manifestations of the *event*, I do acknowledge that the delimitation of the projects is temporary. It doesn't imply a termination of processes that continue to feed the events, nor does it claim to know all the processes that fed the event. This is also why I prefer the *Event* over the lecture machine as a way to imagine the projects. It offers a – "...particular *sense of occasion* [a puncture to the flow of the process] and focus *as well as the overarching social envelope* [a continuation of the flow of the process]..."(ibid.).

Adopting his understanding of the event which is a happening that is separated from the rest of life, the event is an occurrence that not only gives a sense of something different happening, but it does so without escaping the social realities and material experiences of the event. This positioning of an event – at the threshold between inside and outside, is what made me gravitate towards McKenzie's notion of the event. It allows me to delineate the projects and the educational praxis within it, inside and outside the classrooms/ festivals/ syllabus, yet allow it to be framed as an event of situated knowledge. With this, I argue that the event is comparable to the ecologies that Zurn and Shankar speak about. With this, I am also able to provide the basis for a framework that has considerably more advantages than the adoption of an ecological perspective.

1) an event, because of its distance from scenes of lecture, manages to frame cultural, organizational, and technological performances not because it aids the production of scenes of lectures alone, but it allows me to consider how educational praxis is bleeding out of the classrooms, festivals and syllabus and moving into the social sphere.

2) the event is ecological yet situated. Delimited yet implicated by the social envelope. On one level is the audience, the performers, and the immediate surroundings of the theatre hall, then there is the sense of occasion as an occurrence outside of real life. Beyond the threshold is the

social envelope, implying that just the immediate surroundings don't make it an occurrence, but that there is something more beyond that event that implicates it.

If this is the case if disparate performances are entangled in a complex event, what can we say about the point of entanglement? Does the event remain unaltered before, during and post the entanglement of these performances? If events reflect the performances that produce it, it must also reflect the entanglements between the performances and the transformations that occur upon their encounter. Although McKenzie observes that performances are deeply entangled and visible within the other performances, I find it hard to trace observations related to the entanglement itself. What is it that happens in and through these entanglements? Is there any potential that can be found in studying the character and operations of this encounter? How does it affect the knowledge that gets produced?

In his book *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (2011), Tim Ingold's observation of knowledge production suggests that there is merit in paying attention to the encounter. He goes as far as saying that knowledge is produced only through the encounter. Although he never directly develops the concept of the encounter, he focuses on the notion that knowledge is always in the process of being constructed, contingent on the kind of interaction between different becomings of human and non-human. That, what emerges is only made actual through our movement through the environments we inhabit and through the encounters with other movements. He also suggests that we shouldn't consider the environment as inert background around which we move and form perceptions. That the entire ecology is moving, and it is through the encounters of movements, that knowledge are brought to life.

From this, I infer that he recognizes encounters, but also implies that different kinds of encounters produces different kinds of knowledge. I infuse this theory to the concept of event proposed by McKenzie. I argue that while the projects are an event and thereby an entanglement and reflection of technological, organizational, and cultural performance. This already allows me to read the projects to highlight the complex decolonial potential that underscores them. But moreover, the understanding that the event reflects the entanglements as much as of the individual performances, allows me to uncover the potential of the encounter as a strategy and how it underscores the above mentioned decolonial potential.

Experience of the encounter

“There are human becomings, animal becomings, plant becomings, and so on. As they move together through time and encounter one another, these paths interweave to form an immense and continually evolving tapestry. (Ingold 2011, 9).

Ingold claims that knowledge is shaped in relation to the experience of the encounter between different processes. We come to know “by way of [our] practice [...] through an ongoing engagement, in perception and action, with the constituents of their environment” (Ingold 2011, 159). This means, that knowledge is an always ongoing construction, manifesting a complex-process metaphor (ibid.). The knowledge formed then is processual and is to be understood as a formation that occurs not in transmission but only through an encounter. Likening it to the verb ‘to process’, he explains that it is through the kind of encounter, that certain knowledge gets revealed. If knowledge is formed through an encounter with another material, that knowledge is formed by continuously moving, encounter must be more than a moment of impact. It must be a longer, continuous, and ongoing process

To understand the transformations during an encounter – both material and affective – Ingold asks the reader to pick a stone from the backyard, pour some water on it, and place it on the desk where the reader is seated. As the reader proceeds with the first chapter of his book, they are instructed to keep an eye on the stone. Observe the differences, subtle and obvious, note it, and reflect on how we describe it. At the end of the chapter, Ingold offers insights on two aspects of the encounter between the stone and the water 1) Without any intervention, the stone has experienced certain textural changes as the water has evaporated from his surface. This supports his first claim that the transformation first and foremost appears on a material level. Through this, demonstrating that material transformations are “...the underbelly of things...” (Ingold 2011, 27). In other words, the entanglement between different processes is a material exchange. 2) It is this material transformation that is observed and perceived within the social context of humans, that is then further described in relation to its former state – “The properties of materials, in short, are not attributes but histories” (ibid., 32). The stone is a damp stone, the water is now in gaseous state.

If Ingold suggests that it is only through encountering other becoming that knowledge is brought forth, that is, the stoniness of the stone is in relation to the former perception of the stone, knowing is an expansive act. Not “...a movement towards terminal closure: a gradual filling up of capacities and shutting down of possibilities” (ibid, 3). Knowledge isn’t an already existing entity; it is in the process of working with and doing of practice that new possibilities

and insights reveal themselves. That knowledge is “ [attuned] and responsiveness to the task as it unfolds...” (Ingold 2011, 6), it does not start with an image and end with a fixed representation of it.

In fact, he asserts, and I agree due to my personal affair as a dancer, sportsperson and a theatre performer, that although a part of knowledge that is handed over from teacher to student, the learning and honing of the practice occurs in the doing. As a dancer myself, the routines that were shared with a group of students at the same time, became different routines in parts based on each student’s individual capacity, decision, and relationship with the routine. Moreover, I argue that if knowledge is inevitably a product of encounters, produced in relation to what it was before the encounter, then there is potential to be found in methods that foreground encounter. What I suggest is that the encounter can act as a potential site where the curiosity of a different kind is brought together with the understanding that their individual histories might have the potential to produce future pieces of knowledge that are different, outside utopian or dystopian knowledge.

Returning to my experience as a dancer, this encounter occurs when my movement interacted with another dancer or actor. We bent and moved with each other, leaning forward so the other could get space, turning away so the partner could use their movement to fill the space created. Through this encounter, what would emerge is a choreography that could not have been imagined. It could have been hoped for, which is what was done. As dancers, we were given the space to converse, albeit through our body, and build a dialogue based on giving and taking, resistance and compromise, negotiations, and arguments. And no point was the supposed tensions caused by resistance, arguments or compromise considered antithetical to the routine that was emerging. This potential that is found in encounters seems to gain some risk when applied to the field of verbal discourse. For discourse is filled with power dynamics that are constant and always evolving¹³. Yet, I believe that education and educational projects, whether in the field of performing arts or theoretical knowledge, should value the encounter, not only between seemingly popular ideologies but also those that don’t fit the dominant agenda of the neoliberal university.

With this, I propose the above theoretical intervention to analyze three educational projects. In chapter 3, I will adopt the framework to analyze three projects. For the purposes of this thesis, I would like to establish the three elements that I am interested in. Three elements

¹³ Terry Smith’s text *Talking Contemporary Curation* (2015) provides further insight. Mulling over the word discourse or Latin *discursis* (Smith 2015, 13), Smith takes us through the political architecture that forms a discourse, one highlighted by Foucault as early as the 1970’s (Smith 2015, 13) – “Its general meaning is obvious enough; any written or spoken communication, or, as a verb, to talk at length about something [is placed in contrast to the] ways in which power operate[s] in every kind of relationship...” (ibid.). Recognizing how discourse is non-neutral and forms power structures, also allows it to be employed to dismantle the hierarchies (ibid.).

that when placed together, provide the outlines of decolonial thinking and doing that transgresses the mission statements of projects that utter their decolonial intent – 1) The elevation of performance as critical to the production of different kinds of knowledge, 2) the production of situated events to intervene in the monopolization of knowledge production and transmission, and 3) encounters as a strategic site to produce truly decolonial knowledge. Along with these three elements that are visible in the projects, my reading of its implications to the practice of curiosity supports my argument that decolonial knowledge is directly linked to the idea that something different is being done with curious desires in the case studies.

Chapter 2: Methodology

In the previous chapter I introduced a way of thinking that helps situate knowledge production and thereby curiosity as an ecological yet situated and processual practice. To apply the framework for the analysis in chapter 3, 4, and 5, I ask:

How do practices of curiosity in contemporary educational praxis contribute to decolonial work?

To be able to answer my main research question, I ask three sub-questions that are answered in Chapter 3, 4, and 5. These are:

Research sub-question 1) How is the production of knowledge conceived in an era of high-performance? How is the experience of learning imagined? What is the thinking that went into the project and why did certain ideas/ methods gain more traction? How does their conception relate to performance theories of McKenzie? How (if) are their conceptions decolonial? To answer this question, I mainly rely on the interviews conducted with one of the curators of Zero Footprint festival and the facilitator of Ecologies of Curation. Since I couldn't schedule an interview with the organisers of The Kashmir Syllabus, I answer the question by assessing the mission statement and goals shared on the website.

Research sub-question 2) How did the contemporary condition affect how knowledge was produced? How is the production of the project aligning with the decolonial idea behind the project? How does the concept of the event relate to decolonial production? This question hopes to understand how the concept of the event emerged due to the ongoing pandemic and political climate (specifically in the case of The Kashmir Syllabus). It seeks to understand how the organizers found alternative ways to produce the idea, how it allowed the projects to flourish despite severe constraints and how, through that, emerged a new kind of event, one that can be understood with the help of McKenzie.

Research sub-question 3) How was the production of said knowledge, managed by foregrounding practices curiosity? What strategies were deployed to manage projects so that they fell in line with the idea that birthed them and could be effective for the contemporary conditions? How is the management style complying with the conception and feeding the decolonial intentions of the project? What is the underlying yet overlapping strategy found in the three projects? In this section, I also propose a strategy that I call the *Curious Encounter*.

Case Studies

Zero Footprint: Living and Connecting on a Damaged Earth

IMPAKT's 2020 Festival – *Zero Footprint: Living and Connecting on a Damaged Earth* opens itself to the audience with a mandate– “No, you can't go on with your daily routines”. *Why not?* “Global heating is happening, not in the future, but right now. It is also happening much faster than we thought. Many people around the world are already paying dearly”¹⁴. *So, what do we do?*

All we need is to overcome our hesitation and get together to create the necessary change. While it's only natural to start thinking from our own experiences, we propose that the experiences of people far and near, of animals, plants and of our environment are a much more valuable starting point. Our festival aims to do exactly that, by looking at the wealth of knowledge that exists and applying the playful yet serious ideas that art can reveal and make real.

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If at all the title (*Zero Footprint*) suggests a utopian possibility, the sub-title and the above lines suggests a humbler narrative. Without promising to provide a grand explanation or solution to the ecological crisis the world has been facing, the curatorial team brought together critical, creative, playful, and theoretical practices that provide different perspectives to perceive the ecological crisis and equally different ways to cope, live and negotiate with it.

Described above is the concept note of IMPAKT's 2020 5-day festival. Usually hosted at Het Huis, Utrecht, the 2020 festival was a digital counterpart to the physical site of Het Huis, Utrecht. Creating a similar impression of moving from (outside) Boorstraat, crossing the threshold of Het Huis, to then enter the (inside) festival for the preceding festivals, the landing page of the digital portal for 2020 acted as a threshold beyond which lay the plethora of knowledge. This transition was partly as a response to COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns that had firmly installed itself across the globe by May 2020. Having impacted almost every aspect of life, lockdown had generated a sense of limbo for the arts and cultural sector. Art forms and cultural interventions built on artist-art-spectator interactions, shared spaces, cross-cultural encounters, and dialogues were experiencing a moment of crisis. To dissuade the apathy of such a contemporary condition (artistically and ecologically), the festival

¹⁴ “impakt.nl/festival/2020/” last accessed August 24, 2021, <https://impakt.nl/festival/2020/>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

was imagined as a proof of concept of festivals in the form of broadcasts. Moreover, the online festival was conceived to mindfully respond to the contemporary condition of the increasing carbon footprint. Thus, embedded in the lockdown and ecological crisis, the festival was going to be open to visitors from October 28 – November 1, 2020. But instead of visitors entering the space of Het Huis, they would be attending the festival remotely through an online portal.

Constructed in collaboration with HOAX, Amsterdam, the online portal was built of various network and communication technologies – digital tools to design and host the portal along with the media apparatus that recorded, transmitted, and screened the programmes of the festival. Professionals from digital journalism, television and media could imagine the festival to operate similarly to recording stations. The role of Het Huis in 2020 was both, that of a recording and broadcasting studio. Thereby, opening the festival to new audience, globally. This global yet situated festival suggested that no matter where one is seated in the world, once an audience member entered the portal, they would be able to access different programmes curated around the ecological crisis. In a way, the festival was at once here and everywhere else. The digital portal is controlled through the backend team at Het Huis, which was a sight of various encounters that would have been otherwise impossible due to the lockdown.

Aesthetically intended to straddle the past and the future forms of the festival, it was an experience that was borne out of the memory of the preceding festivals, yet one that could generate a new experience altogether. The digital portal mimicked through reconstruction, its physical predecessor, thereby imagined with the aid of the ghosts of the previous years. In that, once the audience crossed the landing page, they would catch sight of a visual of a 2-D building, with spatial separations like that of Het Huis. The Theatrezaal, Rooftop Bar and Studio 3 – three spaces of Het Huis that were used during the festivals – were separated by walls and a floor was now flattened into a 2-D image of a building made of 6 blocks, with minute changes made to the details (the ground floor bar at Het Huis was moved to the rooftop in the online version). Arjon Dunnewind, director and curator of IMPAKT and ZFP who was interviewed for the purposes of this thesis, claimed that this was done to not defamiliarize the audience and to facilitate easy and uncomplicated navigation of this new terrain – “The simplicity of the programme is not related just to the size. It relates to how you offer it, how you visualize it so to say, in an online environment, how you structure it” (Dunnewind, unpublished interview) Thus, the spatial aesthetics of Zero Footprint emerged as a blueprint of the physical site.

My involvement with the festival was in the capacity of a team member. Starting in April 2020, while I was still an intern with IMPAKT, I was coordinating and auditing the curatorial discussions that were planned to brainstorm over the topic, themes, and formats of the festival. Split across 2 hours sessions weekly, each session involved the 4 curators of the festival – Arjon Dunnewind, Inez de Coo, Lara Stolwerk and Paul Schmidt and experts from the fields of science, social science, humanities, environmental sciences, activism, economy

and more. This gave me insight to the kind of discourse the festival hoped to produce. At the later stages, I was involved in the production on the days the festival ran which allowed me to observe the way in which the festival ran for the 5 days it was imagined. I was experiencing firsthand the evolution of a festival, from a physical site to a digital portal, from a conception to management, from *Zero Footprint* to *Zero Footprint: Living and Connecting on a Damaged Earth*.

Ecologies of Curation

“For me, ecology is very much about the awareness of connections and relations. And curating is about creating meaningful contexts around works, or by bringing certain works into meaningful relation with one another. So it is about setting up relations”

(Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink, unpublished interview)

Ecologies of Curation is an elective course offered to RMA students in the Humanities Department at Utrecht University. Spanning across 3 months from November – January, this course is designed and facilitated by dr. Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink, assistant professor in Theatre and Performance Studies in the Media and Culture Studies department. The course is designed with a focus on the ‘interactions’ within curatorial projects, between the – “spectators, artworks/performances and the spatial, social and media environments wherein the objects and acts are staged, produced and situated” (course manual EOC, 1, 2020). I examined this sentiment in an interview with Nibbelink that was conducted for the purposes of this thesis.

The method of interview is described in the next section of the chapter. Specifically focusing on the methods adopted by her, the interview examined what it means to design a practice-based course for curatorial studies. For Nibbelink, the course is intended to underscore the importance of curatorial practice in relation to the different ecologies it inhabits – arts, social, political, educational, economic, environmental, and more, and not as a practice that is positioned outside these relations. The most recent version of this course was spread across 9 weeks. Each session of the course had a list of ‘Preparatory’ or mandatory readings and a list of ‘Recommended Readings’. Dividing the students into groups of 3-4, Nibbelink also designed the course in a way that each session would be curated by 1 group of students. Allowing them to imagine what kind of discourse they wanted to produce, how they wanted to do it and reflect on their role of facilitator as a curator.

The group would read the ‘Preparatory’ texts and convene to have a first discussion amongst the three or four of them. This is done outside the confines of the classroom, at least a week or two prior to the designated session. Speaking in the context of the group I was involved

in, the texts acted as a starting point for the brainstorming session. Anchoring our discussion around the set of texts, each of us then presented our interpretations, connections, and questions. Finding strong potential in two of the many directions of discourse, we decided to use them as entry points to the texts and themes for the session. We designed two interactive exercises which required the students to actively participate. Thereby, facilitating an embodied experience of some concepts discussed in the texts. Working with this as the foundation, we then embarked on a verbal analysis of the exercises and their insights, by drawing connections to the text. The exercises themselves were designed and facilitated by my teammates and myself. It focused on collaborative learning and the production of knowledge and interrogated the value of curatorial praxis in the process.

It was because of my participation in this course, that I decided to include it along with the first two projects. Technically, my role in this course was only that of a student. Although, if I am to think about the curated session with two of my classmates, I would also consider myself performing the role of a curator and facilitator. More specifically, if I was to consider how I thought about curation, my thinking was informed by my background in arts and design, expanding my performance to that of a designer, a dancer, a filmmaker, and a writer. But for all intents and purposes, I was engaging with the course as a student, acting out all the other roles temporarily. Such an experience enabled me to document perspectives in the first person, by inhabiting the event rather than observing it as an outsider. Holding such a position in a project this thesis analysis enables me to emphasize the sentience of knowledge production. Not only in this project, but also in the case of the other two, my personal observations and reflections are complemented by the organizers and the material that produced the projects. Because of this, the research material for this and the other two projects include interviews with the organizers, course syllabus/ festival programme, and the introductory note/ concept note that stages the event that is to occur.

The Kashmir Syllabus

On August 5, 2019, the state of Kashmir was shut down under the orders of the prime minister of the ruling party of India. The lockdown, effective immediately, was a ban on any kind of communication for the state. The reason behind this was a potential terrorist attack intercepted by Indian intelligence, the government sent military troops onto the streets. But the tipping point was the revocation of two provisions – that guaranteed Kashmir constitutional autonomy – by the government of India. This led to a series of national and international protests to disband the communication lockdown, call back the troops and revisit the provisions

that had been revoked. While the intention behind the decisions of the government is an ongoing matter of debate, what the lockdown caused was an insurgency in response to the silence ensuing from Kashmir. From street protests to digital journalism, voices of those from a Kashmiri diaspora and those standing in solidarity produced a noise that brought global attention to the silence that had been forced onto the state. This was not without reason.

Kashmir has been a battleground, mainly for Pakistan and India since they gained independence from the British in 1947. With a Muslim majority, the state would have ideally been a part of Pakistan, but since it was a kingdom with its own ruler, Kashmir decided to stay separate till an attack by tribesmen in 1949. Following this, the ruler of Hari Singh, asked Louis Mountbatten, the then viceroy of independent India to provide military support to the kingdom. In return, since India was still writing her constitution, only to become a republic in 1950, it was suggested that Kashmir could become a part of India while continuing to hold constitutional autonomy, overall areas except for defence, external affairs, and communication. This was Section 370 of the Indian Constitution was supported by Article 35A which stated that the residents of Kashmir had special privileges over the land. The revocation of Section 370 almost entirely on the morning of August 5th automatically deactivated Article 35A. With this move, the government of India did not only break a treaty but did so without the consent of the citizens of the state of Kashmir¹⁶.

Following this, a series of interventions that aimed to restore agency to Kashmir emerged in different parts of India. While there is no dearth in political interventions, in-kind or number^[2], one example that didn't only act as a political intervention, but also an educational one is The Kashmir Syllabus. The syllabus, a part of a larger project #StandWithKashmir, is the educational kin to its political movement. The syllabus, much like course syllabi is split across weeks. Each week addressed a different sub-topic related to the local politics of Kashmir as well and global discourse around similar kinds of colonial insurgencies. To protest, dismantle, and disrupt the Indian government's attempts to not only silence Kashmir but also the production of imbalanced narratives about it, the "Kashmiri diaspora-driven independent, transnational, grassroots movement" crafted a syllabus that fights (Indian) colonial knowledge and methodology. In terms of knowledge, the syllabus collected literature, poetry and prose from scholars and students across the world, foregrounding voices of Kashmir but also highlighting critical literature from those outside the community. In terms of methods, the production of the syllabus can be likened to curation, seeing that the process, provoked due to

¹⁶ Read Also: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/8/5/kashmiris-in-india-are-still-suffering>
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/8/5/kashmir-special-status-india-two-years-human-rights-economy>
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-53646322>
<https://www.dw.com/en/kashmir-a-year-of-lockdown-and-lost-autonomy/a-54437369>

the ongoing politics, emerged as an archive of knowledge. Moreover, as one that has been carefully studied, assessed, and connected to produce a course that runs across 14 weeks.

These gestures of response, research, selection, and design was solely to aid the education of the self and others on matters related to Kashmir, by expanding beyond the disciplinary boundaries the state and its politics were studied within. Moreover, foregrounding voices of Kashmiri diaspora, it exposes paths for “decolonial, transnational and anti-occupation solidarities among movements of freedom and emancipation, through a close study of the region”. As mentioned before, it was not just that they were seeking different pieces of knowledge, but that it was done through a collective method. Stating that it is a “working syllabus”, suggests that the knowledge transmitted contains different voices, ranging across timelines but was also one that didn’t promise autonomy over it. My own engagement with the syllabus was after encountering it twice – once over Instagram on December 5th, 2019, when I was involved in digital protests related to the lockdown, and the second time during research for a theatre production on December 21st, 2019. The first encounter was with screenshots of WhatsApp images that documented the departure of members from family WhatsApp groups after the lockdown and the second encounter was with a text by Abir Bazaz – *Imagining Srinagar-Sarajevo* (2002), which led me back to the syllabus. Both these encounters were different in that, the first was an artistic and political encounter while the latter was an artistic and educational one primarily. It is the latter that inspired me to select this project for the purposes of this paper.

Research Material

Interviews

For this thesis, the initial plan proposed interviews with the organizers of the 3 projects selected as case studies. This was going to be the starting point for the research material. The first interview with Arjon Dunnwind, curator of Zero Footprint Festival was conducted on February 5th, 2021 as an informal introduction to the thesis. On May 19, 2021, I conducted the first formal interview. It was conducted over Skype and lasted for 90 minutes. The interview with dr. Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink for EOC was designed in three parts. While the first interview, in December 2020, was designed more as a conversation, it already opened some directions in which the interview could be imagined. A second more formal introduction was conducted in January 2021 where I shared how I had situated the project and what was the study I was conducting. The final interview was conducted on May 12, 2021, and lasted 90 minutes. In this interview some of the questions overlapped with the interview with Dunnwind. All the interviews with Nibbelink were conducted over Microsoft Teams. Since both the interviews

were also meant to provoke new insights and intended as an exploratory conversation, some questions were unplanned, posed as a response to a new insight. Both the interviews have been transcribed and are available if needed. For the purposes of the word count limitations of the thesis, I have not added it as an appendix. Both the transcripts is available on request.

This leaves the third project – The Kashmir Syllabus. Even though I had intended to interview one of the many organizers for this project, after multiple attempts this seemed impossible. Whether this was due to the ongoing political unrest in Kashmir and India, or that my thesis proposal and its intent got lost in translation in the way I had drafted the emails, I was unable to get any response from their end. Due to this, the research material for the third project consists of the mission statement, the goal, and the syllabus itself. While I claim that this project is analyzed with the same intentions of uncovering how their educational practice is different, I do understand that it comes from a place of personal reflection alone. Yet I believe that the strategy of Curious Encounters proposed by me strongly resonates with this project.

Thick Description / Reflection Notes

Complimentary to the interviews are notes from my personal experience of the three projects. Being personally involved in all three projects, albeit in different capacities, the notes have mostly been written during the time spent in the project. The material documents the journey of a student, team member and citizen. The reason I invite a second reading of this project through personal socio-political position is to elucidate the importance of positionality in contemporary educational praxis. This research method comes from a place of wanting to analyze the educational projects from multiple perspectives.

Syllabus

The third set of materials is the content that was put together and handed over to the students/ audience. This aspect of the projects manifests in different forms in the three projects. In the case of The Kashmir Syllabus, it is very clear that the syllabus is a set of texts – academic, poems, prose and journalistic pieces that have been placed together in a form that has similarities to the traditional syllabus. The syllabus can be viewed in the Appendix as Table 1. The course outline and goals can be viewed in the Appendix as Table 2.

Chapter 3: Envisioning Decolonial Knowledges

Chapter 1 sets out to establish historical and contemporary theories around curiosity and elements of it that are visible in contemporary educational praxis. I now analyse the 3 projects with the aid of the proposed theoretical framework. The following three chapters answers the following 3 questions in the same order:

Chapter 3: Research sub-question 1) How is the production of knowledge conceived in an era of high-performance? How is the experience of learning imagined? What is the thinking that went into the project and why did certain ideas/ methods gain more traction? How does their conception relate to performance theories of McKenzie? How (if) are their conceptions decolonial?

Chapter 4: Research sub-question 2) How did the contemporary condition affect how knowledge was produced? How is the production of the project aligning with the decolonial idea behind the project? How does the concept of the event relate to decolonial production?

Chapter 5: Research sub-question 3) How was the production of said knowledge, managed by foregrounding practices curiosity? What strategies were deployed to manage projects so that they fell in line with the idea that birthed them and could be effective for the contemporary conditions? How is the management style complying with the conception and feeding the decolonial intentions of the project? What is the underlying yet overlapping strategy found in the three projects?

Is where I ask how is the production of knowledge conceived in an era of high-performance? How is the experience of learning imagined? What is the thinking that went into the project and why did certain ideas/ methods gain more traction? How does their conception relate to performance theories of McKenzie? How (if) are their conceptions decolonial?

In the first chapter of my analysis, I highlight the decolonial intentions that the organisers and projects have been imagined with. The organisers and the project concept notes demonstrate how, whether due to ecological crisis or political upheaval, they found alternatives that could support the continuation of their practice and mindfully respond to the ongoing crisis.

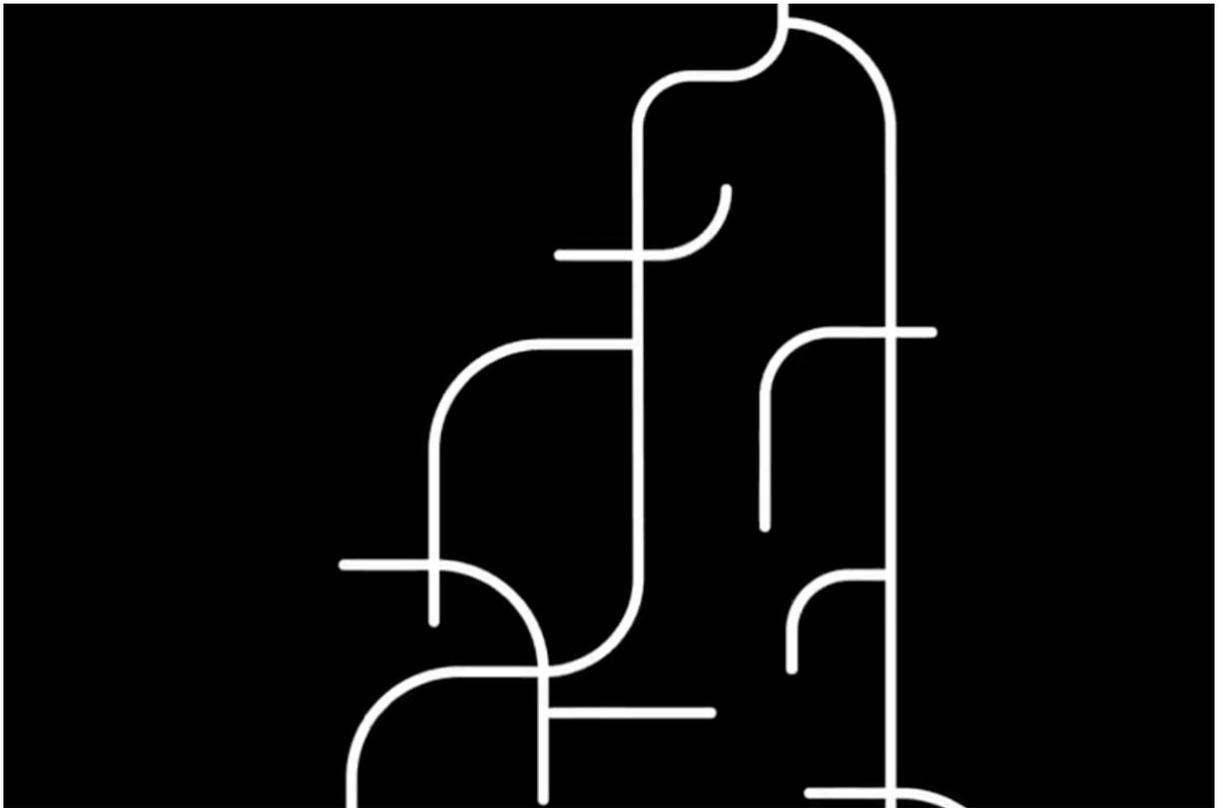


Figure 1: Screenshot of initial iteration for the visual language of Zero Footprint

Curating Knowledge OR Caring about Knowledge

Speaking about the idea behind the festival, Arjon Dunnewind mentioned that the festival was focused on the theme of sustainability even prior to the momentum that the environmental crisis had gained post the pandemic. While the name itself got confirmed around April 2020, the idea of a festival that produced and embodied the discourse of sustainability was present since early 2020 (Dunnewind, unpublished interview). The idea was that the festival would be an *event* (more on this in the following chapter), that presented the myriad perceptions of sustainable thinking and practices. Acknowledging that the term ‘Sustainability’ had perhaps lost its meaning, gathering various connotations through neo-liberal productions, the curatorial team was looking for other ways that would provoke thought and action. In fact, the opening lines of ZFP stipulate that moving away from “talks about sustainability”¹⁷ was a

¹⁷ “impakt.nl/festival/2020/” last accessed August 24, 2021, <https://impakt.nl/festival/2020/>.

conscious choice, one that didn't want to risk the discourse from serving clickbait environmental movements, or greenwashing.

Locking down on the name of Zero Footprint, the team opened the festival's name and sub-themes to experts from diverse fields. This was done with the aim to understand the stakes of curating knowledge around such a charged topic. What do we talk about when we talk about Zero Footprint? Is it even possible? Does such a promise give a sense of false hope, or does it initiate interrogation of a term that is commonly heard in the discourse of environmental action? (Dunnwind, unpublished interview). Such were the questions Dunnwind hoped to ask experts with the hope that it would make way for diverse opinions. Through this, his aim was to move away from the idea that curators and festivals dictate ways of thinking. Instead, by staging the festival with the title Zero Footprint, it seemed like the curatorial team wanted to honour the complexity of ecology and ecological practices and challenge certain ideals that had become dominant in the discourse of environmental politics. Instead of directing how one can think about the contemporary ecological condition, the curatorial team wanted to find ways in which different perspectives on this global topic could be shared within the same event. This showed that they were preparing to introduce the tensions, challenges, and overlaps between different ideologies and practices, without necessarily elevating any one perspective.

Following this, the curatorial team employed a "global, inclusive, and social approach" (Dunnwind, unpublished interview) in the selection of the speakers/artists/designers/scholars, with the aim to reflect their curatorial process in the programme of the festival. During this phase, Dunnwind was more interested in creating discourse around the engagement with technology – as something that has created the footprint but also as something that could help decrease it – the other curators were more interested in understanding the topic through the perspective of collective knowledge and care. According to him, not only did the curatorial intentions become more global – his technological interest encountering the intersectional perspectives brought in by Inez de Coo, Lara Stolwerk and Paul Schmidt – but it did so without reproducing borderlands between the aversion and loyalty to technology, Non-Western and Western knowledge, or individual and collective knowledge (Dunnwind, unpublished interview).

A reflection of this was visible when they changed the name from Zero Footprint to Zero Footprint: Living and Connecting on a Damaged Earth. Dovetailing two interests – a hopeful future and a lived present – made space for a more complicated and collective discourse around the climate crisis. This highlights a critical quality of knowledge production. Performances that subvert cultural, social, or intellectual dominance directly points to McKenzie theory of cultural performance. I claim that Zero Footprint is highly efficacious in contributing to the decolonial task because it was conceived through a collective curatorial methodology, without elevating or denigrating any kind of knowledge. This discloses that the

curatorial team was aspiring to have something more than just inclusiveness, which is also visible in their curatorial statement – “The works are inspired by the alternative worlds found in science fiction, perspective changes offered by Indigenous knowledge and the stories from people that are experiencing climate change first-hand”¹⁸. I mentioned in the introduction that projects undertaken by neo-liberal institutional spaces and staged as decolonial projects has risked the term becoming an empty metaphor.

The term is borrowed and employed to gain social currency, but more often than not a “...startling number of these discussions make no mention of Indigenous people, our/their struggles for the recognition of our/their sovereignty, or the contributions of Indigenous intellectuals and activists to theories and frameworks of decolonization (Tuck and Yang 2012, 3). At no point did Dunnewind or the curatorial statement explicitly mention a decolonial intention. Yet by selecting perspectives and stories in alternative worlds the festival is clearly an example of how to do decolonial work. Moreover, this was done without necessarily prioritising ideologies or methodologies. The festival was conceived by carefully navigating dominant and alternative thought to transmit pieces of knowledge that could catalyse change in the present moment. The following statement by Dunnewind supports the argument I am trying to make

So, they [co-curators] wanted to add focus on how do we as humans relate to each other in the light of this problem, how can we approach it in a more inclusive way? Also, how can we approach it with a focus on how climate crisis manifest itself or we may expect will manifest itself in the future, let's say on the southern hemisphere. So more outside of the western industrialized societies[...]were also issues that were addressed in these expert meetings. And that led to also a shift in the content of the program towards this more global, inclusive social approach to what the climate crisis is, and how we can counter it (Dunnewind, unpublished interview)

Dunnewind’s reflection highlights a nuance found in the idea behind Zero Footprint that also resonates with the more contemporary decolonial thought in the educational sector. Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh explain this through their observation of the relationship between modernity and coloniality and offer some insights into the potential of bringing different pieces of knowledge together. Insights that comply with the efficacy of McKenzie’s cultural performance. Foregrounding relationality in their approach to decolonial thought, they step away from universal thought and action. But relationality does not simply mean inclusion, it implies what they call *vincularidad* – “Vincularidad is the awareness of the integral relation and interdependence amongst all living organisms (in which humans are only a part) with territory or land and the cosmos” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 1). This means that for true decolonial pieces of knowledge, one mustn’t forsake one kind of knowledge for another, instead, the approach should resist any kind of singularity. Either coloniality or the conflation

¹⁸ “impakt.nl/festival/2020/” last accessed August 24, 2021, <https://impakt.nl/festival/2020/>.

of all non-western thought and decoloniality. Knowledge is a much more complex entity, and to dismiss its dynamism will risk the production of decolonial knowledge.

This is the reason why I believe that the conception of Zero Footprint aligns with decolonial work as discussed by Mignolo and Walsh. I believe that it is through action undertaken to subvert singularity without necessarily employing the term *decolonisation* as a staging strategy that manages to circumvent the metaphorization of the word and work. Zero Footprint demonstrates that by aligning with educational intentions to produce discourse, projects can fulfil the task of producing decolonial knowledge. Dunnewind and his team were clearly hoping to open rather than conclude the dialogue around the climate crisis. This is also visible in the complex way Dunnewind speaks about alternative knowledge

“...if you see IMPAKT as an organization that aims to present alternative visions, the question is alternative to what? If your target group is already like a higher educated academic, into the arts target group, if that's your audience, do you want to confirm their ideas? By bringing alternative program that is alternative to the mainstream and thereby probably in sync with the ideas of your more specialized target groups? Although do you want to present alternatives to what your audience already accepts as reality and and their ideas? It's a bit like this Russian doll example, where do you position yourself? Do you want to contradict commonly known or commonly held conventions in mainstream media mainstream society, or also want to be critical to what the common perception in academia and in arts are. I do think this this second approach is just as important. I don't see the two exclusively. I think you can curate your program with both- nuances, commonly held perceptions in mainstream society and in another program be critical to what is the commonly held perception in academia and in the arts. Because I do think, if you want to be critical to mainstream perceptions, you owe it to yourself to also be critical to your own perceptions or to the perceptions of what you see as your, your peers (Dunnewind, unpublished interview)

I cannot articulate more succinctly the potential that emerges when a project recognizes the complicated task of cultural performance. Not simply as subversion or deconstruction of dominant knowledge, but as a way that acknowledges the debt to subversion itself. Subversion is not for the sake of subversion, inclusion is not to check a task off a checklist. Interpreting Dunnewind's reflection, I notice that Zero Footprint on one hand did understand the need to look outside the canon for philosophies and practices that could help us deal with the ecological crisis. Yet, it is evident that the need for subversion wasn't for its own sake. That it was utilized as a strategy only if it served the global discourse of global warming. Such an approach complicates McKenzie's theory of Cultural Performance. In that, not only was it intended to provoke a performance towards social (ecological) efficacy, but it also asked the audience to interrogate the kind of efficacy that they were catering to.

The curatorial intentions pushed both the social imaginaries that defined what decolonial pieces of knowledge could be, but also how one could attempt to achieve it. It isn't just demonstrating how cultural performances contribute to the decolonial project, it also exposes dominant social efficacy to further examination. I observe that it is precisely because

Zero Footprint manages to highlight the complexity of decolonial work, that makes it a direct offspring of cultural performance but also an example that develops it further. In foregrounding the complication, ZFP manages to save social transformation ideologies from becoming the hegemonic structures, or feed the neo-liberal institute, it seeks to resist. Instead of asking how can we subvert colonial knowledge, I believe that the curators also managed to consider what it means to subvert? When is subversion necessary, and why? In an era of high performance, where decolonial thinking and action hold high valence, the curatorial team of Zero Footprint conceived a learning experience that on one hand paid due diligence to cultural performance and the potential it holds in examining colonial productions of knowledge. On the other hand, they also expanded the value of such cultural performances by interrogating and demonstrating different ways of being decolonial. It goes beyond dismantling, beyond deconstruction and beyond negation. Decolonial work, if we are to take heed of the curatorial intentions of Zero Footprint, means being fiercely loyal to discourse, to the encounter between pieces of knowledge, and to giving different perspectives space while also being critical of certain pitfalls they may have. In this aspect, *Ecologies of Curation* and *The Kashmir Syllabus* serve as good comrades to Zero Footprint.

Choreographing Knowledge OR Knowledge for the Not Yet

“people from the younger generation, they will come with different stuff. And it would be nice to see what they come up with. [...] So that was, in this online format, reason to give space to students”

(Nibbelink, unpublished interview; emphasis added)

In the interview with Prof. Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink regarding *Ecologies of Curation*, she mentions that the elective was designed with the intention to introduce students to contemporary theories on curatorial praxis and ways to *apply* theory for curatorial praxis related to media, art, and performance objects. Specifically, the elective showed how such objects are researched, translated, and communicated. Emphasising a difference from the core courses that students select, those that focus on object-oriented analysis, this course was specifically designed with the intention to let students realise how objects, ideologies and discourse can be and are “carefully” put together in ecologically cognizant curatorial praxis.

Moreover, the course framed media, art, and performance objects in relation to the ecology they inhabit and understood it through a curatorial perspective. Briefly put, it was conceived as an introduction to the various theoretical debates in the field of curatorial praxis that exposed the transformations curatorial praxis has experienced – how it engages with different disciplines and praxis, and how all of it sits within an art ecology. While the relation

between Nibbelink's ecological intention and McKenzie's event is analysed in the following chapter, I would like to focus on the way Ecologies of Curation, much like Zero Footprint, complicates cultural performance.

Not only were the students invited to diversify theory with perspectives from individual curatorial praxis, but they were also asked to counter the practice heavy curatorial field with theoretical interventions. Nibbelink exclaims that the choice to straddle theory and praxis, was due to the shift to online classrooms (although the course, even before lockdown aimed to balance academia with praxis). But upon losing the shared space of the classroom, Nibbelink had to consider a way to develop this position further. As students didn't have a way to participate in field excursions where we would convene to meet professional curators while simultaneously attending the course remotely, Nibbelink had to explicitly adopt a format that engaged the distributed attention.

For example, during the second session, after a brief introduction to the themes of the course, Nibbelink gave us access to a document. In this document, each of us had to select a quote of our choice from a list of literature we had been read and explain how it expressed the theme addressed productively. At the end of 10 minutes, the document acted as a repository of quotes and explanations that connected 3 different texts and interpretations of it. While some perspectives overlapped, the document also held perspectives that challenged each other. The following quotes underscore the potential of such an exercise –

...there were these very nice moments where people started working together online. One of the few times that students felt that we were doing something together. Instead of having independent study, it was not only about working to make something together, but also about the feeling of being connected. And I thought that was very valuable (Nibbelink, unpublished interview).

Today, I saw the construction of text which was in some ways frustratingly disconnected. Each time I began editing my note, I noticed another classmate add a point that challenged mine. I paused multiple times – how was the interpretation so different? At the same time, I realised that I was responding to the challenge and rather than changing my note, at the end of it (whether the other person noticed), my note like a verbal debate. I imagine I would have been more emphatic if I was to face with them. This note however, was a more articulate side of me (Kumar, notes from the session)

It is evident that Nibbelink, much like Dunnewind and his team, had conceived a space for dialogue to emerge and continue. Nibbelink had managed to delicately tie academic work to a practical workshop format. This, allowed us to learn how to research, discern and critique but also do so collaboratively while responding to differences of opinions. Upon reflection (a process Nibbelink made mandatory at the end of each class), she offered an explanation for conceiving such a space – “It's just what I think, what education should be and how I function. I hope that people are interested and *want to know, want to ask questions and want to explore things*. Maybe we can think together without knowing where it leads. I think that discussions

can also have the function of just putting things on your agenda” (Nibbelink, unpublished interview).

‘...dialogue, that's where I think that the encounter is...’ (Nibbelink, unpublished interview)

This thought is also evident in how she imagined the encounter between curatorial theories affected by social, cultural, and political practices. Since the course was intended for an international group of students, the theories and methods introduced had to traverse the cultural, social, and political differences, to not present curatorial practise that is exempt from the socio-cultural forces that it inhabits. The course syllabus moves through the themes of ecology, education, artistic integrity, discourse and ideology, new institutionalism, queer spaces and more^[1]. If this is the case, Nibbelink’s intention with foregrounding dialogue indicates certain recognition of the decolonial value of dialogues. What I mean is, Nibbelink had conceived of the space for discourse, not the discourse itself. While the classroom structure resembled a traditional higher education set-up – a start and end date, a start and end time, a curriculum, a teacher-student dynamic, assignments, and grading – Nibbelink reconfigured the methodology adopted to navigate this standardized set-up. Specifically, by introducing dialogue to produce knowledge that didn’t yet exist.

McKenzie says that the efficacy of cultural performance is a direct result of a highly mediated society. He claims that it was the possibility of relaying, cross-referencing, and citing, remixing, and redistribution that transformed cultural performance from a performance of compliance to one of liberation. Or in the case of *Ecologies of Curation*, new knowledge. We see this in an instance when Nibbelink refuses to dictate the kind of discourse and by consequence knowledge that gets produced. Although a major chunk of directorial control lay in the hands of Dunnewind and his team and Nibbelink, both the projects were conceived as an idea that would see its fruition only through the engagement of the audience or students. While in both cases, the content – the themes, literature, films, talks, and questions – were partially set up prior to the onset of the event, it was only through the encounter between the themes and audience in the case of *Zero Footprint*, and the texts and students in the case of *Ecologies of Curation*, that I see the emergence of new knowledge.

Nibbelink’s educational intentions much like Dunnewind’s didn’t explicitly state a decolonial aspiration. But by giving students the space to exchange perspectives, she gave up directorial control over the knowledge that was produced. Her conception pushed the way decolonial knowledge could be produced. It isn’t just demonstrating how her own cultural performances contribute to the decolonial project, it also demanding, nudging, encouraging and provoking students to perform to produce knowledge. *Zero Footprint* is conceived as a space

that introduces the audience to the cultural performance of the curatorial team and resists efficacious cultural performance for the sake of it. *Ecologies of Curation* demonstrates some similarities in that Nibbelink introduces the topic of curation through a diverse range of themes without elevating any one theme. But *Ecologies of Curation* highlights another aspect of decolonial intention too.

By providing texts as the ingredients for the discourse, I see the decoloniality of this project to emerge because of the space Nibbelink had made for potential knowledge to emerge. She had anticipated the space for something yet to be. This anticipation demonstrates that while on one hand, *Ecologies of Curation* was conceived to introduce the students to historical and contemporary theories about curation, it was also conceived as an experience where students would develop the theories and praxis further. In the words of Mignolo and Walsh, this shows traces of decolonial work that doesn't simply seek to "dismantle the master's house", but instead show other ways of theorizing (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 7)

"Slaves have historically done something more provocative with such tools than attempt to dismantle the Big House. There are those who used those tools, developed additional ones, and built houses of their own on more or less generous soil. It is our view that the proper response is to follow their lead, transcending rather than dismantling Western ideas through building our own houses of thought. When enough houses are built, the hegemony of the master's house – in fact, mastery itself, – will cease to maintain its imperial status" (Gordon and Gordon in Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 7)

What Nibbelink's conception of the learning experience suggests is that instead of completely reconfiguring literary material offered to students, there might be better ways to create decolonial knowledge if those texts are brought into contact through discourse in classrooms. Not a discourse dictated by the teacher, but one that emerges as a conversation, at the same time rife with tensions and harmonies. But most importantly, the reason why I argue that Nibbelink's conception is underscored by decolonial thought is that she recognized that learning occurred only if made space for exchange

Connecting Knowledge OR Knowledge without Borders

"Stand With Kashmir (SWK) is a Kashmiri diaspora-driven independent, transnational, grassroots movement committed to standing in solidarity with the people of Indian occupied Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh (henceforth referred to as "occupied Kashmir" or "Kashmir") in ending the Indian occupation of their homeland and supporting the right to self-determination of the pre-partition state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Our mission is to advocate for an end to the Indian occupation, and the right to self-determination for the people of the disputed region of Jammu & Kashmir. While we do not advocate one particular solution for the future of the region, we strongly support a just and

sustained process in which the people can ultimately decide their future through an internationally mediated referendum”¹⁹

I had felt the first grains of discomfort because the government had outmaneuvered an entire nation and robbed them of their previous stated autonomy. Not just for me, but a wave of discomfort and anger swept the country. I was packing my bags at this point, to leave for the Netherlands. It was surreal, to realise that I wasn’t going to be here when India’s history was being rewritten (Kumar, documented notes)

The first time I encountered the syllabus, was during my daily scroll of Instagram ‘news’. It was on December 5, 2019, 5 months since the communication lockdown in Kashmir and Instagram, against all odds, had become one of the many platforms where communities were performing allyship with Kashmir through stories, facts, and numbers that mainstream channels in India were not communicating. The post I encountered was not a provocative artwork or a strong message declaring or calling for solidarity. Nor was it a documentary style image that displayed the decay on the state. It was a series of screenshots. The screenshots were images of Whatsapp family groups. Each screenshot had a different group name, yet each of them had one specific thing in common. Displaying the date of August 5 or later, there were multiple notifications with the same message ‘<xyz> left’. While there was no direct indication as to why, the date after which this occurred insinuated that it was because Whatsapp had been blocked for citizens within the state of Kashmir. The post had been shared by a profile called Stand With Kashmir.

A few weeks later, on December 21st, 2019, I came across another post with the heading – *Kashmir: A Short Summary*. The post shared reactions to the situation in Kashmir that differed both in position and context

“India is committing genocide. End this occupation. We want freedom. We deserve to live a life of dignity” (Kashmiris), “...territorial dispute between India and Pakistan...” (International Reports), “We will continue our military operations. Everything is normal. But there is a threat from across the border. We are looking at different models to perpetuate genocides, we meant resettlement. How dare anyone ask us to explain anything. How Hinduphobic. Israel-jis are we doing it right?” (Indian government)²⁰

There was no indication whether these quotes were lifted from actual interviews or had been fictionalised to exaggerate the reaction from the different perspectives. While I recognised and even believed to a certain extent the actuality of these statements, it felt dangerous to sell them as “facts”.

Even though I personally stand against India’s occupation of Kashmir, reading such statements in quotes and without citation gave a sense of opacity. The curiosity to know what the situation in Kashmir was about, outside of both popular and alternative media channels, initiated my hunt for literature that could teach me about Kashmir, its history and politics.

¹⁹ “The Kashmir Syllabus” last accessed June 12, 2021. <https://standwithkashmir.org/the-kashmir-syllabus/>

²⁰ Instagram post: posted on December 21. Stand With Kashmir.

Typing a combination of phrases with the words “Kashmir”, “Literature”, “Syllabus” and “Scholarly Articles”, I finally came across The Kashmir Syllabus. Arriving on the landing page, I was taken aback when I noticed that it was same group that had shared the last two posts. Finding their multi-pronged approach to intervene in the political situation of Kashmir interesting, I began studying the syllabus that they had gathered to educate those interested in Kashmir.

The syllabus itself performs as the educational focal point between artistic and political interventions. It is a document that “...suggest[s] paths for decolonial, transnational and anti-occupation solidarities among movements for freedom and emancipation, through a close study of the region”²¹. At the same time cautioning the readers to use the syllabus as a manifesto. In other words, the syllabus didn’t promise to be a vanguard in teaching solidarity but instead, through shared and co-produced knowledge demonstrates(ed) the very impossibility of learning through a directive process. All these aspects reflect the potential of cultural performances expressed by McKenzie. Mainly that, the conception of the project heavily relied on the citizens to perform – much like the students of *Ecologies of Curation* – to generate any kind of transformation at an individual and social level. Culturally, it is evident that the idea behind this syllabus is to transform certain perspectives about Kashmir. Additionally, through a collective production of the syllabus, not only did the organizers intend “...change people and societies”²², but also how they did it.

The Kashmir Syllabus serves as a great example of the paradigm of cultural performance. Not only were the organizers performing in resistance to the dominant perspectives around Kashmir, but it was also pushing citizens, not unlike me, to take initiative to educate ourselves. It provoked me to step outside my liberal views and understand the politics of a land beyond the politics of the so-called left and right. Positioning myself became critical to this process - an ally, but not a Kashmiri, a student, but not a scholar of Kashmir, a researcher, but not an expert on Kashmir, and an Indian not physically present in India. The syllabus, and my own engagement with it, along with the ongoing protests in India, triangulated a critical nuance of cultural performance – “...performance is not a passive mirror of these social changes but a part of the complicated feedback process that brings about change” (McKenzie 2001, 31). In other words, the performance of the team in continuously producing updated knowledge fed my performance, which in turn could be imagined as one of the many bodies of knowledge that fed the movement, which looped back to feed the literature that got added to the syllabus.

²¹ “The Kashmir Syllabus” last accessed June 12, 2021. <https://standwithkashmir.org/the-kashmir-syllabus/>

²²

This sets it apart from more traditional educational spaces where the syllabus is designed. Firstly, it erases almost entirely the idea that to be educated, one needs to be sitting within the confines of a classroom for a dedicated number of classes. It even shakes away the presumption that learning can be delimited to a certain time frame for a particular age group. Through the repackaging of individual texts, books, poems of contributors as the syllabus 1) it becomes difficult to separate the organizers from the contributors within a hierarchy, thereby blurring the line between knowledge production and transmission 2) its produce a body of knowledge that isn't neatly contained within disciplinary borders and 3) it does not fortify knowledge within a historical period, bereft of the ongoing politics and transformations, but most importantly.

Moving away from the above structure, posed some challenges. Firstly, in conceiving a body of knowledge that would be co-produced, The Kashmir Syllabus was contingent to a discourse that transgressed homogenous discourse. Discourse of academia, social movements, and politics. In making the syllabus accessible not only in completion but also in production, I can safely claim that The Kashmir Syllabus had imagined the project with decolonial intentions. An intention explicitly outlined in their goals. It chose to position itself as a response to the ongoing political resistance against the government. Both ideologically, and in praxis. To understand the potential of such positioning, I will now proceed to examine the production of an idea. To do so, I turn to the second lens of analysis – the production of situated events to disrupt the monopolization of knowledge production and transmission

Chapter 4: Dissecting the Event

Is where I ask how did the contemporary condition affect how knowledge was produced? How is the production of the project aligning with the decolonial idea behind the project? How does the concept of the event relate to decolonial production?

Building as a Metaphor

Zero Footprint's opening lines promise a transversal experience. They do this by producing programmes as the junction where ideologies and discourse around the climate crisis cut across modern and indigenous thinking and thus interrogate the linear ideology and practice that has dominated how we understand climate crisis. Informed by the different ways communities think about climate crisis, how different communities deal with it, and how technology (analogue and digital) implicate and aid reparation, the festival produced a festival experience that created space for transmission of the curated knowledge. But how exactly was it produced? Since the lockdown, the festival team had been working towards the smooth transition of the festival from a live experience to an online experience. They hoped to do this without overwhelming the audience – “The simplicity of the program is not related to the size of the programme [...] relates to how you offer it, how you visualize it, so to say in an online environment, how you structure it” (Dunnewind; emphasis added).



Figure 2: Screenshot of digital portal entrance to the festival

To be able to do this, the exhibition was designed around the metaphor of a 3-storied building that audience members encountered upon entering. The building was made up of 6 blocks, 2 blocks representing a floor, 3 floors making up the entire building (Fig. 2). The festival was experienced by the audience selecting which room they wanted to enter based on the festival programme. To also maintain the interaction that occurs during festivals, where audience members interact with each other and artists and curators either at the bar or after parties, one of the blocks was the designated Rooftop Bar. The audience could enter this virtual room from their own locations, with their own drinks and interact with the bartender and other audience

members. At the same time in their own spaces and in the shared space of the virtual festival. At this point, it would do well to remember that ZFP was almost entirely a virtual experience. Except for three programmes - Global Warming Yoga Studio, Dreaming in Everywhere, and Climate Mourning Circle which were programmes requiring the participant/ audience to be present in Utrecht, the rest of the festival was being broadcasted from Het Huis. Not only were the main events broadcasted but so were the “...extra in between moments...” (Dunnewind).



Figure 3: Production panel at the Theatrezaal in Het Huis, Utrecht

For the 5 days of the festival except for guest curators or moderators, it was only the production team that inhabited Het Huis spaces would have been swarming with the audience (Fig. 3). Layered on the physical spatiality, the virtual festival space was a direct offspring. The curatorial license embroidered the experience of the festival by mixing traditional and experimental formats. This produced a layering or doubling of the digital space onto the physical space and vice versa, which was made possible by the new media technologies. McKenzie’s explanation of the technological performance provides an initial explanation of why I consider this project to be a decolonial production. Technological performance involves the conjunction of both human and non-human elements, the audience but also the new media technologies that enable the access, perform continuously to relay information, connect, and share knowledge, stream the live programmes, and enable live interactions.

In fact, at any given point, the human and non-human entities are meant to operate together. While a part of the efficacy of the festival was dependent on the cultural performance

of the curators and audience (as seen in the preceding chapter), for an effective experience, the festival was heavily dependent of the smooth functioning of the digital technologies. The absence of which would result in an unsuccessful event. Here, along with cultural performance, we see that the production team had to have made technical decisions that could support the ideals behind the festival. McKenzie states that the effectiveness of technological performance determines its relevance. In other words, good and accurate performance saves technology from being obsolete. But other than technical performance, which by no means do I intend to undermine, in the case of Zero Footprint, the technology chosen had to perform technically to be able to produce to the socio-cultural aspirations of the project. In other words, if a particular technology did not aid discourse, or did not support the virtual experience of the festival, it not only failed technically but I believe that it failed culturally too. The culture of knowledge transmission virtually.

The technological equipment needed to connect speakers, audience, and participants within Utrecht and around the globe, without which the above articulated world of ZFP would be impossible to produce. Because of this, the technological devices, both the physical hardware and the networks, became as critical to the possibility of the space as were the participants who completed the networks. The smooth and consistent connection of speakers across the world for a single program, the outward flow of information and the influx of audience from different parts of the globe. This festival, while formally positioned in Utrecht Netherlands was not produced solely to sit within those geographical boundaries. It would be witless to say that the experience/ the space ZFP began and ended within Het Huis, when a large part of its becoming was contingent to its access from different parts of the world. In times of global lockdown, the curatorial team could have possibly postponed the festival, or contained it for those who could visit Het Huis. Instead, the team decided to find an alternative way that didn't just allow them to go ahead with the festival but also develop the festival for the years to come.

In the interview, Dunnewind does suggest that while he may bring back some live events for the following years, the alternatives they experimented with has given them new pathways for the future. Not only in terms of the reach of the festival but also in terms of being true to the climate crisis that continues. For the 2021 festival, the team has decided to produce a hybrid event, borrowing some formats from the previous year, and bringing back some live elements. In their persistence to find alternatives during harsh conditions I find traces of decolonial thinking, of "... other conceptual instruments, other ways of theorizing, and other genealogies, all of which – in both the past and present – construct and constitute what we understand as decolonial thinking, praxis, and thought" (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 7-8). If the ways through which the experience was produced were so different from its predecessors, there must be something to be said about what got produced – the *event*.

Reading with McKenzie helps me draw some parallels between the festival as an event – a term commonly used in the case of cultural programmes – and the *event* as theorised by him. An event, according to McKenzie is the most efficacious machine produced by humans. It consists of actors and audience, at a designated venue, which can be entered upon crossing a threshold. The event, although separated from life as is in the crossing of thresholds – doors, gates, curtains and more, is not disconnected from the society it intervenes in. In fact, McKenzie claims that an element of efficaciousness is made possible and is truly to be found only if the event acknowledges the social envelope that surrounds it. Similarly, Zero Footprint, both for the way it was conceived and how it was produced, created a “sense of occasion”, nestled deep within the ongoing climate crisis.

It is evident that the curatorial team was determined to create an impact on a global level. While Zero Footprint isn't simply a theatre performance as suggested by McKenzie, it is attuned to the transformational qualities of a theatrical event that is at once separated from the “rest of life” and at the same time embedded in it. ZFP very categorically creates a concise event that delivers content for hundred hours, organises itself into different programmes and predetermines most if not all the formats through which the audience experiences the event (talks, symposia, games, workshops). In transitioning to a virtual experience, it also quite literally opened the otherwise enclosed festival experience to the social envelope of the different remote locations from where the audience attended it. The event which would have otherwise been only for those who bought the ticket, those who were inside Het Huis, those who were involved in the production, was suddenly transcending the borders that usually separated the inside from the outside.

I believe that McKenzie's theory of the event is a decolonial theory because it does not disconnect the event from the socio-political surroundings. Similarly, Zero Footprint does not only acknowledge it, but opens the experience to unsuspecting audience but also receives unexpected feedback. For example, during one of the performances while I sat at home, I had a friend over who had not bought the ticket for the festival. But since I was watching the festival on my projector, it was hard for her to not experience it as well. In the past when I have attended festivals without my friends, I have often failed to articulate particulate instances and simply stated – *You should have been there* or *You had to be there*, sharing only my memory of the experience rather than the experience itself.

While this opening creates a certain crisis for the economy of festivals, in that lesser tickets are bought because one ticket for a home viewing is enough, there is still a decolonial potential to be found in the fact that it introduces the festival and unsuspecting audience to each other. The event found another way to reach the audience. I believe that by going digital, Zero Footprint disrupts the spatial borders that keeps the knowledge in and those who can't attend

out. It dismantles the “master’s house” but not to deconstruct it, rather to develop it (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 7).

The Third Object

“I think that we need to be time capsules” (Nibbelink, unpublished interview)

Keeping in mind that technology could act as an agent of disconnection and isolation, Nibbelink had to find different ways to harness a different potential of the technology that the university had chosen for online classes. By way of considering the technological condition it inhabits, the online classroom space, specific hierarchies, formats, and educational praxis were reoriented to work with the capacity technology offers. To do this, she had to consider what aspects of Microsoft Teams aided the continuation of the course had to be employed to recreate the shared space – “Instead of having independent study, it was not only about working together, but the about feeling connected” (Nibbelink, unpublished interview). The moment she speaks about is related to the exercise I briefly mentioned in the previous section.

Because Microsoft Teams allows sharing of documents, excel sheets and notes, Nibbelink had opted to consciously use it as the space where we gathered and produced knowledge collectively. Borrowing from the liveness in physical classrooms or even in theatre (Nibbelink’s personal background is in Theatre and Dramaturgy), she talks about wanting to maintain the effectiveness of shared spaces, something which the document afforded. For this, it was critical to have aspects of Microsoft Teams that transcended the disconnect that the virtual classroom created. Smoothing the gaps and kinks that were created due to the physical distance, Microsoft Teams was employed precisely because of its affordance to mimic interaction found in physical classrooms. Whether in the manner that all the faces could be visible on a single screen, or the chat option on the side that allowed parallel conversation²³. But most importantly, the affordance to allow collective production of knowledge. Understanding how the course was produced, I now turn to examine what was produced and what was the value in finding alternative ways of producing the experience.

I now discuss her adoption of a “thorough [third] object” (Nibbelink, unpublished interview). In the interview conducted with her, I was curious to know whether the course was separated from the ongoing curatorial but also social and political events around the world. I wanted to understand how a course based on a practice had been imagined without any practical experience for students. And whether there was value in such a process. Nibbelink was very forthright in offering her insights to this question. “I would say it [the course] is open, it is open

²³ I would like to make it clear that while this section focuses on Microsoft Teams, it does not do so to prove its validity over other meeting platforms such as Hangout or Zoom. Instead, it only describes the experience of an online classroom, one made possible through Microsoft Teams.

to what is happening in the larger world. And especially because it is talking about curated projects that in turn respond to larger issues in the world. Like it can be about precarity or activism” (Nibbelink, unpublished interview).

The tone of this response almost amused, gave me the sense that it was impossible to delimit something even as structured as a university course within the academic walls. What she keeps iterating is the is that the university is a space to reflect on daily social life. It is a way to step back, albeit momentarily, to prevent risking reflex reactions to social movements that transform monthly, daily, hourly and even in the span of one breath – “...to understand the now, you also need some context. So of course, what is happening in the classroom is also a product of people who are in there, their subjective and collective politics but what is [should be] happening in the classroom is also about taking some time to reflect on thing” (Nibbelink, unpublished interview). To be able to do so, Nibbelink offered the idea of a thorough third object. She described the thorough third object as a material object that binds the dispersed classroom together, various histories, contexts, logics and arguments, and academic theory and social movements.

Referring to Jacques Rancière, the French philosopher famously known for *The Emancipated Spectator* (2008), Nibbelink borrows the lesson of the third object as “...a plea for the equality of intelligence of both the teacher as well as the students” (Nibbelink, unpublished interview). The third object, by her interpretation of Rancière’s theory, is an object constructed out of relational knowledges. Anything can be the third object, if it is the same material object for everyone convening to analyze the object. This object that holds together, read by each student and in this case Nibbelink too, is then examined, producing a collective understanding of it. But what is particular about this process (rather than a didactic approach where Nibbelink would perhaps introduce the object and then go on to share a history – a format more commonly known as a lecture), is that, through this collectively formed description, opinion, perspective, “...they [teacher and students] will both learn something from that book, in relation to what they already know” (Nibbelink, unpublished interview).

According to her, the reading material for the course are an example of a thorough third object, but also the co-produced object. Even though Nibbelink would have more history with the text or those related to it, within this gathering – one different from the previous ones – her knowledge will also grow in relation to what she already knew. Relational not just to prior knowledge she had, but also to the prior and forming knowledges of the other interlocuters. Similarly, the students are reading a material which is consistent for everyone, yet through their reading and discussion, not only have they transformed, but so has the material being read.

There are some elements that resemble McKenzie's notion of the event. We have already seen that the class was conceived keeping in mind a socially efficacious dialogue. It is also clear that the technology adopted was due to its effectiveness in supporting classroom dynamics. Microsoft Teams has proven to be an effective tool that surpasses Zoom's facilities that prioritizes business meetings. This already shows that cultural and technological performances are entangled and geared towards the production of EOC. But what is the event that is being produced?

Seated between academic and practice based thinking, and historical and contemporary discourse, the liminoid event is not simply the assembly of students on Microsoft Teams. Although it would be straightforward way to delineate the event the moment the students are in one of the Teams Rooms. The event is not simply the entire course from the day it began to the last time students logged out. Although, this holds a stronger resonance with McKenzie's notion of an event as something that is clearly separate from life outside the event. Additionally, this doesn't support the fact that McKenzie's event, although separated from the rest of life, is efficacious because it has a social envelope around it. Instead of assuming the entire course as the event, I argue is that the event in the case of *Ecologies of Curation* occurs each time a one of the reading materials was being analyzed in the course. I argue that the nature of the event in this case is—"... the experience as made up of material to be interpreted, to be reflected upon, to be engaged in—emotionally, mentally, and perhaps even physically" (McKenzie 2001, 49). To achieve this, Nibbelink had created a format where each session would be curated and facilitated by a different group of students. This meant that the designated group would meet prior to the session, select texts, analyze it themselves, curate the discourse they hoped to have by a way of games/ surveys/ immersion or writing. The group would usually send out an email a day before the session stating certain specific tasks that they had to do, material they had to bring to class, and perhaps certain films to watch. This was enclosed in 'Preparation'. The session would then commence with the designated group facilitating the discussion. Each session the group of students facilitating would take up the role of the facilitator, while the rest of the students would attend class as per usual. The affair was indiscernibly different yet by enacting different roles automatically defamiliarized the daily routine of a classroom and produced what McKenzie calls, a "sense of occasion" (ibid.).

Produced through the technology the experience of reading the material together is what I claim to be the event. The event was produced through the thorough third object. An object that sits between being what it was, what it is becoming and what it could be. It sits between being read in the middle of the day in a park and being re-read in the classroom. Constantly subjected to change and at the same time transforming the students and teacher as

they read it. Moreover, the engagement is not just cerebral. The students are going through something beyond an intellectual conversation. They are connecting to experiences they have had as curators or artists, they are agreeing, disagreeing, interpreting, and even questioning, which I would argue is also an emotional investment. Physically, the document albeit situated as copies on different screens/ printed documents, is being annotated, notated, scribbled on, highlighted, and with the earlier example of the production of the shared document, some of the texts (bits of it), even get remixed into knowledge that is contingent to the independent curiosities within that event. Satisfying these conditions of the event, what I argue is that the texts and the occasion around is event that resonates with McKenzie's theory. But what is decolonial about this event?

For a material third object, to not only be the event, hold the event together but also be the object around which the event gets formed, allows me to reconfigure McKenzie's notion of the event as one made up of smaller happenings. Each of these occasions, is far more liminoid than the dispersed classroom itself. This I believe is due to the process of discourse that bleeds out of the theoretical texts into lived realities of the past, present, and future. While Nibbelink states that there is a risk in completely giving into everyday life, she also acknowledges that the texts she recommends cannot be disconnected from social realities. This goes back to her notion of curation – specifically ecologies of curation – itself – “For me, ecology is very much about the awareness of connections and relations. And curating is about creating meaningful contexts around works, or by bringing certain works into meaningful relation with one another. So it is about setting up relations” (Nibbelink, unpublished interview).

Setting up connections is not only critical to curatorial praxis, but it is also discussed by Mignolo and Walsh as way to truly do decolonial work. As such, it is through connections, relations between connections and sustaining those connections that they believe that decolonial knowledge differs from the homogeneity of universal knowledge. If relationality is what Mignolo and Walsh consider as one of the ways to produce decolonial knowledge, there must be something to say about those who create these relationalities, or the space for them to exist, or the methods through which situated knowledges can emerge. The thorough third object according to me is an exemplary example of a decolonial production. It not only created an event, this occurrence of reading each time we as students gathered, but it did so by creating space for each of us to produce collective and relative knowledge at the same time.

Reflection in Icons

In both the projects described until now, it is visible that the value of technological performance was not harnessed to create a subversion of the traditional counterparts. Instead,

the performance is gauged specifically for the ability of the digital technologies to recreate an online rendition of its physical counterparts. In *Ecologies of Curation* more than *Zero Footprint*, we also see value in technological performance enabling the construction of a different kind of connections, those that would be difficult to create without the affordance of digital networks. Since the audience in both the projects are experiencing a shift from physical to online modes of learning, it was critical that technology performed to make this transition smooth. To not overwhelm, confuse or disorient the students/ audience. But *The Kashmir Syllabus* had no physical counterpart it needed to recreate. All it wanted to do was create in the face of oppression.

As mentioned earlier, the syllabus is an open-source document that was constructed through contributions of a Kashmiri diaspora and otherwise. While open-source projects may sound relatively unimpressive to a student in the 21st century, I argue that it is the simple ambition in the face of political crises that pushes the value of technology in *The Kashmir Syllabus* beyond the value seen in the first two projects. By constructing and sharing the syllabus online, the team behind *The Kashmir Syllabus* managed to make accessible, pieces of knowledge that had been invisible in the dominant discourse around Kashmir. The reach of the internet allowed them to collect information outside of university curriculums or those impressed upon society for political agendas and educate the website audience about Kashmir in different ways. They also managed to catalyze an intellectual movement in an increasingly political one, where it was easy to sway masses with sheer emotion. Moreover, the individuals or groups accessing it didn't require high levels of digital literacy, making the syllabus easily accessible. Lastly, and according to me the most valuable aspect of the production process, *The Kashmir Syllabus* anchored itself to a political movement. Framing the knowledge to a topic that was rife not just with political forces but also to the geographical, socio-cultural and the mundane, the project serves as a great companion to the notion of *events* in McKenzie's text. It is this connection between *The Kashmir Syllabus* and the historical and ongoing political climate of Kashmir that makes it a "...specific yet extremely complex event" (McKenzie 2001, 24).

Typically, an event has a demarcation, with a start and end date as seen in *Zero Footprint*. As it is more commonly known and phrased, a political event of the past is not necessarily one happening but a conjunction of myriad events that all contribute to the overarching phenomenon. But what is to be said about an event that goes not only spills physical boundaries but has a continuity which makes it difficult to pin down? I would say, such an event is only a speculation. It doesn't yet exist in entirety. What is visible is that the syllabus very transparently sits within a specific social envelope. Not only in its conception, but even the production process was positioned right smack in the middle of the political situation of Kashmir. The literature collected and curated was contingent to the ongoing communication

lockdown but was also slowly growing into the study of a region that is much more than the identity it holds for over 70 decades.

The Kashmir Syllabus thus offers itself as an *icon*, that stretched across space and time. In other words, since everyone accessing the syllabus did not share the experience of entering and exiting, The Kashmir Syllabus, as an event did not have a formal statement establishing when the gates open and close. I can view, download, and apply it for educational purposes even today. Thus, The Kashmir Syllabus, was produced as an icon of resistance. By employing digital technology to resist the communication lockdown installed by Indian governmental institutions and harnessing its networked potential. Both, to produce the project and present it. In this manner, the value of TKS goes beyond the event itself. By allowing the co-production of a perennial, generative and decolonial document, it also becomes a way to examine the communities that support the decisions made by the then government of India.

TKS was conceived to create new knowledges, those that foregrounded voices of Kashmiris and expanded disciplinary boundaries. In doing so though, other than offering space for marginalized voices, it also offered different ways to perceive the situation. In other words, the intention was not only to make space but to also show the contours of a discourse that was otherwise framed within the binaries of left- and right-wing politics. In doing so, the project fits the bill of McKenzie's event for many reasons. It is liminoid in nature, in that it sits between social movements and scholarly analysis. But also, that it itself is liminal, growing each time someone accessing or shares it, and generating, each time someone adds to it. Secondly, it is clearly separated from the rest of life, but the borderland between political and scholarship is so merged that, the social envelope becomes a catalyst rather than a backdrop to the happenings of the event. Which is what makes it difficult to delineate the event in the case of TKS. Thirdly, it can also be said that the material, that is the syllabus, is the physical (in this case virtual), document that is the thorough third as seen in EOC's production. Allowing the audience to transform it while it gets transformed. But beyond all this, I return to McKenzie's description of the event as an "icon" of all the processes that constitute it.

Even though the syllabus offers the complex possibility of "...self-reflexion and experimentation" (McKenzie, 49), the transformations are not explicitly visible in the syllabus itself. Except for the addition of new texts. So, while a material enthusiast could jump with ecstasy if given the chance to analyse the politics of syllabus development, for the purposes of this thesis, I argue that TKS can be of value, if it is understood as an icon. What this allows, is to recognise that the event doesn't hold every sub-event, movement, process, possibility and failures, perspectives, and discourses. Instead, it stands as a rhetoric to a time when governmental times refused to provide Kashmir with the promise India had made to her in 1947. The syllabus demonstrates a transformation in gestures of solidarity, with a turn to education. Neither claiming to be the only icon of the processes, nor claiming to have corrective measures

incorporated in its work, TKS is one of the many icons that explain the ongoing processes that have been and will be running the political climate between India and Kashmir.

To show an additional value to TKS as an icon, I would like to refer to a critique of TKS. On 26th May, 2020, an Indian online newspaper, The Print issued an article that claimed that the Stand With Kashmir organisation, the very same one that produced TKS, was not necessarily as altruistic as it claimed to be. Behind the performed transparency and openness, writer Martha Lee states that "...the organisation's actual intentions look far more sinister"²⁴. With an increasing influence in the US, the organization is said to have ties with various extremist Islamic organizations. This at best complicates the humanitarian intentions and political potential of TKS and at worst results in the pulling down of the syllabus for being linked to some members who are allegedly a part of terrorist groups. Even if we are to assume that some claims made in the article stand true, that TKS is not necessarily as "inclusive" and "humanitarian". Even if we are to agree that under the jargon of "left-leaning language of today's social scientists" are propagating "unabashed extremism", I observe that now more than before, TKS as an icon expresses the complicatedness of the above situation. An icon, once created, is partially subject to material change (withering, loss, or destruction). But once constructed, the ideas that feed it and feed off it, are, if nothing demonstrating the intricacy of events.

Unlike ZFP and EOC which sit relatively safe environments, where what comes out of it and what goes into it is somewhat regulated, TKS is laying bare, out in the sea, getting impressed upon by rocks, water, travelers, and birds. It sits there, collecting not only new material within, but generating new ideologies and material outside. Like a myth that is interpreted in so many ways that the interpretations become the myth and not a spawn of it. While I am unsure as to how true the accusations are, the reason I bring it up is not to suggest it as a fallacy, but rather look at TKS as a politically complicated icon, a truly complex yet specific event. Not only demonstrating that social envelopes are deeply integrated in events and vice-versa but also that, an event could still hold value, even if the social envelope it sits in is heterogenous and even problematic to an extent.

With this I conclude that the conception and production of how curiosities could be performed and are allowed to perform, as observed in Zero Footprint, Ecologies of Curation, and The Kashmir Syllabus are decolonial for following three specific elements of the event. 1) It is invariably separated from the rest of life, yet without escaping the social envelope it inhabits providing the production of knowledge a break from the ongoing knowledge

²⁴ Read more: <https://theprint.in/opinion/stand-with-kashmir-not-innocent-supports-violent-islamists-terrorists/429425/>
<https://foreignpolicynews.org/2019/12/13/does-stand-with-kashmir-really-stand-with-kashmir/>

productionn, 2) It creates a sense of occasion – rather than an absolute body of knowledge – of ritualistic entering, engaging, and reflecting over the syllabus provided, and 3) Feeding the social efficacy that is the core of the project.

Why I consider this decolonial, is specifically because the three events truly honour intellectual, cultural, and emotional differences, by attempting to study topics through those differences rather than reconcile them. In that, the learning experience is not defined by a standardised social contract between institutions and society, nor does it present a homogenous and concrete body of knowledge about the topic. In fact, in adhering to performance – of culture and technology–to produce different kind of knowledges, the alternative visions of the educational projects, even goes so far as to raise concerns about its allegiance. A provocation that could easily destroy the organization and the labour behind constructing the syllabus. Moreover, it could insidiously seep into arguments that stand against Kashmir by example of one maligned gesture. Despite such risks, the decoloniality of the projects display fierce loyalty to the in-betweenness that is given space to exist through discourse.

Chapter 5: Mediating Knowledge

How was the production of said knowledge, managed by foregrounding practices curiosity? What strategies were deployed to manage projects so that they fell in line with the concepts that birthed them and could be effective for the contemporary conditions? How is the management style complying with the conception and feeding the decolonial intentions of the project? What is the underlying yet overlapping strategy found in the three projects?

Curious Encounter as a Management Strategy

The interpretation and analysis done until now leave one key loose end: how the decolonial conception and production of the projects were managed. In that, how was such an event facilitated? What is the role of the teacher/ curator in such a self-directed event? What gestures do they enact and what strategies do they employ to support the imaginaries and productions of educational praxis that sits outside traditional forms of education? And how does this finally render the three projects decolonial? My hunch is that the management style that allowed for decolonial knowledge to be produced did not incorporate the Taylorim style of “...top-down management...” that are perceived as “...controlling, conformist, and monolithic” (McKenzie 2001, 6). Or atleast attempted to attune themselves to less hierarchical ways of operating and organising.

Responding to this conjecture of mine, Dunnewind says that he saw IMPAKT and by consequence Zero Footprint Festival as a mediator – “between people with very specific knowledge because they are an academic or researcher or an author, or people that have audio syncretic visions, or, as artists that have the skills to visualize in the abstract, poetic conceptual way certain issues” (Dunnewind, unpublished interview). In other words, IMPAKT and the curatorial team provides space to get introduced to alternative views and ways (around a relatively general theme) via exchange. To be able to convey information that is so inclusive, first and foremost, there must have been a shift in the organisation of the festival team – both at a curatorial and technical level.

Curatorially, Dunnewind compared the festivals organisational operation to the ‘Russian Doll principle’, Dunnewind expresses that ZFP’s aim was to introduce alternative perspectives but in its truest manner, without presenting a grand narrative. As such, no perspective would stand without an alternative view. In the manner of the Russian doll, upon examination, no perspective stood outside the complexity that it inhabited and that inhabited it. This intention has always allowed IMPAKT’s programs to challenge not only dominant perspectives found in popular media but also counter the counter-institutional knowledge, leaving little room for critiques of bias. At the same time presenting alternative views from non-western philosophies, Dunnewind also believes in keeping in mind certain pieces of knowledge of the West that can and should be considered, even if only for the partial study of phenomena.

I have already discussed in chapter 3 (page 42), how the conscious inculcation of cultural performance, aided by alternative curatorial practice, allowed for decolonial conceptualisations. In chapter 4 (page 52), I develop the argument further by observing the importance of the technical side of the event. I argue that since digital technology was equally critical to the making of the event, the decision making process would and should involve the technical team as much as it does the curatorial team. If the organisation of the team, curatorially and technically, is rearranged in the above said manner, I believe that the organisational structure of the festival resembles what McKenzie terms ‘...ars poetica of organizational practice’ (McKenzie 2001, 7). With the alteration of the internal structure, deeming no one person with absolute authority, the method of managing the production of knowledge could subsequently align with mediation strategies as reflected upon by Dunnewind.

Mediating, an action that Dunnewind ascribes to IMPAKT’s role is a way to be the third in a two or multiparty conversation. The mediator is considered neutral, a person or coalition that sits to intervene without bringing in their own prejudices or biases. I must bring to the front here that this is not entirely true in the case of IMPAKT. In chapter 3 (page 42) I pointed out how the curatorial phase of this festival experienced different views, some of which included the different ways in which each curator perceived the climate crisis. This already shows that at some level, the curators did begin the idea with certain preferences, opening it up to further input thereafter.



Figure 4: Image by IMPAKT for the programme: Global Warming Yoga Studio

While this may be true and should be remembered well when considering their position as a mediator, it still doesn’t overtake the gestures that were enacted by the curators while

finalizing or executing the festival. To risk offending the gatekeepers of knowledge, the team, for example, included atrociously interdisciplinary artworks such as Global Warming Yoga Studio – A Yoga Class, an immersive exhibition (Fig. 4) that makes the participant sweat due to 200+heatlamps forming the words ‘GLOBAL WARMING’, and a yoga teacher, narrating the decay and death Earth is experiencing. All rolled in one, this programme is a prime example of a case where challenging perspectives clash, not just in theory, but also in practice.

I couldn’t believe the kind of programme I was in charge of. On one hand, I was awestruck at the transcendence. This was for me, my history, present and future, wrapped in one big yoga studio. But I couldn’t help wonder about the damn lights. Why were there so many lights when we were curating around environmental crisis and what was the point of 15 minutes of hot yoga and what were the audience, who came for the hotness of yoga, over yoga itself (Fig. 5), what were they supposed to get out of it. But more than that, I couldn’t recognize myself in the yoga teacher. The harshness dissuaded me. Yet, I was in awe. It must’ve been something I would never be able to completely reconcile (Kumar, documented notes)

Placing a very embodied, and generally what is considered a relaxing experience of yoga is placed right opposite the red flared heat lamps that almost scream ‘GLOBAL WARMING’ every time the participant looks up. This is softly merged by the yoga teacher narrating the decay, almost like a lullaby. Yet, upon closer attention, the words don’t provide the most soothing compliment to a yoga class. It is a bittersweet realisation that in the moment of relaxing your body, you’re being reminded of the increasing disconnection with Global Warming – “inhale, and bring your attention to all the particulate matter landing on your alveoles...exhale and let go of your cognitive dissonance”(impakt, n.l). This performance – installation was designed by Pinar Yoldas, an infradisciplinary artist/ designer/ researcher who, in her work, combines the various disciplines to address the post-human crisis through ecological and feminist perspectives. This complicated mix of things already showcases a strong resistance on IMPAKT’s part to not constrict individuals and the work they do and the projects that come out of it. In refusing populist notions and alternative notions, what is then left of IMPAKT’s contribution to the discourse?

Dunnewind expresses that the intention behind the curatorial choices had less to do with radical innovativeness and more to do with easing the audience into an experience. According to me though, it is the transformation of the role of IMPAKT (the curatorial and technical team), from curators to mediators, that makes the management of knowledge production in this project innovative. In that, Dunnewind and his team offered intense, complex, and perhaps irreconcilable perspectives emerging from unallied theoretical and practical fields, which allowed the audience to consider Global Warming for the complicated reality that it is. So, while ZFP is by no means ushering in a new kind of engagement with technology, it is potentially worth examining precisely because of its modest technological ambitions afforded. It afforded the mediation of knowledge to construct a complex discourse. I believe that such approaches – by and due to neo-liberal ideologies – has been forsaken for innovative technology

or binary oppositions, that seek radicality by distancing themselves from their physical predecessors rather than working with them.

If mediating pieces of knowledge, questions, perspectives, and opinions becomes the sole focus of the curators, if Zero Footprint doesn't claim curatorial neutrality at any moment, then perhaps we can understand mediation as a strategy to bring two or more differing perspectives together without needing for the third party to be entirely void of their own opinions. When I consider the other parts that arbitrate not only the intersections of diverse disciplines, ideologies, and discourse, but also individual curiosities that are affected by different socio-cultural contexts, IMPAKT's role seems clear. What I mainly see – what aligns with the conceptualisation and production of the festival – is strategy that produces and transmits interdisciplinary discourse rather than reproduce homogeneous ones. Moreover, the mediation strategy also allows the curator to regulate the stresses that emerge in interdisciplinary discourse.

For example, In one of their programmes Conditional Values, IMPAKT was alerted of the possibility of some trolling. Pinar Yoldas, one of the panelists, who had been previously subjected to violent threats due to her stance on Global Warming, required IMPAKT to act as bouncers if needed. Although there was no threat perceived, the entire team was asked to keep an eye out for the trolls that could enter the live discussion that was happening across an excel sheet. The audience isn't left – like a bird out of the nest – to fend for themselves in the virtual portal after attending such complex programmes. Instead, through Q&A's, rooftop bar spaces, and continuing discourse through emails, the audience is allowed to express any confusion, disagreement, surprise or even offense experienced through the programmes. Which subsequently feeds the discourse in the Q&A of the programme.

IMPAKT's mediation strategy is less compliant with how traditional curators seek to reconcile knowledge systems, which in its own way had seen the sun set on its time. With the contemporary audience always connected, sourcing and relaying information, creating their own interpretations, and even sharing their own stories, the role of the curator could no more feed the demand that the audience had, if their only value was collecting and presenting curious knowledges. The contemporary curator, much like a contemporary educator requires to negotiate with the fact that their audience isn't coming to them for exotic knowledges alone. That their role now is more of someone who aids the audience to navigate the different knowledge systems that exist. Such a transformation means that the curator must first place knowledges of different kinds – new and old, Western and Non-Western, Modern and Indigenous and other binaries that refuse to be rallied – together. And then, provide space and

facilitate or guide the discourse²⁵ that emerges at the point of encounter. I believe that the strategy behind taking up the role of the mediator was to mediate the discourse by staging encounters.

To understand this strategy, I finally turn to Ingold's consideration of encounters. According to him, knowing something or knowing about something only happens by way of doing. It is his claim that knowledge is an ongoing production of ongoing processes, never to be naively assumed as an absolute body. If Ingold perceives knowledge acquisition only through a processual becoming, doing, and practising, then the method of managing different pieces of knowledge through mediation seems like a valuable strategy to make this possible. This process makes space for nuanced and complicated knowledges to be formed. It seems to be a gesture that recognises the need to create knowledges by doing and encountering other doings, questions, or curiosity – quite literally in the case of Global Warming Yoga. Knowledge, according to Ingold "...is a matter not of testing conjectures in arenas of practice, but of enrolling practical activity in the very process of following a train of thought. It is to do our thinking in the open, out-of-doors (Ingold 2011, 15).

By staging the encounter, and mediating the experience of the encounter itself, Zero Footprint makes space for curiosity. This is what makes the festival truly decolonial. The curators don't attempt to dictate what questions must be asked, they don't formulate the answer or the entire experience prior to the experience itself. They lay the ground where the audience can, by practice, encounter curiosity different from theirs and engage in the process of knowledge production. While I argue that the encounter is the alternative strategy practiced in the management of Zero Footprint, I would say that the kind of encounter is different from that of the other two projects. The intention here is to shock, or perhaps even make the audience feel discomfort, through which they realise the differential landscape of curiosity that produces a heterogeneous body of knowledge. A kind of encounter that reflects very aptly the complicated terrain of knowledge related to the climate crisis.

This strategy, is what I term as the Curious Encounter, proposed through the combined insights and theories of McKenzie and Ingold. Upon completion of the project analysis via the theories of the two authors, it became evident that the theories that they had presented as observations and propositions, were being deployed as a strategy. While this strategy may show traces in other fields, Curious Encounter according to me is a particular approach visible in

²⁵ Visible since the linguistic turn, discourse became central to curatorial praxis to increase transparency and engagement of the audience. This transformation, which Smith attributes to contemporary curatorial praxis is what O'Neill and Wilson term 'The Educational Turn'. It was the evidence of the intersection of educational and curatorial formats in Zero Footprint, that made me want to analyze it in the first place.

contemporary educational praxis, which has emerged both due to the specific technological, social, and ecological conditions contemporary education is situated in and the recognition of knowledge production through processual practices. To further understand Curious Encounter as a strategy, I turn to examine the management styles in *Ecologies of Curation* and *The Kashmir Syllabus*.

Softness of the Curious Encounters

“...it's doing its work [...] in its strangeness” (Nibbelink, unpublished interview)

Ingold urges a return to material exchanges considering the growing discourse around materiality. He elucidates how in an encounter, two elements first and foremost, interact materially and then also undergo affective transformations based on relational histories of the objects and the observer. Referring to Ingold's notion that affective and perceptive transformations occur only as a following process of material entanglements, I would like to return to the example shared in the case of *Ecologies of Curation* in the previous chapter. The document (articulated as the thorough third object), and my own response forming in relation to the text of a fellow classmate, displays how curious encounter is a strategy in Nibbelink's management style. At the point of encounter, I was stimulated to write, delete, re-write and edit the text at the same time as I was following the movement of construction of my classmates note.

Initially my perception of a document was a blank digital sheet where my fellow classmates and I would add notes to construct a repository at most. While it may or may not have been noticed by them, my re-writes were occurring as I made sense of what was being said *to me*, just on account of being present at the same site. The production of knowledge as such, was one borne out of the encounter with the thoughts of another student, which could also be responding to mine or another text in the document. While this experience demonstrates and supports my argument that the management of educational praxis is built on strategies of curious encounters, the following reflection by Nibbelink articulates the idea of encounters in a way that suggests that the kind of curious encounter in *Ecologies of Curation* is based on softer encounters, as opposed to the more shocking encounters visible in *Zero Footprint*.

When asked about the nature of such encounters and whether the course had consciously intended for its occurrence, Nibbelink mentions that encounters have been a part of her since her experience with theatre. Briefly touching upon the notion of encounters in her book *Nomadic Theatre* (2015), Nibbelink recounts how her examination of site-specific performances through the “staging strategy” of an encounter (Nibbelink 2015, 36) is different

from how she views encounters in educational spaces. Her story begins by quoting Kafka in Deleuze's *Nomadic Thought* – "It's impossible to understand how they made it all the way to the capital, which is nonetheless quite far from the frontier. But there they are, and every morning seems to increase their number [...] Impossible to converse with them. They don't know our language [...] Even their horses are meat-eaters!" (Kafka in Deleuze 2004, 256). Referring to the same quote to open the first chapter in her own book, she explains how the sudden and unexpected manner of such an encounter as expressed by Kafka, defines the kind of encounters she experienced in a particular performance of *No Man's Land* (2008-2014), created by Dutch director and scenographer Dries Verhoeven.

According to her, *No Man's Land* stages encounters not only between the performer and the audience, but by doing it in a public space, also between the "stage and everyday life". Such encounters embody the strangeness, otherness and defamiliarity that she believes is also found in Kafka's quote. It is an experience that is not in accordance with the daily humdrum and routine. The performance disrupts the normative flow and forces regular commuters to become spectators. Moreover, it also requires the spectators who have paid for the performance to allow themselves to be encounters by the unsuspecting commuters as performers themselves. Thereby, "deterritorialising" the urban environment (Nibbelink 2015, 37). But in Nibbelink's opinion, an encounter doesn't only emerge as a suddenness, it could also be experienced as a smooth experience without necessarily feeling deterritorialised – "...something passes between two heterogeneous movements – a force, a flow of intensity – and produces a mutual becoming" (Nibbelink, 38). Although, it must be noted that the heterogeneous movements do not become each other. Instead, each movement combines with the other to transform itself in relation to what it used to be.

It is with this understanding of encounters, that Nibbelink imagined the curious encounter. It was encounters of a "harmonious" nature that she choreographs – "I am not one to work with conflict or confrontation" (Nibbelink, unpublished interview). Setting aside her own experience of encounters in theatre and dramaturgy, which foreground sudden encounters as a way to disrupt the normal flow of daily life, Nibbelink imagines encounters in educational praxis through dialoguing. A dialogue between two bodies, ideologies and practices. She urged us, as students, to make the common text our own, and then merge it, as organically as possible, with the other students. Upon asking if dialogues were the only format which enabled such encounters, she explains that it isn't just dialoguing that is critical, but more so the aesthetic of it.

Describing it as an exchange that transforms both or all the elements involved, both materially and affectively, Nibbelink's methods suggest a loyalty towards processual thinking

and doing. This is clearly visible in the above-mentioned exercise and in the method of management of Zero Footprint. Both the events introduced perspectives that may or may not have interacted before, students and audience that may or may not have encountered each other. But by giving them space to speak, both literally and figuratively, bodily or textually, the notion of transformation through encounters is made possible through their mediation. This brings me to the final project – The Kashmir Syllabus. Since I couldn't interview any of the organizers to confirm if this was a conscious method in their management style, the next section is based on my personal experiences.

Decoloniality of the Curious Encounter

“To widen disciplinary approaches to studying Kashmir [...] To suggest paths for decolonial [and] transnational [...] movements for freedom and emancipation, through a close study of the region” (standwithkashmir, “The Kashmir Syllabus”)

The Kashmir Syllabus aspires to approach the study of the region of Kashmir through decolonial lens. The only project out of the three case studies that explicitly mentions a decolonial approach to their work, The Kashmir Syllabus has paved the way for me to interpret the management of knowledge production visible in the other two projects working as decolonial work. The ‘Syllabus Goals’ categorically state that they hope to produce a decolonial body of knowledge through two methods – expanding the study by transcending interdisciplinary boundaries and by foregrounding voices of Kashmiri's that have otherwise been given second rate positions in the telling of their own stories. These steps have made the syllabus a site where I experienced surprising encounters with bits of knowledge that otherwise escaped my knowledge radar. Not in a way of unnerving me from learning about Kashmir, but in fact checking the assumptions I had to then be able to unlearn some ideas and reconfigure the others. Despite being an ally in the current moment, it made me recognize the stagnancy in my own knowledge about Kashmir. But instead of crippling me from the desire to learn, it managed to motivate my curiosity. This was done in two ways mainly.

The syllabus is a mix of poetry, prose, academic literature/ scholarly articles and journalistic essays. This pushed me to encounter Kashmir in multiple ways. Without confining the knowledge to plainly academic or abstract systems, I could choose and pave my own way of learning about Kashmir, always being reminded that Kashmir was not an object to be studied from a singular lens but a constantly evolving identity that could be understood academically,

poetically, politically, and even through the mundane. This mellowed the encounters I had. It invited me to be curious in both the ways mentioned in chapter 1 – curiosity to create a body of knowledge and curiosity to create new ways of knowing.

If according to Ingold knowledges are processual, then The Kashmir Syllabus by giving up autonomy over the information absorbed and allowing curiosity to operate along both its functions – of production through curious constructions and production through curious resistance – rejects the engineering of absolute knowledges. This experience supports my argument that the encounters strategized were satisfying their decolonial intentions. Those encounters have been deliberately deployed, to enable transformation, both scholarly and social.

The Kashmir Syllabus not only constructs the syllabus collaboratively, but also leaves the syllabus open to interpretation, subject to the contingencies in each application. In each case the organizational structure is geared towards transformation, not only of the topics at hand but also of the organizational hierarchy itself, what McKenzie believes expresses ‘ars poetica’. McKenzie observes that such transformations within the institutional structures, but at this point, we are seeing how the reconfiguring of hierarchies is also changing the relation between the organizers and the people for whom the event is being organized. I argue that this key transformation should be attributed to focus on encounters – a focus on how different pursuits of knowledge is brought together.

My argument for a focus on encounters results in the proposal of curious encounter as an analytical tool to evaluate contemporary educational praxis on two levels 1) to be able to evaluate the encounter as strategy towards the production of alternative bodies of knowledge or decolonial knowledge and 2) to evaluate the kind of encounter that affects the kind of knowledge produced – constructive vs resistive knowledge. This lies in the observation that each project was imagined only partially with the hope that they would be fully formed only via the encounters. At no point do the words “directed”, “designed”, “formatted”, “decided”, or “controlled” get used. And if at all it has been by me, it is solely for the purposes of the emphasis of the action of the organizer rather than a suggestion of their intent. Throughout my experience of The Kashmir Syllabus, study of the materials and recording of the interviews what became clear is that the projects were realized as an acknowledgement that individuals come from their own spaces of curiosity. The task that remains then is to bring them together, without elevating

one curiosity over another if possible. Leading to the formation knowledge that emerges at and because of the encounter.

If this is the aim that underscores the three educational projects, the curious encounter as an analytical tool could help evaluate the decoloniality of educational praxis by focusing on how they are imagined, produced, and managed? The need to address all three questions comes from the recognition that decolonial work doesn't contain itself to imaginations, productions, or management styles separately. That to move away from colonial ways of thinking and doing, analysis of projects through the lens of the curious encounter must occur at each phase of the project. This became critical to the thesis, specifically but not only because of, Tuck and Yang's caution of the domestication of decolonial work – "inclusion is a form of enclosure, dangerous in how it domesticates decolonization" (Tuck and Yang 2012, 3).

What decolonial work needs and wants isn't just a tokenized gesture that performs decoloniality but requires a radical reconfiguration of how the thought manifests and how it is further managed on site. In other words, decolonial thought needs to go hand in hand with decolonial action. What emerges with this focus on encounters is how the educational projects examined in this thesis manage to do the work at every level. How encounters conceived the initial idea, how it enabled alternative ways of producing in times of crisis and how it finally enabled the construction of decolonial bodies of knowledge

This according to me is a valuable aspect of the educational projects analyzed in this thesis. To resist the neo-liberal call for decolonization. Even though The Kashmir Syllabus mentions it once in their 'Goals', the word doesn't resurface in the syllabus unless mentioned in a submission by another author. To add to this, the conceptions and methods haven't relied on how other institutions have performed decoloniality. For example, often, doing decolonization get associated to increasing diversity – of authors in the syllabus, of students and staff in the university, of writing styles and of policies that consider non-western ways of operating. A powerful strategy, one that decentralizes Europe and Western thought in the larger paradigm of knowledge production and transmission. This strategy recognizes the white-ness of curriculums, those favoring canonical and traditional texts, those opting to bring in literature from POC only as a response to the canonical texts, those that gatekeep concepts and theories to maintain their historical significance without recognizing how it filters out not only theories and ideas but whole cultures and philosophical which affectively continue to generate knowledge of a kind. While diversifying is clearly a required action, much to the chagrin of decolonial work, what escapes this strategy, is the insidiousness of colonial thinking and practice.

Even though The Kashmir Syllabus is the most obviously non-traditional educational projects, the other two projects can, in their own ways subvert the hierarchy between the knowledge producers and student/ audience. Refusing to give in to absolute knowledge, acknowledging the knowledge systems of those attending the event, and making space for the different systems to interact shows how the three projects managed to transform the experience not just in thought but also quite intensely in the working of the organization, and in the kind of knowledge produced. The role of the curators and educator was clearly disturbed. Dunnewind and his team and Nibbelink, by choosing to continue educating in the online space, had given in to the possible contingencies that would arise had the technology failed them, or had the students/ audience refused to partake in engaging. The success of the projects was as dependent of the involvement of the students/ audience. An interdependency clearly foreseen by the organizers of the respective projects.

Closing Words

By undertaking this research, I was interested in understanding the value of practices of curiosity in contemporary educational praxis and how (if) it contributed to decolonial work. For this purpose, I was interested in educational projects that continued their work in times of constraint – environmental or political. I asked how and why they find different ways to think and produce the learning experience, what new ways of thinking about knowledge were being constructed, why knowledge and its production were moving away from grand narratives and what value did such transformations have. Rosalba Icaza and Rolando Vázquez ask another question that developed my field of research. Instead of examining educational praxis in classrooms alone, I expanded the inquiry to projects of many kinds, as long as they demonstrated intentionality of education, learning, and thereby curiosity. I was convinced to do so after a reading of their text. It goes as such –

In our view, the movements to decolonise the university are fighting the ‘*arrogant ignorance*’ that is produced by a system of knowledge that is Eurocentric, heteronormative and anthropocentric in kind. We call it an ‘*arrogant ignorance*’ because it is an epistemology that is at one and the same time pretending to be wide-ranging, or even claiming universal validity, while remaining oblivious to the epistemic diversity of the world. The university is being confronted with the need to overcome this ignorance and acknowledge the geopolitical and genealogical location of its knowledge practices (Icaza and Vasquez 2018, 112).

This led me to examine 3 diverse projects. Even though each project comes from their own genealogies, I found that there was a common theme: of educating the students, to make them active thinkers, creators and interrogators. Not just the employment of education as a topic of discussion, but the adoption of educational formats to stage ecological, artistic, political and cultural interventions. Critical to this centrality of discourse in the formation of knowledge production. Conversation, exchange, and dialogue were curated, choreographed and collected. Subsequently, learning was imagined beyond the linear practices that defined the traditional classrooms, galleries and museums and the syllabus. If learning or knowledge practices permeate so many different landscapes, it would be highly unjustified on my part to examine educational praxis contained to spaces it was traditionally found in. But most importantly is their attempt to make space for different curiosity to encounter each other

The impression I got from each project was that learning isn’t isolated anymore. It isn’t singular, and cannot be conducted with a fixed set of ideologies, discourse and methodologies. While students who choose universities are primarily engaging in academic research and writing, in the current digital condition they are also always in contact with other pieces of knowledge that challenges the classroom, in ideology, discourse and practice. The teacher, curator or curriculum designer – who were the traditional vanguards of knowledge practices – no longer have sole authority over what kind of knowledge reaches students. So

how do those who intend to educate, develop knowledge practices for such times? As I mentioned earlier, discourse became central to these practices.

From a curatorial perspective, O'Neill and Wilson, and Smith explain how the 'educational turn' in the arts and curatorial praxis, have reconciled the historical differences between educational spaces and curatorial spaces. Overlapping in decolonial intent and educational formats, the selection of 3 projects that have traces of each other, allowed me to examine educational praxis beyond its traditional spaces of confinement. It gave me a way to study 3 projects that differ in genealogy, practice, and politics but share common ground in the theoretical proposition that permeates each of them because of the overarching educational intentionality of the projects.

Emerging in a time of political and environmental crisis, the organisers share certain challenges against which these projects were imagined. Zero Footprint and Ecologies of Curation was working against the global lockdown. Having lost the physical spaces to Covid19, the course and festival lost a vital aspect of their character - the shared space. To recreate such spaces in an online atmosphere placed them and the audience/ students on shaky grounds. Unfamiliar with ways to engage people in the event, organizers of both the events looked for different ways to engage and provoke discourse. While both Nibbelink and Dunnewind do foresee a hybrid future (partially online) for the event, they do believe that despite the global panic, the urgency to find a new way only grew. In the case of The Kashmir Syllabus though, the digital was a way to rebel against the communication lockdown enforced by the Indian government. In a sense to be visible digitally was as much a political act as was the knowledge that was being produced.

The interviews with the organizers and mission statements/ concept notes/ course manuals revealed that the strongest way to intervene in the ongoing crisis was by education. Knowledge gained centre stage. Not knowledge that superficially promised global cognitive unity. Rather, the practices visible in the projects supported the construction of relative, situated and decolonial knowledge. Knowledge constructed in the projects were motivated to produce collective futures. The interviews revealed the importance of knowledge being inclusive, collaborative and situated. Each project resisted the urge to produce grand narratives. This is visible not only in how they speak about what they intended but also in how they produced and managed the projects. Three major elements enabled the formation of such knowledge - the elevation of cultural performance, the production of the projects as events, and the mediation on the part of the organisers to facilitate the experience of Curious Encounters.

Event of Knowledge

Through the interviews for Zero Footprint and Ecologies of Curation and the analysis of the mission statement and goal of The Kashmir Syllabus, I found that all three projects were aspiring to produce knowledge that was situated yet global. Although all three projects describe the intention in different ways, it is undeniable that the idea behind the projects aimed to dismantle traditional bodies of knowledge, whether by doing it from within institutional spaces, as is the case of Zero Footprint and Ecologies of Curation or by situating the project outside institutional spaces, as is the case of The Kashmir Syllabus. The projects are staged as an event where different pieces of knowledge meet or could meet. They are conceived as spaces for specific knowledge related either to the environment, art and curatorial praxis, or the state of Kashmir. By anchoring the event to one particular topic, they have the space to introduce it through different perspectives. With Ecologies of Curation, for example, curatorial praxis is discussed from the perspective of artists, curators, critiques and scholars, the organisers also expressed the stresses of attempting to assimilate the diverse perceptions around the topic. While no project claimed ownership over the entirety of knowledge in the field, it was clear that they were coming from intentions of wanting to examine the topic as expansively as possible.

It was the ecological, political, and technological condition which had installed itself by 2019 in the case of The Kashmir Syllabus, and 2020 in the case of the other two projects, that pushed the organizers to stage themselves as events. However, these events were meant to persist in times of crisis, with the hope that it would be able to respond responsibly to the ongoing crisis. For these purposes, education became central to the projects. The ideologies and methodologies of education were being borrowed to encourage citizens to learn more and learn differently about the world they inhabit. Even in the case of Ecologies of Curation, which is already a part of an educational institute, it was interesting to see how Nibbelink imagined a course where perspectives of curators, artists, critiques, and scholars were brought together. While these could dissuade the student from understanding curatorial praxis as a specialization, I think it introduced curation with all its complexities. While the intention was to educate so as to cultivate ways of thinking, interrogating, and analysing, each project was short-lived or even a tertiary to the main courses in the case of Ecologies of Curation. They were events of knowledge that intervened in the larger bodies of knowledge.

The lasting form of knowledge production envisioned is done in collaboration with those consuming it. By involving other curators, trans-disciplinary perspectives, audience questions and responses, student perspectives and citizen writing, the three projects were conceived to break away from the power structures that drew the borderland between disciplines, practices, institutional and non-institutional spaces. Situated between institutional methodologies and social initiatives, I thus find them to be potentially important examples of

decolonial projects that dismantle autonomy over knowledge production. In the preface of his book *Decolonising the University* (2017), Boaventura de Sousa Santos discourages against reproducing the binary of the institution and social movements. He states that despite a seemingly slower pace than constantly developing social movements, the university has in fact undergone large transformations. This relative difference in the pace of transformation should not cancel the changes within universities, nor does it imply a disconnect between an alleged outside/inside binary

I argue in this book that, for the past 40 years, the university has been undergoing a process of paradigmatic change to which both external and internal factors contribute. This is a time when everything is open-ended. The projects proposing change are so contradictory that, depending on the evolution of the conflicts they generate, the question about the future of the university may well turn into the question of whether the university has a future. In this context, if the objective is to guarantee the future of the university, resistance to certain kinds of change may not be a negative factor (Souza Santos 2017, xi).

In other words, just as social movements denote the living conditions of society, universities allow for slow, critical, and reflexive perspectives to be formed. This should not be considered antithetical to their activist counterparts. To imagine the university as a fixed object – whether as a stern installation immune to change or as one refusing to interrogate unprecedented change – only takes away the potential of the academic world as a space that was envisioned to enquire and interrogate, through precision and criticality. This nuance is visible in the production of all three projects too. While all three projects do have a certain hierarchy between the curator/audience, teacher/student, organizers/contributor, it was imperative for those producing it to involve those, for whom they were producing the project so as to maintain a balance between reflection and lived experiences. All 3 projects consciously give up control over the kind of knowledge produced by changing the how. Thus, discourse became critical to this kind of production. Discourse that thwarts silence, discourse that emerges through questions, discourse that supports individuals with different kinds of curiosity, discourse that allows curiosity to move in and out of the confinements of the institution.

It is interesting that while all three projects attempted to intervene in the homogeneity of knowledge – usually a trait of institutionalized knowledge – they managed to do so without entirely breaking away from institutional spaces or methodologies. Zero Footprint engaged in formats such as talks, panels, and workshops. Ecologies of Curation was a course where students were evaluated on the final paper they wrote. The Kashmir Syllabus did create a weekly syllabus. These qualities, found in institutional practices, and often criticised for its didactic methods, in fact compliment the social movements they were working with. It has often been spoken about by Decolonial scholars to caution against the neoliberalisation of universities and social movements alike (Tuck and Yang, 2012; bell hooks, 1994; Frantz

Fanon, 1961; Kopano Ratele, 2017; Gayatri Spivak, 2003), Recognized by Santoz as a gesture necessary to balance the topical way social movements gain momentum and traction, the university balances action with thought. With this consideration then, the pieces of knowledge produced within the university and outside it, only complement each other. An attempt to imagine them in distinct potentials, isolated from each other is not only harmful but also working against an inevitable condition. Santoz illustrates this distinction through a two-fold assertion.

The first questions the unitary definition of the university itself, which risks conflating the various forms of educational praxis that constitute myriad forms of universities that “are so diverse from country to country, and within the same country, that any generalisation may become abusive” (de Sousa 2017, xv). Secondly, by focusing and expecting from whichever form that conflates with the established university, we risk missing out on alternative and different ideologies and methodologies inhabiting spatialities different from that of the general university – “Focusing on the absent university may mislead us into ignoring the emergent university’ (ibid.). Similarly, I see the three projects to borrow ideologies, discourse and methodologies constructed in institutional spaces and visible social movement. With this, they do not fall prey to the reproduction of colonial binaries that seek to separate the institution from the social sphere. All three projects reflect theoretically what is ongoing in contemporary conditions while also thinking for the contemporary conditions in a way that the projects themselves become a place of encounter for different pieces of knowledge to interact.

Like I mentioned earlier, each of the projects aimed towards different outcomes, in that they differed in academic, environmental or political intention. But what ties them all together is the intentional reconfiguration of their own role in the projects for the purposes of education. Management of contemporary educational or knowledge practices reveals a culture in which traditionally passive audiences/ students/ citizens are allowed to be active knowledge producers by congregating with a diverse range of people. Though we see in some projects such as The Kashmir Syllabus, more extreme criticism around the intention, we see in projects like Zero Footprint and Ecologies of Curation, safer spaces for the marginalised to exist. Although I personally find The Kashmir Syllabus to be truly decolonial not only in its conception, production and management but also in the accessibility it offers itself up with, it cannot be denied that the other two projects are radically changing educational praxis within the context of their own fields. In other words, while some radically charged political, artistic and educational projects attempt to create encounters that shock, surprise and even create fear, these projects demonstrate their decolonial self through softer encounters. Encounters where

curiosity is allowed to meet other curiosity, academic and social curiosity, radical and moderate curiosity, active and passive curiosity, visual and textual curiosity. The encounters in these projects aren't necessarily sudden or immediately impactful. Yet they display the kind of softness of processual knowledge Ingold talks about– “The path, and not the place, is the primary condition of being, or rather of becoming” (Ingold 2011, 12). It is through the movement along the path, where one invariably encounters other pieces of knowledges, that we come to know. Methodologies that seek to educate, those that recognise this processuality of knowledge should show ways to deal with these encounters. How to deal with it, how to cope with it, and how to engage with it. This potential, rather than quick reactions to encounters could be the way to dismantle the homogeneity of colonial way of producing knowledge.

Curious Encounters: Decolonial Offerings

So why propose the Curious Encounter as an analytical tool? My case for the encounter isn't novel. Neither is my case for curiosity. What I propose through this thesis is the concept of Curious Encounters. I have already shown how the value of curiosity has time and again been underscored. Not just in its contemporary conditions but also historically. I do believe that the focus on encounters in contemporary educational praxis is a critical contribution of this thesis for the development of alternative ways of knowledge production. The previous chapters have moved along a path that has attempted to bring together theory, methodology and analysis of how encounter is foregrounded in contemporary educational praxis. This research began with an intuition that something different was happening in educational praxis.

Having worked in the field of media, arts and technology prior to my Master's it was evident that directive learning was slowly making space for more self-directed learning. But this didn't mean that traditional methods had to throw their hands up and make space for new ways. Neither should they. The university's ideologies and praxis have certain merits which complements the fast paced social movements that dance around it. I conducted this research to understand what exactly was happening, not only in the university but also in spaces like universities that were showing traces of intent of education. Based on my research, findings ,and interpretation, the notion of performance complimented practices of curiosity. In that, the organizers seem to recognize the doing of curiosity for which they stage a site of encounter. With that contributing to the production of decolonial language, or knowledge borne out of relationality, positionality, and encounter.

Curious Encounters is a way to imagine how decolonial knowledge practice carefully mediates encounters between curiosity. My motivations to propose this concept stem from philosophical, artistic, and educational desires. As a way to speculate that curiosity, the desire

to know, can perhaps be imagined for how it is invoked in a student, through a series of encounters. How can curiosity be harnessed as a discourse, an exchange, and dialogue causing both discomfort, and harmony? The concept is proposed as a way for facilitation in educational praxis to recognize that the individual student/ audience/ activist is only as curious to learn as is the encounter in which their ideas and practices are challenged, expanded and/or pushed.

The encounter in this concept draws from Ingold's insight that encounters are inevitable, always yet to happen, always just having happened. He also suggests that the encounter is more than a moment of brief contact, that it is a meeting of all the processes that have made it happen and all that is yet to occur (potentially). Thus, the Curious Encounter is a proposition towards the examination of the kind of encounters in contemporary educational praxis. Especially those that seek to contribute to decolonial work without the risk of diluting it to a metaphor. It is meant to examine the kind of discourse imagined, produced and how it is managed. It is meant as a tool that is loyal to dissent, ethics and discourse. Listening and dialoguing, at the same time interrogating. In other words, Curious Encounters offers itself as a concept to examine how curiosity can meet curiosity and make space for discourse that reflects the complexity of the conditions we live in.

Appendices

Table 1: The Kashmir Syllabus: Weekly Outline

Week 1 : Theorizing Occupation and Resistance
Week 2: Histories of Present
Week 3: The Militarization of Everyday Life
Week 4: Borders, Regions and Boundaries
Week 5: State of Emergency and the Institutionalisation of Imp
Week 6; Martyrdom and Memoryscapes
Week 7: Women's Organizing in Kashmir
Week 8: Mapping Sexual Violence: From Kunan Poshpora to
Week 9: Kashmiri Pandits and the Politics of Homeland
Week 10: Claiming Culture, Contesting Spaces: Stone Pelting, A
Week 11: Winning Hearts and Minds
Week 12: Climate, Infrastructure and Ecologies
Week 13: Imagining Freedoms, Seeking Solidarities
Week 14: Artful Resistance

Table 2: The Kashmir Syllabus: Course Outline

<p>#TheKashmirSyllabus compiles a list of sources for teaching and learning about Kashmir. It foregrounds voices, histories, and aspirations of people from within Kashmir, and moves beyond prior scholarship that often took security studies approaches and thereby privileged the statist perspectives of India and Pakistan. This critical body of work on Kashmir allows for a lens into the broader study of the modern state, occupation, nationalism, sovereignty, militarization, social movements, resistance, human rights, international law, and self-determination.</p> <p>This is an interdisciplinary working syllabus that includes academic scholarship as well as literature, memoirs, and journalistic pieces. It is an incomplete and evolving work in progress. The group hopes that this syllabus will be used by those within Kashmir studies and beyond, and that it will be useful to academics and non-academics. Although they have minimized repetition across the weekly modules, users are encouraged to think flexibly about how particular readings may also speak to multiple weekly themes across the syllabus.</p>	<p>Syllabus Goals: To understand how Kashmiris themselves have made sense of their political past, present and future, through work that centers Kashmiri experiences</p> <p>To foreground emerging perspectives by Kashmiri scholars, activists and artists, including women and other often marginalized voices</p> <p>To widen disciplinary approaches to studying Kashmir, beyond international relations (IR) scholarship, which largely presents Kashmir through the statist lenses of India and Pakistan</p> <p>To suggest paths for decolonial, transnational and anti-occupation solidarities among movements for freedom and emancipation, through a close study of the region</p> <p>This syllabus is certainly not an exhaustive or comprehensive list of resources or readings, but it allows for a diverse range of teachable materials for each of the weekly themes.</p>
<p>COURSE OUTLINE</p>	
<p>CRITICAL COMMENTARY POST AUGUST 5, 2019</p>	
<p><u>Exist, Don't Exist Anymore, Do They Still Exist?" Amnesty International India, September 30.</u></p>	
<p><u>Name: Ongoing Genocide." The Conversation, August 8.</u></p>	
<p><u>Stories from the Kitchen." The Conversation, August 18.</u></p>	
<p><u>Hindu Nationalist Fantasies." Foreign Policy, August 8.</u></p>	
<p><u>International Community Must Intervene on Kashmir." Open Democracy, August 14.</u></p>	
<p><u>Spirit of Resistance." The New Arab, August 20.</u></p>	
<p><u>in Kashmir Should Force the World to Act." TRT World, December 2.</u></p>	
<p><u>South Asia: A Focus on Kashmir: Testimony Given to House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee On Asia, the Pacific, and</u></p>	
<p><u>Human Rights in South Asia: A Focus on India-administered Kashmir: Testimony Given to House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and</u></p>	
<p><u>2019. "Occupied Kashmir: Poetry and Disappearance." AAWW Radio podcast with Asian American</u></p>	
<p><u>Sikh-Muslim Solidarity in Kashmir." The Wire, January 23.</u></p>	
<p><u>Partners India's Stripping of Kashmiri</u></p>	
<p><u>Gendered Violence in Kashmir." London School of Economics and Political Science blog, September 9.</u></p>	
<p><u>Raj System Will Be the New Instrument of India's Control over Kashmir." The Caravan, September 5.</u></p>	
<p><u>Nightmare of Indian Colonialism." The Conversation, August</u></p>	
<p><u>of Kashmir Faces an Existential Threat." Middle East Eye, December 3.</u></p>	
<p><u>Painting It as Terrorism." OpenDemocracy, December 2.</u></p>	
<p><u>Kashmir." Frontline, August 30.</u></p>	
<p><u>Territorial Sovereignty Poses an Existential Threat to Kashmiris." Caravan, October 1.</u></p>	
<p><u>Frame, October 15.</u></p>	
<p><u>Age." Contending Modernities, January 3.</u></p>	
<p><u>Article 370." University of Nottingham Asia Research Institute, Asia Dialogue blog, September 27.</u></p>	

Interview Quotes

For my research I conducted interviews with Arjon Dunnewind, curator of Zero Footprint Festival, and dr. Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink, professor for the course of Ecologies of Curation. This appendix is a summary of quotes used in the description of the case studies in chapter 2 and in the analysis of the case studies in chapter 3, 4, and 5. The original interview transcription has been shortened for the purposes of this thesis. The page number behind each quote corresponds to the shorter transcription.

Arjon Dunnewind – Interview Quotes

Date: February 5th and May 19th, 2021

Location: Skype

Total interview time

- Interview 1: 65 minutes
- Interview 2: 90 minutes

Total time of transcribed interview: 60 minutes

“The simplicity of the programme is not related just to the size. It relates to how you offer it, how you visualize it so to say, in an online environment, how you structure it” (Dunnewind, 5)

So, they [co-curators] wanted to add focus on how do we as humans relate to each other in the light of this problem, how can we approach it in a more inclusive way? Also, how can we approach it with a focus on how climate crisis manifest itself or we may expect will manifest itself in the future, let's say on the southern hemisphere. So more outside of the western industrialized societies[...]were also issues that were addressed in these expert meetings. And that led to also a shift in the content of the program towards this more global, inclusive social approach to what the climate crisis is, and how we can counter it (Dunnewind, 2)

“global, inclusive, and social approach” (Dunnewind, 2)

“...if you see IMPAKT as an organization that aims to present alternative visions, the question is alternative to what? If your target group is already like a higher educated academic, into the arts target group, if that's your audience, do you want to confirm their ideas? By bringing alternative program that is alternative to the mainstream and thereby probably in sync with the ideas of your more specialized target groups? Although do you want to present alternatives to what your audience already accepts as reality and and their

ideas? *It's a bit like this Russian doll example, where do you position yourself?* Do you want to contradict commonly known or commonly held conventions in mainstream media mainstream society, or also want to be critical to what the common perception in academia and in arts are. I do think this this second approach is just as important. I don't see the two exclusively. I think you can curate your program with both- nuances, commonly held perceptions in mainstream society and in another program be critical to what is the commonly held perception in academia and in the arts. Because I do think, if you want to be critical to mainstream perceptions, you owe it to yourself to also be critical to your own perceptions or to the perceptions of what you see as your, your peers (Dunnewind, 4)

“...extra in between moments...” (Dunnewind, 1).

– “between people with very specific knowledge because they are an academic or researcher or an author, or people that have audio syncretic visions, or, as artists that have the skills to visualize in the abstract, poetic conceptual way certain issues” (Dunnewind, 4)

Dr. Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink – Interview Quotes

Date: 12th, 2021

Location: Microsoft Teams

Total interview time

- Interview 1: 90 minutes

Total time of transcribed interview: 90 minutes

“For me, ecology is very much about the awareness of connections and relations. And curating is about creating meaningful contexts around works, or by bringing certain works into meaningful relation with one another. So it is about setting up relations”

(Nibbelink, 7)

people from the younger generation, they will come with different stuff. And it would be nice to see what they come up with. [...] So that was, in this online format, reason to give space to students”

(Nibbelink, unpublished interview, 2; emphasis added)

...there were these very nice moments where people started working together online. One of the few times that students felt that we were doing something together. Instead of having independent study, it was not only about working to make something together, but also about the feeling of being connected. And I thought that was very valuable (ibid.).

“It's just what I think, what education should be and how I function. I hope that people are interested and *want to know, want to ask questions and want to explore things*. Maybe we can think together without knowing where it leads. I think that discussions can also have the function of just putting things on your agenda” (Nibbelink, 3).

‘...dialogue, that's where I think that the encounter is...’ (Nibbelink, 5)

“I think that we need to be time capsules” (Nibbelink, 9)

“...to understand the now, you also need some context. So of course, what is happening in the classroom is also a product of people who are in there, their subjective and collective politics but what is [should be] happening in the classroom is also about taking some time to reflect on thing” (Nibbelink, unpublished interview, 8).

“I would say it [the course] is open, it is open to what is happening in the larger world. And especially because it is talking about curated projects that in turn respond to larger issues in the world. Like it can be about precarity or activism” (Nibbelink, 8).

“thorough [third] object” (Nibbelink, 3)

“...a plea for the equality of intelligence of both the teacher as well as the students” (ibid.)

“...they [teacher and students] will both learn something from that book, in relation to what they already know” (ibid.)

“...it's doing its work [...] in its strangeness” (Nibbelink, 4)

“I am not one to work with conflict or confrontation” (ibid.)

Authors Notes

Today, I saw the construction of text which was in some ways frustratingly disconnected. Each time I began editing my note, I noticed another classmate add a point that challenged mine. I paused multiple times – how was the interpretation so different? At the same time, I realised that I was responding to the challenge and rather than changing my note, at the end of it (whether the other person noticed), my note like a verbal debate. I imagine I would have been more emphatic if I was to face with them. This note however, was a more articulate side of me (Kumar, November 20, 2020)

I had felt the first grains of discomfort because the government had outmaneuvered an entire nation and robbed them of their previous stated autonomy. Not just for me, but a wave of discomfort and anger swept the country. I was packing my bags at this point, to leave for the Netherlands. It was surreal, to realise that I wasn't going to be here when India's history was being rewritten (Kumar, August 10, 2019)

I couldn't believe the kind of programme I was in charge of. On one hand, I was awestruck at the transcendence. This was for me, all my history, present and future, wrapped in one big yoga studio. But I couldn't help wonder about the damn lights. Why were there so many lights when we were curating around environmental crisis and what was the point of 15 minutes of hot yoga and what were the audience who came for the hotness of yoga, over yoga itself, what were they supposed to get out of it. But more than that, I couldn't recognize myself in the yoga teacher. The harshness dissuaded me. Yet, I was in awe. It must've been something I would never be able to completely reconcile (Kumar, October 31, 2020)

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