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Unlearning Extractivist Thinking: Instituting Pedagogical Practices of Radical Reciprocity at Kunstinstituut Melly

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ABSTRACT

In the Western contemporary cultural milieu, decolonisation has emerged as a cornerstone of the struggle against institutional racism. But what is the praxis of instituting social justice and social change? In this scholarly inquiry, I explore the implications that arise when institutional transformation is conceptualised as a radically reciprocal and pedagogically-oriented process.

By integrating decolonial, feminist, and curatorial studies perspectives, I challenge the often 'non-performative' (Ahmed, 2012) nature of institutional commitments to the social justice project, positing 'extractivism' (Junka-Aikio and Cortes-Severino, 2017) as the exploitative logic dominating these discursive practices. Drawing on insights from Indigenous scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's 'Radical Resurgent Theory' (2017), I investigate the affordances of 'radical reciprocity' as a non-extractivist ethical system and driving imperative for art instituting, one where institutional discourse and praxis deeply inform one another.

My analysis focuses on the Name Change Initiative (NCI) – the transformative journey undertaken by Rotterdam-based contemporary art organisation Kunstinstituut Melly (formerly Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art) in 2018. This initiative was catalysed by the *Open Letter to Witte de With* (2017), which called attention to the organisation's colonial infrastructure and associated 'institutional whiteness' (Ahmed, 2007), urging a systemic renewal of its working culture. Through a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of specific documents produced by the institution and its close collaborators and compiled into the edited volume *Tools for Collective Learning* (Cuy et al., 2022), I delve into some of the politics and practices implemented within the curatorial framework of the NCI.

My research aim is to ascertain whether the institutional renaming symbolically embodies the reciprocity-driven ethical principles (*accountability*, *mutuality*, and *vulnerability*) cultivated through the practice of the pedagogical model delineated by decolonial thinker Rolando Vázquez in the aforementioned volume (ibid.). I conclude by advocating for a radically reciprocal mode of art instituting, maintaining the generative potential of reciprocal ethics and pedagogies as tools to unlearn extractivist working precepts and advance towards a decolonised institutional ethos.

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INTRODUCTION

As we attempt to analyse dialogue as a human phenomenon,
we discover something which is the essence of dialogue itself:
***the word*.**
But the word is more than just an instrument which makes dialogue possible;
accordingly, we must seek its constitutive elements.
Within the word we find two dimensions
reflection and action,
in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed
– even in part –
the other immediately suffers.
There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis.
Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world.[1]

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970

Over the past few decades, efforts to tackle institutional racism have gained widespread prominence in the Western transnational cultural landscape[2]. In principle, these initiatives signify the dedication of a given organisation to combating past and present forms of racial discrimination and prejudice through the creation of a safe work environment and the promotion of equal opportunities among cultural workers. In practical terms, these commitments have primarily resulted in updated institutional policies, with a central focus on the promotion of 'diversity' and 'inclusion'. This, in turn, has led to the proliferation of a variety of cultural projects, discursively framed under the banners of social justice or decolonisation.

In parallel, a substantial body of voices has actively mobilised itself to underscore the perfunctory and superficial nature of this institutional trend. Critical thinkers and activists have stressed the extent to which these measures alone do not pose tangible challenges to the "systemic

[1] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London, UK: Penguin Classics, 1993), 60.

[2] Depending on the specific institutional context at stake, initiatives of this nature can either adopt an intersectional approach, addressing various forms of discrimination embedded in a given working culture simultaneously – such as those based on race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, social class, etc. – or they can be specifically focused on addressing only some of these particular forms of discrimination. Due to limits in its scope, my discussion in the current research revolves around measures aimed at combating racism and xenophobia; hence, my primary emphasis is on the axis of race/ethnicity.

disparities and legacies"[3] ingrained in a given institutional working culture – i.e. "those tendencies or habitual forms of action that are not named or made explicit"[4]. Rather, commitments to an antiracist ethos merely function to embellish an organisation's public identity and preserve its social license to operate[5]. Meanwhile, "the conditions which unfairly marginalise new entrants go unaddressed and are invisibilised as 'problems'"[6] – as claimed by London-based cultural practitioner Jemma Desai in *This Work isn't For Us* (2020).

In the latter project, Desai offers an autoethnographic account of the systemic challenges faced by racial and ethnic minorities navigating the arts sector, drawing from her personal experience of inhabiting a brown body in institutionally white spaces as well as from the testimonies of other non-white cultural workers. In a passage, Desai discusses the "abusive power dynamic"[7] inherent in early career programmes, particularly within the context of diversity and inclusivity policies. She explains how these schemes are set up to create a perception of institutional "benevolence"[8] all the while placing pressure on newcomers to express gratitude for the opportunities presented. It is only upon entering these '(host)ile environments'[9] that one realises the extractivist nature of this social engagement – namely, the "inequitable relating"[10] between non-white individuals and white institutions, where "the exchange benefits the 'benefactor' more than the supposed beneficiary."[11]. In essence, while an increasing number of cultural organisations celebrate the implementation of their brand-new multicoloured policies, a closer look reveals that

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[3] Gavan Titley, and Alana Lentin, "More Benetton than Barricades? The Politics of Diversity in Europe," in *The Politics of Diversity in Europe* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2008), 14.

[4] Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 25.

[5] Commonly linked with extractive and transformation industries, the concept of 'social license' or 'social license to operate' (abbreviated as 'SLO') pertains to the perceived social acceptability or legitimacy that local stakeholders and/or communities attribute to an industry, company, or project, as well as its operations in a specific area or region (Raufflet et al., "Social License," 2223-2224). Specifically, because it is rooted in the beliefs, opinions, and perceptions of the local population, which can change with the acquisition of new information, a social license should be regarded as intangible, dynamic, and impermanent (Raufflet et al., 2225).

[6] Jemma Desai, *This Work isn't For Us* (2020), last accessed January 22, 2024, https://heystacks.org/doc/337/this-work-isnt-for-us--by-jemma-desai.

[7] Desai.

[8] Desai.

[9] Desai.

[10] Desai.

[11] Desai.

behind the facades of these buildings, lines of "uncomplaining bodies"[12] bear the intellectual and emotional "burden"[13] required to provide the dominant stakeholder publics with its much coveted "moral surety and instant progressiveness"[14].

In the present thesis, my attention and efforts are devoted to understanding the essential prerequisites for creating a reciprocal – i.e. non-extractivist – relationship between the discourse and praxis of institutional transformation, in the broader attempt to acknowledge and valorise the lives and experiences of those consistently oppressed by structural forms of discrimination. In exact terms, the core proposition of my research is to sketch out the affordances of the notion of 'radical reciprocity' as a non-extractivist ethical system and driving imperative for institutional thinking and organising. I aim to comprehend whether and how by learning to practice reciprocal ethics it is possible to bridge the existing disparity between the ethical commitments to social engagement discursively advanced by cultural organisations and the inequitable practices and processes that dictate their day-to-day line of conduct. Therefore, my underlying contention is that institutions should proactively and genuinely strive to promote equity and anti-racism by first and foremost engaging in a process of unlearning the extractivist ethos ingrained in their working culture, thereby laying the foundation for substantial infrastructural change.

To this end, I propose to conduct a concept-driven, critical discourse analysis of the Name Change Initiative (NCI). The NCI is a process of institutional transformation undertaken in 2018 by the Rotterdam-based art organisation Kunstinstituut Melly, named at the time 'Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art' (FKAWdW)[15]. The decision to embark on such an endeavour followed the publication of the *Open Letter to Witte de With* (2017), which instigated an intense public debate by denouncing the institution for not having confronted the colonial legacy of its namesake despite working on an art project about decoloniality titled *Cinema Olanda: Platform* (2017). More important than the name change, the signatories of the open letter called for a radical process of transformation of the institution's modus operandi, which resulted in FKAWdW's formal commitment to foster a systemic change in its mode of instituting. Eventually, besides the renaming, the aforementioned initiative included the implementation of various pedagogical

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[12] Jenny Richards in Danielle Child, Helena Reckitt, and Jenny Richards, "Labours of Love," *Third Text* 31, no.1 (2017): 162.

[13] Desai.

[14] Titley and Lentin, "More Benetton than Barricades?" 13.

[15] Throughout the thesis, I will predominantly use the acronym 'FKAWdW' to refer to the institution.

practices oriented towards infrastructural transformation – the latter intended as a radical, self-reflexive, and ongoing intervention into the working culture of the institutional ecosystem – which crucially affected the organisation's activities, outcomes, team members, audiences, and spaces.

I examine this case study by drawing on the theoretical insights provided by the concepts of *reciprocity* and *extractivism*. Notably, these two concepts significantly interact with each other throughout my research, for the latter informs my comprehension and formulation of the former. On the one hand, the concept of 'extractivism' is a highly valuable tool for capturing the oppressive and exploitative rationale that underlies the ostensibly benevolent and innocent discourses enacted by cultural institutions. On the other hand, building upon the suggestion advanced by Indigenous scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson that "[t]he alternative to extractivism is deep reciprocity"[16], I attempt to understand what specific forms and implications 'non-extractivism' might assume within the context of Western institutions. Accordingly, investigating the theoretical and practical potential of Simpson's concept of 'reciprocity' as an alternative mode of thinking and organising grounded in feminist and decolonial ethics is a key task of my analysis. That is to say that the mapping of extractivist institutional dynamics is intended solely as a preliminary research step, serving my primary objective: the elucidation of what a radically alternative, non-extractivist approach to art instituting might involve[17].

By observing how the aforementioned concepts are operationalised through various aspects of the case study, I aim to better comprehend how practising radical reciprocity can help to counter an extractivist working culture. Hence, driving the present thesis is the following research question: *How can pedagogical practices grounded in reciprocal ethics inform a non-extractivist approach to art instituting?* With this objective in mind, and through the just-outlined conceptual framework, I observe the course of action undertaken by FKAWdW to unlearn extractivist working precepts and transit towards a mode of instituting premised on reciprocity between discourse and praxis.

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[16] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2017), 75.

[17] I use the expression 'art instituting' here to distinguish it from 'instituting art', referring to an ongoing and generative mode of instituting. The theoretical foundation for this concept is rooted in Gerald Raunig's notion of 'instituent practice' (2006), which refers to a mode of organising that connects social criticism, institutional critique, and self-criticism to challenge the static nature of the notion of 'institution'. Integrating Raunig's conceptualization with insights from curator Marta Klein (2022) and the feminist collective la Sala (2021), I employ the terms 'instituent' and 'instituting' as opposed to 'institutionalized', to denote institutional approaches that always remain radically open to changes, as opposed to those that are formalised and fixed in time.

Methodology.

The methodology I propose to adopt to carry out this qualitative research is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In a volume dedicated to this approach (2003), editors Gilbert Weiss and Ruth Wodak argue for 'theory' and 'interdisciplinary' to be "the conceptual and disciplinary framework conditions of discourse-analytical research"[18]. As regards the former, the core theoretical assumption underpinning CDA is that "the complex interrelations between discourse and society cannot be analysed adequately unless linguistic and sociological approaches are combined."[19]. Accordingly, the authors explain that this analytical approach differs from classic Discourse Analysis (DA) for it goes beyond linguistic structures by emphasising the social context in which "discursive practices"[20] are embedded, with the purpose of investigating "opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language."[21]. Hence, CDA employs an interdisciplinary perspective, operating at the nexus of language with broader social, political, and cultural phenomena. Precisely because it adopts a critical stance toward societal issues, CDA represents a valuable instrument for examining the role of language in reflecting and reproducing social inequalities, power relations, and cultural norms[22].

Within the context of my research, such a methodological approach appears to be especially appropriate when it comes to the task of unravelling the underlying ideologies[23] and power

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[18] Gilbert Weiss and Ruth Wodak (eds.), "Introduction: Theory, Interdisciplinarity and Critical Discourse Analysis," in *Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory and Interdisciplinarity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1.

[19] Weiss and Wodak, 7.

[20] Throughout my research, I define 'discourse' (i.e. language use in speech and writing) as a form of 'social practice', hence using the term interchangeably with the expression 'discursive practice' [Fairclough and Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in van Dijk (London: SAGE, 2011), 258; quoted in Weiss and Wodak, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 13]. This definition implies the existence of a reciprocal relationship between "a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s)" (Fairclough and Wodak, 258) which actively frames it. More precisely, discursive practices should be approached as actions that are "both structuring and structured" (Weiss and Wodak, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 10), meaning that, within a given social system, discursive practices play a dual role, functioning as both the mechanisms through which structures find expression and the products or manifestations of those structures (Weiss and Wodak, 10). That is, "the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them" (Fairclough and Wodak, "Critical discourse analysis," 258; quoted in Weiss and Wodak (eds.), *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 13).

[21] Weiss and Wodak, "Introduction", 15.

[22] Weiss and Wodak, 15.

[23] In my research, I employ the term 'ideology' to denote "social forms and processes within which, and by means of which, symbolic forms circulate in the social world." (Weiss and Wodak, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 14). As explained by Weiss and Wodak, discourse/language acts as a mediator of ideology across various social institutions. Given that ideologies are crucial tools for the establishment and maintenance of power relations (for a definition of 'power', see footnote no. 24), a central objective of CDA is to 'demystify' discourses by unravelling underlying ideologies (Weiss and Wodak, 14).

dynamics[24] concealed beneath institutional commitments to the ethos of social inclusivity and diversity. More precisely, it can help in assessing whether the discourse around institutional change put forth by FKAWdW genuinely mirrors the unfolding of a more profound and intricate infrastructural process of unlearning and learning. Furthermore, adopting a cross-cutting approach is essential for unravelling the phenomenon under inquiry. Indeed, while generally speaking the investigation proposed in the present scholarly project can be situated in the tradition of institutional analysis, it adopts an interdisciplinary perspective as it considers sociocultural and artistic discourses and debates coming from various theoretical and philosophical traditions such as cultural studies, gender studies, de- and post-colonial theory, critical pedagogy, and museum studies.

First of all, my viewpoint and approach to the subject of institutional racism are significantly shaped by key insights from several intersectional feminist scholars. Notably, the works of Sara Ahmed, bell hooks, Amber J. Musser, and Jemma Desai hold particular relevance for my research. Furthermore, contributions from the field of curatorial studies, particularly those of Helena Reckitt, Angela Dimitrakaki, Dorothee Richter, Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, Beatrice von Bismarck, and Marta Keil, indirectly inform my perspective on contemporary art institutions. This influence is particularly pronounced in response to recent debates postulating the necessity of a shift of emphasis from a cultural activity to the "trajectory of activity"[25] – a call rooted in the acknowledgement that "the effect of the work is entangled with the way it is produced"[26]. Feminist authorial voices emerging from this discourse advocate for a radical transformation in institutional priorities, emphasising "caring for the context of the work"[27] over curating the final product. This expanded approach considers not only "the materiality of resources that enable an institution to work"[28] but also the reproductive aspects of art instituting, including "human relations and the ways

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[24] Throughout my research, I conceptualize 'power' as concerning "relations of difference, and particularly about the effects of differences in social structures" (Weiss and Wodak, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 14). Weiss and Wodak clarify that while language in itself is not inherently 'powerful', it can acquire power through its use by 'powerful' individuals – the latter referring to those responsible for perpetuating inequalities and who possess the instruments and opportunities to enhance conditions (Weiss and Wodak, 14). Indeed, power relations are effectively established and perpetuated through ideologies (for a definition of 'ideology' see footnote no. 23), with discursive practices serving as their privileged medium.

[25] Iris Rogoff, and Beatrice von Bismarck, "Curating/Curatorial: A Conversation Between Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck," in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, (eds.) Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff, Thomas Weski (London: Sternberg Press, 2019), 23.

[26] Marta Keil, "Can a theatre institution be a good place to work? Feminist instituent practices as a proposal of methods of working together in performing arts" (2022): 15.

[27] Jenny Richards in Child et al., "Labours of Love," 155.

[28] Keil, "Can a theatre institution be a good place to work?," 7.

of managing the energy, time, intellectual and emotional resources of the institutional employees"[29]. Finally, as I will elaborate further in this introduction, the core concepts at the heart of my research – *reciprocity* and *extractivism* – also invoke multiple and intersecting bodies of knowledge.

With regard to the case study analysis, I propose a critical examination of specific documents produced by Kunstinstituut Melly and its close collaborators within the curatorial framework of the Name Change Initiative. The majority of the research materials considered are retrieved from the edited volume *Tools for Collective Learning*[30], produced by the institution and published together with Jap Sam Books in 2022, which I integrate with additional information disclosed on the FKAWdW's official websites[31]. I selected this volume because it consists of an accurate, retrospective and multi-faceted discursive account of the NCI. More specifically, it brings together heterogeneous voices that have contributed, to varying degrees, to both the theoretical and practical developments of the transformative journey undertaken by the institution, and which, as a consequence, have influenced the discourse that unfolded around it. The materials included in the publication range from conversations and interviews, to more descriptive accounts and reflections. These are all sketched in hindsight either by external contributors (CLIP participants Yahaira Brito Morfe, Tayler Calister, Stijn Kemper, and Aqueene Wilson, Forum moderator and designer Prem Krishnamurthy, art curator Alex Klein, sociologist Teana Boston-Mammah, and scholar and professor Rolando Vázquez) or by some of the team members recruited over the course of the project (Director Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, Research and Programs Manager Vivian Ziherl, Curator Collective Learning Jessy Koieman, except for Rosa de Graaf, who was already working as assistant curator).

Still, although *Tools for Collective Learning* serves as the primary textual foundation of this research, my departure point is the *Open Letter to Witte de With* (2017). This is because the publication and online circulation of this letter played a crucial role in instigating the decision to

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[29] Keil, 7.

[30] Sofia Hernández Chong Cuy, Rosa de Graaf, Jessy Koeiman, Jeroen Lavèn, and Vivian Ziherl (eds.), *Tools for Collective Learning*, transl. James Hannan, Milou van Lieshout, Marie Louise Schoondergang, Jet van den Toorn (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022).

[31] Three are the primary institutional websites from which I retrieve information:
(i) Official Website: https://www.kunstinstituutmelly.nl; this site is affiliated with the institution and offers information about the institution itself and its programmes.
(ii) Pre-NCI Activities: https://www.fkawdw.nl; this website compiles a comprehensive list of activities organised by the institution from its inception to the year 2020.
(iii) NCI Details: http://change.wdw.nl; this site was designed by the institution for publicly sharing details about the unfolding Name Change Initiative.

change the institution's name and, consequently, in initiating the process of infrastructural transformation. Authored by Egbert Alejandro Martina, Ramona Sno, Hodan Warsame, Patricia Schor, Amal Alhaag, and Maria Guggenbichler, and co-signed in solidarity by other cultural professionals, artists, and activists, the letter was originally published online on the national contemporary art magazine *Metropolis M*[32]. Finally, important information regarding the NCI are retrieved from the public reports and announcements formally compiled by FKAWdW and its collaborators throughout each stage of the Renaming Process[33].

Chapter Overviews.

As anticipated, the theoretical perspectives framing my case study analysis are manifold and traverse different disciplines. The purpose of chapter one – entitled "Radical Reciprocity as a Non-Extractivist Mode of Instituting: A Theoretical Framework" (I) – is precisely to outline the overarching conceptual scaffold through which I propose to examine the Name Change Initiative, and specifically the affordances of reciprocity as a feminist and decolonial ethical value system in which a non-extractivist mode of instituting can be grounded.

As previously stated, my analysis begins with the theorization of the concept of extractivism. This marks an attempt to address my first research sub-question: *What institutional rationale does FKAWdW try to unlearn?* Accordingly, I start the chapter with the section "Extractivist Institutional Cultures" (I.I), where I provide an account of how extractivist logics operate in a cultural institutional setting. Firstly, Sara Ahmed's in-depth account of diversity work in cultural institutions (2012) plays a pivotal role in clarifying the un-reciprocal quality of the relationship between institutional discourse and praxis, a distinctive aspect of conventional approaches to social inclusivity. The second core body of scholarship my research appeals to is then related to the current debate around the notion of 'extractivism' as occurring in the field of cultural studies[34]. During the past decades, the original meaning of the latter concept has been expanded

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[32] Egbert Alejandro Martina, Ramona Sno, Hodan Warsame, Patricia Schor, Amal Alhaag, and Maria Guggenbichler, "Open letter to Witte de With," *Metropolis M* (June 14, 2017), last accessed December 20, 2023, https://www.metropolism.com/nl/news/31933_open_letter_to_witte_de_with.

[33] These documents are accessible both in the publication *Tools for Collective Learning* and online at the following link: http://change.wdw.nl/reports-media/.

[34] In particular, I consider contributions on the topic by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Naomi Klein, Imre Szeman, Laura Junka-Aikio, Catalina Cortes-Severino, Sandro Mezzadra, and Brett Neilson.

beyond its original association with mass-scale industrial extraction of non-renewable natural resources[35], stressing the potential for extractivism to be "an analytical and also political concept that enables the examination and articulation of deeper underlying logics of exploitation and subjectification that are central to the present conjuncture of capitalist globalization and neoliberalism."[36]. Approached from this perspective, this conceptual lens offers a valuable preliminary framework for analysing the unequal power dynamics at play within the discoursive practices enacted by cultural organisations.

In "Refusing Extractivism at *Witte De Witte Center Of Contemporary Art*" (I.II), I proceed to sketch out what an extractivist institutional rationale might look like in practice. This involves an analysis of the issues raised in the aforementioned *Open Letter to Witte de With* (2017) and the ensuing controversy surrounding the art project *Cinema Olanda: Platform* (2017). This emphasises the crucial role of the letter in prompting the institution to transition towards a non-extractivist working culture.

In section three "On Reciprocity as a Non-Extractivist Mode of Thinking and Organising" (I.III), I delve into a discussion of the concept of 'reciprocity'. This is functional to respond to my second research subquestion: *What are the theoretical affordances of radical reciprocity as a mode of thinking and organising grounded in feminist and decolonial ethics?* As mentioned, I ground my understanding of this concept in the 'Radical Resurgent Theory' elaborated by Indigenous studies scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson in *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (2017). I provide a preliminary theoretical ground for this concept by laying down the specificities of Nishnaabeg's ethical intelligence, conceptualised by Simpson as a situated, relational, and processual mode of living premised upon deep reciprocity between thought and practice[37]. I conclude the section by suggesting 'radical reciprocity' as the methodological foundation for cultivating a non-extractivist approach to art instituting.

Lastly, in "Radical Reciprocity as Instituent Pedagogy" (I.IV), the concept of reciprocity is further enriched as I bring it into conversation with some of the theoretical perspectives invoked by the case study. Specifically, to provide a more tangible and situated sense of the practical

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[35] While actively participating in this scholarly discourse, I am aware that, in extending this concept beyond its material reality, my intervention site is far from being 'the site of extraction', and that, as noted by Szeman, "after such naming, […] [o]ut in the world, the digging continues." (Szeman, "On the politics of extraction," 517-519).

[36] Laura Junka-Aikio and Catalina Cortes-Severino, "Cultural studies of extraction," *Cultural Studies* 31, nos. 2-3 (2017): 177.

[37] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done,* 23.

affordances of this concept, I introduce the three-step pedagogical model delineated by the decolonial scholar Rolando Vázquez in the chapter of *Tools of Collective Learning* titled "Positionalities, Potentialities": *pedagogies of positionality*, *pedagogies of relationality*, and *pedagogies of transition*. I subsequently suggest employing this model as the groundwork for investigating the NCI, interpreting it alongside the ethical framework of Simpson's Radical Resurgent Theory.

The remaining three chapters are devoted to examining some of the pedagogical practices implemented within the discursive framework of the Name Change Initiative. This serves the purpose of addressing my third research subquestion: *What pedagogical practices premised on reciprocal ethics does FKAWdW cultivate to withdraw from an extractivist approach to art instituting?* As I just mentioned, by observing Vázquez's pedagogical model in conjunction with the situated, relational, and processual ethical framework articulated by Simpson, I divide my exploration into three parts. I identify three core ethical values – *accountability*, *mutuality*, and *vulnerability* – for each of Vázquez's pedagogies, embodying the operational differences between a radically reciprocal mode of art instituting and an extractive one. While I delve into the conceptual facets of each pedagogy and related ethic in the introductory section of every chapter, the remaining sub-chapters consider how these were practised by FKAWdW by analysing research materials included in *Tools for Collective Learning* and publicly available documentation on the NCI. Moreover, the aforementioned chapter "Positionalities, Potentialities" remains a constant textual reference throughout my analysis[38]. The interpretation is structured as follows:

Chapter II –"More Than Just a Name: Instituting Pedagogies of Positionality" – centres on the early developments of the NCI, analysing events such as the exhibition "Witte de With; What's in a Name?" and the Public Input phase of the Renaming Process. The chapters "A Name is a Debt" and "Art as a Platform for Change", along with "Public Reports & Announcements", form the basis for assessing the organisation's ethical commitment to accountability.

Chapter III – "Collective Learning between Theory and Praxis: Instituting Pedagogies of Relationality" – focuses on the official curatorial and pedagogical framework of the NCI – namely, 'collective learning'. The chapter "Troika" in *Tools for Collective Learning* and the interview

[38] This segment features a dialogue between Director Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy and some of the critical voices the institution entered into a dialogue with at the very initial stage of the development of the NCI: Alex Klein, Teana Boston-Mammah, Rolando Vázquez. I selected this document because it offers insights into the theoretical perspectives that played a significant role in shaping the overall strategy for transforming the institution's public identity. Vázquez's contribution, as I will elucidate, holds particular relevance in this context.

“Collective Learning in Practice” with participants in the annual arts educational programme are examined to evaluate the institution’s ethical commitment to mutuality.

Chapter IV – “Towards a New Institutional Identity: Instituting Pedagogies of Transition” – observes the final stage of FKAWdW’s transformative journey, examining key decisional moments and learning experiences marking the Renaming and Renewing phases of the NCI. The chapter “The Renaming Process” and the section “Acknowledgements”, together with relevant “Public Reports & Announcements”, are central to evaluating the organisation’s ethical commitment to vulnerability.

The overarching purpose is to assess how these pedagogical practices contribute to fostering a radically reciprocal approach to art instituting. Concurrently, I aim to identify instances where extractivist relational dynamics persist in the modus operandi of the organisation despite the implementation of these pedagogies. My examination of the Name Change Initiative concludes with an evaluation of whether the selection of a new name sealed a deeper and enduring change in the working culture of FKAWdW. This involves determining if reciprocity between discourse and praxis was achieved in the final stage of Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art’s process of transformation into Kunstinstituut Melly. To accomplish this, I scrutinise the quality of the relationship between symbolic and systemic change, focusing on whether the new name symbolically reflects the ethical principles of accountability, mutuality, and vulnerability that the institution acquired through pedagogies of positionality, relationality, and transitivity. This assessment aligns with the overarching research goal of exploring the potential of reciprocal ethics as pedagogical tools to unlearn extractivist working precepts and promote genuinely equitable and inclusive institutional cultures.

Fig. 1, 2
Name plaque details, following the name launch on 27 January 2021,
Witte de With Center of Contemporary Art (1990-2020) transitioning to
Kunstinstituut Melly (2021–present), Rotterdam, 2021.
Photography by Aad Hoogendoorn.

CHAPTER I

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RADICAL RECIPROCITY AS A NON-EXTRACTIVIST MODE OF INSTITUTING: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present chapter outlines the overarching theoretical framework of radical reciprocity as a non-extractivist mode of instituting. On the whole, this is done by explaining how extractivism is the opposite of reciprocity. I begin by first discussing the former concept, with specific regard to how extractivist logics operate in an art institutional setting. Subsequently, I turn to contextualise the concept through the introduction of the case study, specifically examining the events leading to the Name Change Initiative – i.e. the transformative endeavour initiated by Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in 2018. More precisely, I here outline the criticisms raised in the *Open Letter to Witte de With* against the extractivist rationale driving the art project *Cinema Olanda: Platform*. This functions to highlight how the NCI was launched to move towards a non-extractivist approach to social engagement. In section three, I shift to delineate the conceptual affordances of reciprocity as an alternative ethical mode of thinking and organising, following the decolonial and feminist framework of Simpson's Radical Resurgence Theory. Finally, I close the chapter by drawing a connection between the concept of reciprocity and the case study. The objective is to discern viable institutional approaches for transitioning from an extractivist to a radically reciprocal institutional culture. In this context, I underscore the pivotal role of pedagogy in this process. This emphasis is underscored by my exploration of the decolonial model outlined by Vázquez in the chapter "Positionalities, Potentialities" from *Tools of Collective Learning*.

I.I **Extractivist Institutional Cultures**.

In this section, I introduce the concept of extractivism and contextualise its application within cultural institutions. I do so by elucidating the un-reciprocal quality of the relationship between institutional discourse and praxis, which characterises conventional approaches to social inclusion and equity. Eventually, I contend that this extractivist dynamic serves as a primary mechanism contributing to the reification of structural inequalities.

As an embodiment of the collective ethical values, beliefs, and behavioural norms of a given organisation, an institutional culture is expressed in its day-to-day course of action[39]. While an institutional working culture is supposed to be the ground on which an institutional mission[40] is formulated, frequently the relationship between the two is deeply asymmetrical. This means that the public identity of an institution – as approved by its local community of stakeholders[41] – often does not coincide with its internal reality – i.e. the "hidden discursive and organizational principles, which […] have remained frozen, immobile, invisible, and thus not discussed."[42].

By investigating this internal reality, one may discern the manners in which institutional practices produce and reproduce forms of structural inequalities, which are concealed beneath the seemingly progressive public identities or the purported commitments to social engagement espoused by these institutions. For instance, cultural anthropologist, feminist scholar and activist Gloria Wekker observes that it is in the realm of institutional praxis where evidence of oppressive ideologies is to be searched for; as the author writes with regards to institutional racism: "Race […] is not only a matter of ideology, beliefs, and statements about a particular group of people; race also becomes transparent in practices, in the way things are organized and done."[43].

Wekker's observations are echoed by feminist scholar and cultural critic Sara Ahmed, who introduces the concept of "institutional whiteness"[44] to capture the link between everyday formal

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[39] Davide Ravasi, and Majken Schultz, "Responding to Organizational Identity Threats: Exploring the Role of Organizational Culture," *The Academy of Management Journal* 49, no. 3 (2006): 437.

[40] I employ the terms 'institutional mission' or 'institutional mission statement' interchangeably, denoting a set of organizational values that collectively and fundamentally define the underlying purposes and reasons for the existence of a given institution, encompassing its identity, ethos, and course of action, and the beneficiaries of it all ("Assessing Mission, Mandates and Values," Community Literary of Ontario, last accessed January 26, 2024, https://literacybasics.ca/strategic-planning/strategic-planning-assesssment/assessing-mission-mandates-and-values/).

[41] See footnote no. 5.

[42] Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durnham: Duke University Press, 2016), 51.

[43] Wekker, 50-51.

[44] Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (August 2007): 164.

and informal institutional practices and the reproduction of structural inequalities. Cultural organisations in the West have historically thrived thanks to politics and practices that reflect and perpetuate white norms, values, and perspectives, while actively marginalising non-white voices[45]; as explained by Ahmed: "The institutionalization of whiteness involves work: the institution comes to have the form of a body as an effect of this work. […] institutions become given, as an effect of decisions made over time, which shapes the surface of institutional spaces."[46]. Accordingly, effectively addressing racial inequality requires moving beyond individual attitudes or overt acts of racism. It involves unpacking the systemic and institutionalised nature of these inequalities by confronting those ingrained "institutional habits"[47] which are often disguised within the working culture of a given organisation[48].

Critical theorists extensively explored how the ongoing reification of an unjust order depends in great part precisely on its concealment[49]. Concurrently, principles of equality and non-discrimination have been increasingly co-opted by neoliberal politics. In "More Benetton than barricades?" scholars Gavan Titley and Alana Lentin assert that over recent decades, European institutions have devised novel discursive practices to address social justice demands, yet without fundamentally altering the prevailing unequal structures[50]. The authors discuss 'diversity politics' as particularly influential in this respect, describing it as "a fluid phenomenon, flowing through interlocking networks of money, symbolic and material power, and political agency."[51]. The addition of dedicated charters in institutional policy is probably the most customary and widely adopted institutional strategy flowing out the broad, discursive space of the diversity constellation[52]. For they provide "a gently unifying, cost-free form of political commitment"[53] to an anti-racist ethos, the enforcement of these seemingly "positive tool[s] for action"[54] has become a privileged

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[45] Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 39.

[46] Ahmed, 39.

[47] Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," 165.

[48] Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 25.

[49] Ahmed, 33.

[50] Titley and Lentin, "More Benetton than Barricades?" 12.

[51] Titley and Lentin, 12.

[52] Titley and Lentin, 11.

[53] Titley and Lentin, 13.

[54] Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 67.

and efficient solution for preventing the emergence of political complaints and claims for social justice.

In *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, Ahmed denotes the essence of such perfunctory dynamics – of this contradictory, double act through which power is maintained in the very same instant in which the opposite is proved – with the term 'non-performative'[55]. Merely filled up with a number of "happy talk[s]"[56], diversity and inclusivity policies are devoid of any address to the legacy that cultural organisations have in serving unequal social structures. Hence their failure to underscore the extent to which racism and xenophobia – as well as other forms of discrimination – are ingrained in a given institutional culture[57].

However, non-performative statements still entail an action, because in order not to transform something – that is, for relations of power to be maintained – one or multiple operations are necessary; indeed: "the reproduction of an existing order might depend on the failure to modify that order."[58]. As explained by Ahmed, the statements of commitment to diversity and inclusion exhibited in institutional policies are employed as evidence – i.e. as "a way of saying, or of showing, that something has been done."[59]. That is, they are uttered precisely because they "do not commit institutions to a course of action"[60]. Rather, they become devices to disavow racism and discrimination[61]. As Ahmed articulates:

> The recognition of institutional racism can become a technology of reproduction of the racism of individuals. […] [it] can easily be translated into a form of institutional therapy culture […] [it] becomes shock therapy, leading to the adoption of new attitudes and new behavior.[62]

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[55] Ahmed, 113.

[56] Ahmed, 72.

[57] Ahmed, 44.

[58] Sara Ahmed, "How Not to Do Things with Words," *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies* 16 (2016): 2.

[59] Ahmed, 6.

[60] Ahmed, 1.

[61] Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 117.

[62] Ahmed, 46-47.

In essence, as a result of their non-performativity, diversity and inclusivity projects not only retain but further entrench "ingrained, systemic disparities and legacies"[63] that nurture institutional whiteness[64]. Therefore, the far-flung elevation of diversity and inclusivity narratives as the most effective solution is likely to dissipate the very same key political concerns that prompted their implementation in the first place[65].

The concept of *extractivism* can be helpful here to delineate the un-reciprocal quality of the relationship generated by the institutional rationale driving these non-performative politics. To be more precise, these merely discursive initiatives extract value from those cultural workers and minority groups embodying difference, who are purportedly included under diversity and inclusion policies. By inviting these workers to join their labour force, these institutions are able to exploit their critical voices without actually having to commit to the eradication of institutional racism.

To further elucidate this phenomenon, I now turn to an extensive exploration of the concept of extractivism. Central to contemporary Indigenous struggle, over the past decades the literal meaning of this notion has been broadened outside its traditional reference to the mass-scale, industrial "removal of raw materials from the earth's soil"[66]. In *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (2017), Simpson conceptualises extractivism as both ideology and practice grounded in a capitalist and neoliberal ethos: "[E]xtraction isn't just about mining and drilling, it's a mindset – it's an approach to nature, to ideas, to people."[67]
Specifically, the author introduces the concept through an excerpt from an interview with Canadian author, activist, and filmmaker Naomi Klein, which was originally conducted for her recent publication *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (2014). During the conversation, Klein describes an extractivist dynamic as one inherently un-reciprocal, for it corresponds to an act of taking that never gives back:

> Extractivism is a *nonreciprocal*, dominance-based relationship with the earth, one purely of taking. [...] It is the reduction of life into objects for the use of others, giving them no

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[63] Titley and Lentin, "More Benetton than Barricades?" 14.

[64] Ahmed, *On Being Included,* 46.

[65] Titley and Lentin, "More Benetton than Barricades?," 12.

[66] Imre Szeman, "On the politics of extraction," *Cultural Studies* 31, nos. 2-3 (2017): 444.

[67] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 75.

> integrity or value of their own [...]. It is also the reduction of human beings either into labor to be brutally extracted, pushed beyond limits, or, alternatively, into social burden[68]

Similarly, in cultural studies, extractivism is conceptualised as a "cultural and ideological rationale"[69] that cuts across "patterns of human cooperation and social activity"[70]. In "On the multiple frontiers of extraction: excavating contemporary capitalism", scholars Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson explain that as with the concrete, physical practice of extraction, extractivism as ideology and cultural logic always implicates "an outside that sustains and enables [its] operations"[71], where the quality of the relationship to this exterior is always fundamentally asymmetrical.

The uneven relational structure on which extractivist procedures rest can be further clarified via the concept of *externalisation*, specifically as theorised by sociologist Stephan Lessenich in *Living Well at Others' Expense: The Hidden Costs of Western Prosperity* (2019). As the author explains, the capitalist project thrives due to an externalisation process based on the construction of an outside from which value is drawn – i.e. it always already depends "on the existence of an 'exterior' that it can appropriate"[72]. In our modern society, power and privileges are upheld precisely through an unequal exchange wherein "the costs of one's way of life"[73] are transferred onto others. Essentially, the un-reciprocal relation established through this externalisation mechanism is one wherein "the power of some and the powerlessness of others, the benefits for some and the disadvantages for others, the opportunities for some and the risks for others, our own lives and the lives of others"[74] are intimately connected.

Identical extractivist logics govern the brand-new discursive ethos of diversity and inclusion. As previously noted, the integration of these values into an organisation's mission

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[68] Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs The Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 148 (emphasis added).

[69] Imre Szeman, and Jennifer Wenzel, "What do we talk about when we talk about extractivism?" *Textual Practice* 35-3 (2021): 508.

[70] Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, "On the multiple frontiers of extraction: excavating contemporary capitalism," *Cultural Studies* 31, nos. 2-3 (2017): 194.

[71] Mezzadra and Neilson, 200.

[72] Stephan Lessenich, "Externalization: A Relational Perspective on Social Inequality," in *Living Well at Others' Expense: The Hidden Costs of Western Prosperity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 27.

[73] Lessenich, 42.

[74] Lessenich, 33.

statement often works as a performance of institutional benevolence. Such a performance functions as a strategic tool in supporting the desirable public image of cultural richness, tolerance, and egalitarianism. This is vital in garnering consent from the predominant neoliberal stakeholder community, as it provides them with their cherished sense of morality and progress[75]. By approaching equality in merely discursive terms, statements of commitment to the social justice or decolonial project provide cultural institutions with what Ahmed refers to as "repair narrative[s]"[76] – that is, as discursive stratagems that redeem their public image from charges of racism and discrimination as related to their colonial legacy[77]. Eventually, these institutions are able to preserve or even elevate their status within the market economy without actually having to implement any transformation in their working culture[78]:

> Recruitment functions as a technology for the reproduction of whiteness. […] To recruit can suggest both to renew and to restore. The act of recruitment, of bringing new bodies in, restores the body of the institution, which depends on gathering bodies to cohere as a body.[79]

It is through the value extracted from the labour and bodies of underrepresented groups that the social perception of the public identity of a given organisation is positively altered. Specifically, in the white institutional setting outlined above, extractivism operates by exploiting the intellectual and emotional labour performed by non-white critical thinkers, as well as by tokenising the very physical presence of all those racial-ethnic minorities included, either temporarily or permanently, in its workforce. Put differently, the externalization process here comes at the expense of 'cultural workers embodied in difference' – an expression employed by Jemma Desai to refer to practitioners who carry the signifiers of a racially constructed category of diversity on their bodies[80]. Transformed into 'disembodied'[81] simulacra of change and progress, the bodies and works of these

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[75] Titley and Lentin, "More Benetton than Barricades?," 13

[76] Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 168.

[77] Ahmed, 164.

[78] Ahmed, 34.

[79] Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," 157-158.

[80] Desai, *This Work isn't For Us*.

[81] Desai.

practitioners become ready to be consumed – or 'eaten'[82], in bell hooks' terms – by a predominantly white audience. Meanwhile, the institution, failing to address racial biases and discriminatory behavioural patterns embedded in its everyday working culture, leaves those 'included' in its workforce isolated in the face of systemic oppression and discrimination[83]. This is because the extractivist relational dynamic established by the inclusivity contract "hinges on fitting in and be quiet"[84], making the fight against racism even more arduous. Ultimately, these initiatives not only sustain unequal power dynamics but also 'happily'[85] reinforce emotional hierarchies, intensifying the psychological burdens on non-white cultural workers.

In this context, projects that claim to be focused on social inclusivity and diversity inadvertently become extractivist technologies in the service of white institutions. Driven solely by neoliberal and capitalist imperatives, with a unique focus on generating cutting-edge content to appeal to a mainstream audience, they help in concealing while simultaneously reinforcing what sociologist Joe Feagin refers to as 'white racial frame' – i.e. "an organized set of racialized ideas, emotions, and inclinations, as well as recurring or habitual discriminatory actions, that are consciously or unconsciously expressed in, and constitutive of, the routine operation and racist institutions"[86]. Essentially, the ethos of anti-racism and equality are strategically embraced to perpetuate institutional whiteness "as that which exists but is no longer perceived"[87].

I.II **Refusing Extractivism at *Witte De Witte Center Of Contemporary Art.***

In the previous section, I delineated how extractivist logics operate in an art institutional setting. I now move to explore a specific example of extractivism at work in a cultural organisation. The case in question is the art exhibition *Cinema Olanda: Platform* hosted by Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in 2017. To thoroughly examine the extractivist dynamic in play, I delve into the

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[82] bell hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 366.

[83] Ahmed, *On Being Included,* 44.

[84] Desai, *This Work isn't For Us*.

[85] Ahmed, *On Being Included,* 72.

[86] Joe Feagin, "Systemic Racism," in *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 23.

[87] Ahmed, *On Being Included,* 34.

open letter written with the intent of making institutional whiteness visible. Specifically, I sketch out a theoretical account of how an extractivist institutional rationale manifests in practice by examining the issues highlighted in the open letter. Simultaneously, I suggest viewing the open letter as a strategy of resistance aimed at underscoring and sabotaging the extractivist logic driving the exhibition.

Although I consistently draw on Ahmed's work throughout, the focal point of this section revolves around Gloria Wekker's examination of structural racism in the Netherlands. This theoretical perspective is connected to the case at hand in two key ways. Firstly, it is the discursive ground on which the exhibition was developed. Secondly, Wekker's theory is instrumental in elucidating how whiteness was reiterated by FKAWdW through this exhibition, and, more broadly, in unveiling how institutional whiteness is to be found in the specific context of the Netherlands. As a consequence, throughout the section, I move back and forth between a descriptive outline of the events surrounding the exhibition, and their analysis through the insight gained via Wekker's theoretical account. I conclude by emphasising the pivotal role of the open letter in instigating the institutional process of transformation.

Since the latter half of the twentieth century, a multitude of social justice projects have proliferated across the Global North, aiming to dismantle the contemporary forms of oppression and racial discrimination that systematically uphold the hierarchical structure of cultural institutions. As the latter have sharpened the above-outlined extractivist tools, critical thinkers and activists around the world have advanced novel strategies of resistance aimed at underscoring the divide between statements of commitment to antiracist ethics advanced by Western organisations and the "deep-seated racialized ordering principles"[88] that govern their everyday line of conduct. Simultaneously, these militant groups have been struggling for a "redistribution of economic and material resources, epistemological change, and an overt politicization of knowledge"[89]. It is precisely within such countering dynamics that I propose to situate the Name Change Initiative.

Specifically, during the summer of 2017, the decision to change the name of what was formerly known as 'Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art' responded to the online

[88] Wekker, *White Innocence*, 63.

[89] Amber Jamilla Musser, "Specimen Days: Diversity, Labor, and the University," in *Feminist Formations* 27, no. 3 (Winter 2015): 2.

publication and circulation of an open letter of institutional critique[90]. This letter, while broadly denouncing "the implicit inequality in the arts field"[91], was prompted by the extractivist dynamics experienced by some of its authors on the occasion of the collaborative, event-based art exhibition *Cinema Olanda: Platform* (2017) [Fig. 3, 4]. The exhibition was organised by the former Director Defne Ayas and curator Natasha Hoare and was an extension of the art project *Cinema Olanda*, originally developed for the 57th edition of the Venice Biennale by Dutch artist and filmmaker Wendelien van Oldenborgh together with Irish curator Lucy Cotter[92].

Fig. 3
Exhibition overview *Cinema Olanda: Platform*,
with *The Black Archives on Tour*, a project by New Urban Collective.
Witte de With Center of Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, 2017.
Photography by Kristien Daem.

[90] Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), 17.

[91] Cuy, 17.

[92] Cuy, 17.

Fig. 4
Exhibition overview *Cinema Olanda: Platform*,
with Quinsy Gario, *ROET IN HETETEN* (2012-2017).
Witte de With Center of Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, 2017.
Photography by Kristien Daem.

To better comprehend the tone of the critiques raised against FKAWdW, it is necessary to situate the latter project in the context of the publication of *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* in 2016. In this text, through a combination of case studies, autoethnography, critical race theory and postcolonial critique, scholar Gloria Wekker examines how the imperialist history of the Netherlands is still the ground on which contemporary Dutch culture is based. The author meticulously analyses the profound discrepancy between the "dominant white Dutch self-representation"[93] as "a tolerant, small, and just ethical nation, color-blind and free of racism"[94], and the "Dutch cultural archive"[95], wherein "an imperial racial economy, with its gendered, sexualized, and classed intersections, continues to underwrite dominant ways of knowing, interpreting, and

[93] Wekker, *White Innocence*, 1-2.

[94] Wekker, 39.

[95] Wekker, 2.

feeling."[96]. By highlighting how "race [is] a fundamental organizing grammar in Dutch society"[97], the publication sparked an intense academic and public debate on structural racism in the country. This, in turn, inspired a range of cultural projects, including the aforementioned *Cinema Olanda*.

In an attempt to explore such a "disjunction"[98] between the country's national image and its conservative politics of the time, Oldenborgh approached the Dutch pavilion at the Venice Biennale (designed by architect Gerrit Rietveld in 1953) as a modernist projection of the Netherlands. Specifically, the artist proposed an installation comprehending three filmic works, each depicting "realities, figures, and narratives that have been historically, often actively, marginalised"[99] within the official history of the country. Afterwards, with *Cinema Olanda: Platform*, Oldenborgh sought to bring the conversation back to her home country. She invited artists and cultural producers operating in the Netherlands and with diverse connections to the country's decolonial movement to "use the institution as a further site of production for existing projects"[100]. Staged throughout the building's second floor, Oldenborgh's film installations unfolded in combination with a six-week-long series of live events and presentations[101], which altogether investigated "the clashes, confrontations, and histories of colonialism and nationalism, and the interpersonal relationships between those grappling with and contesting these systems"[102]. Although advocating for institutional critique and resistance at the level of exhibition content, the institution did not foresee these actions materialising within its own space.

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[96] Wekker, 3.

[97] Wekker, 23.

[98] Rosa de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), 37.

[99] de Graaf, 36.

[100] Wendelien van Oldenborgh, "Cinema Olanda: Platform" (exhibition and events platform), last accessed May 1, 2023, https://wendelienvanoldenborgh.info/Cinema-Olanda-Platform.

[101] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt, 17.

The participants included: Charl Landvreugd, Egbert Alejandro Martina, and Quinsy Gario; Patricia Pisters and Esther Peeren (from: *Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis*, ASCA); Jessica de Abreu and Mitchell Esajas (from: *New Urban Collective* and *The Black Archives*); Katayoun Arian, Louise Autar, and Max de Ploeg (from: *First Things First*). A complete and detailed list of exhibited works is available at the following link: https://wendelienvanoldenborgh.info/Cinema-Olanda-Platform.

[102] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 38.

During one of the first exhibition preparatory meetings, a shared 'cause of discomfort' was identified by multiple participants: "the institution's perceived 'whiteness'"[103]. While this was generally ascribed by most to "its hierarchical structure and institutional tone"[104], artist Egbert Alejandro Martina additionally stressed the very colonial legacy of the institution's namesake. More precisely, during the meeting the artist contended that in presenting the exhibition under the name 'Witte de With' – i.e. the name of a high-ranking colonial officer – "the institution was inadvertently sanitizing and tacitly promoting the violent dispossessions that marked Dutch colonialism."[105]. Martina concluded his argument by confronting the institution with a question that will become the backbone of the open letter: "What does it mean for you to invite Black bodies into the institute to perform critical work under the name of a coloniser?"[106].

As such criticisms were raised, team members reacted "defensively and hammered on '*mutual* respect'"[107]. Ayas, the institution's former Director, asserted that, up to that point, the institution's namesake had never been questioned "in its 25-plus-year existence"[108]. Significantly, these responses coincide perfectly with Wekker's concept of *white innocence*, used by the author to capture the extent to which "[d]enial and disavowal"[109] are the dominant modes through which the majority of the Dutch white population deals with accusations of racism in the attempt to preserve the national self-perception as an egalitarian, benevolent and colour-blind society. In particular, the notion refers to an attitude of "not-knowing, but also not wanting to know"[110], and it is associated with an "affective economy"[111] of gendered defensive mechanisms that span from "anger,

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[103] de Graaf, 41.

Specifically, the meeting in question took place on March 20, 2017, almost three months previous to the actual inauguration of the exhibition *Cinema Olanda: Platform*, scheduled for June 10.

[104] de Graaf, 41.

[105] de Graaf, 41.

[106] de Graaf, 41.

[107] Martina et al., "Open letter to Witte de With" (emphasis added).

[108] Martina et al.

[109] Wekker, *White Innocence*, 18.

[110] Wekker, 52

[111] Wekker, 52.

aggressive dismissal, and even death threats"[112] to "anxiety, fear, avoidance, and feelings of guilt"[113].

According to Martina, although problematic, the "feeling of discomfort"[114] underlying these claims of innocence was a potentially extremely fertile place from which to start. Together with other fellow participants, he thus invited the institution to file a petition to change its name, so as to "stimulate public debate and controversy, and, by doing so, […] create an opportunity to redefine itself in a city whose population is no longer predominantly white."[115]. Nevertheless, the meeting was followed by a "weeks-long silence"[116], which persisted even as Martina published the conversation on Twitter. Such a protracted 'unresponsiveness' rendered fully blatant the non-performative character of the institution's commitment to social justice and inclusiveness, underscoring the existence of what Ahmed calls an 'institutional wall'[117].

According to the author, an institutional wall gets produced when there is a deep disjunction between an institution's statements of commitment and its "non action"[118]. As Ahmd clarifies:

> An institutional wall is when a will, "a yes," does not bring something about [….] It is only the practical effort to bring about transformation that *allows the wall to be apparent*. […] [T]he wall as evidence of what a commitment does not do; the wall is evidence of the non-performative.[119]

It is precisely in the attempt to expose such a gap between institutional discourse and praxis that Martina eventually decided to withdraw his participation from *Cinema Olanda: Platform*[120].

In this context, the artist's withdrawal can be viewed as a mode of 'complaint'[121]. According to Ahmed, a complaint is an oblique political action through which individuals express dissent

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[112] Wekker, 79.

[113] Wekker, 79.

[114] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 42.

[115] de Graaf, 42.

[116] de Graaf, 42.

[117] Ahmed, "How Not to Do Things with Words," 6.

[118] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 43.

[119] Ahmed, "How Not to Do Things with Words," 6-7 (original emphasis).

[120] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 43.

[121] Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!* (Duke University Press: Duke University Press, 2021), 302.

toward the institution while actively engaging in efforts to bring about change within it[122]. In other words, "[t]o withdraw *from* can still be to work *on*."[123]. Indeed, the artist's personal act of withdrawal paved the way for what soon became a collective refusal of the institution's extractivist behaviour. FKAWdW was relying on the presence and labour of cultural workers embodied in difference to maintain an outward appearance of progressiveness, all the while avoiding any acknowledgement or resolution of its institutional whiteness. In a joint effort to "[reveal] and [disrupt] fixed patterns so habitual that they had receded from view"[124], Martina and several other cultural professionals, artists and activists co-authored an open letter directed to the institution, with more than three hundred signatures garnered progressively[125].

On June 14, 2017, the *Open Letter to Witte de With* was publicly released in the Dutch contemporary art magazine *Metropolis M*. The letter denounced the organization's "dismissal"[126] of the colonial legacies associated with its name and highlighted the discrepancy between its professed critical stance and its inability to critically acknowledge its own historically rooted whiteness[127]. It argued that, in transposing Oldenborgh's *Cinema Olanda* into its new setting, the institution failed to comply with the "committed awareness"[128] of the colonialist legacy professed in its discursive framing of the exhibition. Put differently, the letter highlighted the institution's failure to recognise its complicity in normalizing, concealing, and consequently reproducing the Dutch cultural archive – namely, "the memories, the knowledge, and affect with regards to race that were deposited within metropolitan populations, and the power relations embedded within them."[129]

Beyond directly critiquing FKAWdW's non-performativity, the letter generally stressed the extractivist nature of the relationship established by purportedly 'inclusive' approaches to instituting

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[122] Ahmed, 301-302.

[123] Ahmed, 302.

[124] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 46.

[125] de Graaf, 43.

An open letter is a written communication directed at one or more specific individuals but designed for broader public readership through intentional publication in a newspaper or journal ("open letter, n.", Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, updated September 2023, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/open-letter_n?tab=meaning_and_use#9933637794).

[126] de Graaf, 42.

[127] Martina et al., "Open letter to Witte de With."

[128] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 35.

[129] Wekker, *White Innocence*, 19.

art. Specifically, the "strategy of refusal"[130] carried out in the open letter worked as an attempt to boycott the neoliberal co-option of the decolonial discourse by white institutions, premised on the "all too familiar"[131] exploitation of the intellectual and emotional labour as well as the presence of non-white cultural workers, "now in the name of 'diversity.'"[132]. As stated in the letter:

> The consumption and incorporation of Blackness […] only serves to satiate the belly of "critical" white liberal. […] Black people pass through them [white institutions], seemingly without transforming them – they extract what they need from us to sustain their "criticality". Appropriation without credit. Tokenism and visibility without agency. Instrumentalisation. Critique pedagogy advice, and emotional labour as a rule, without pay. We enter and end up in the databases.[133]

Ultimately, the open letter laid bare the extractivist dynamics inherent in the institutional relationship with those critical voices recruited for *Cinema Olanda: Platform*, underscoring the occurrence of that pervasive, systemic pattern of tokenism and exploitation which is functional for the reproduction of institutional whiteness. Therefore, I suggest interpreting the *Open Letter to Witte de With* as an intentional act of strategic refusal that effectively highlighted and undermined the extractivist mechanism inherent in the art project.

In particular, I frame the letter through the lens of Simpson's Radical Resurgence Theory. Observed from this analytical perspective, the open letter appears to perform what the author calls a "generative refusal"[134] – one that rejects "the politics of recognition as a mechanism to bring about change"[135] and that rather "turn[s] inwards, building a politics of refusal that is generative"[136] for it is "coupled with the embodiment of the alternative"[137]. Indeed, the letter concluded by soliciting FKAWdW to undertake a "decisive radical action."[138].

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[130] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 43.

[131] Martina et al., "Open letter to Witte de With."

[132] Martina et al.

[133] Martina et al.

[134] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done,* 175.

[135] Simpson, 178.

[136] Simpson, 177.

[137] Simpson, 177-178.

[138] Martina et al., "Open letter to Witte de With."

On the one hand, potential "[a]pologies and perfunctory commitments to "diversity"[139] or any renovation of a supposed dedication to social change and inclusivity were refused in advance. On the other, the institutional renaming was posited as only one facet of a much composite challenge. The latter encompassed "working towards undoing its institutional structures"[140] to address its "internal contradictions"[141] and "[prevent] these patterns from becoming re-fixed."[142]. As articulated in the letter:

> To trouble the name Witte de With is to trouble not only the white subject position, but the entire cultural and economic structure that supports and enables the white subject. […] without working towards dismantling the foundations of antiblackness – [white institutions] can only "incorporate" Black people as accumulated and fungible objects.[143]

Essentially, the authors of the open letter rejected "neoliberalism's move to separate cultural resurgence from political resurgence and co-opt it"[144]. Instead, they aimed to initiate an infrastructural process of transformation that would compel the institution to get to "the root"[145] of its whiteness. To put it differently, the open letter called out FKAWdW to meaningfully embark on a "thorough and comprehensive reform"[146] of its extractivist institutional culture.

The act of resistance performed by the authors demonstrated its generative power as the critiques presented in the letter swiftly ignited a heated controversy surrounding the institution. This controversy not only "amplif[ied] an existing debate on decoloniality in the Netherlands"[147] but also prompted an immediate reaction from the organisation[148]. Specifically, the development of the Name Change Initiative was an attempt to provide a meaningful response to this decolonial call. While the specifics of this response are explored in the following chapter, the next section is

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[139] Martina et al.

[140] Martina et al.

[141] Martina et al.

[142] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 46.

[143] Martina et al., "Open letter to Witte de With."

[144] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done,* 54.

[145] Simpson, 54.

[146] Simpson, 48.

[147] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt, 18.

[148] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 35.

dedicated to articulating more broadly what it means for a Western contemporary art institution to partake in such a resurgent project.

I.III **On Reciprocity as a Non-Extractivist Mode of Thinking and Organising.**

This section delves into Simpson's Radical Resurgence Project, which represents the theoretical foundation of the core concept underlying my research: *reciprocity*. Particular attention is initially given to the author's conceptualisation of the notion of *grounded normativity*, which, generally speaking, can be intended as a political system governed by feminist and decolonial ethics and values. This notion in turn frames my delineation of reciprocity as a mode of living counter to that of extractivism outlined in the first section. I proceed by stating the core aims of my research, linking them back to the institutional context articulated above. I conclude by proposing the concept of *radical reciprocity* as the methodological ground for cultivating a non-extractivist approach to art instituting.

In principle, the Radical Resurgence Project involves "a taking back of resurgence from the realm of neoliberalism and reclaiming its revolutionary potential"[149]. Its 'radicality' lies in the generation of an alternative mode of organising and thinking; as Simpson explains: "Radical resurgence means an extensive, rigorous, and profound reorganizing of things. To me, resurgence has always been […] a rebellion and a revolution from within. It has always been about bringing forth a new reality."[150]. Significantly, this alternative political system "centers radical resurgence within […] an expansive, emergent, generative theoretical space that engages the best of the world's liberatory thinking within the context of *grounded normativity*."[151].

Simpson borrows the latter term from Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, employing it with regards to all those "ethical frameworks generated by these place-based practices and associated knowledges"[152]. 'Place' here is to be

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[149] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done,* 50.

[150] Simpson, 48-49.

[151] Simpson, 54 (emphasis added).

[152] Simpson, 22.

understood as "a peopled cosmos of influencing powers"[153] – one comprehending "the plant nations, animal nations, and the spiritual realm"[154]. Simpson applies the concept of grounded normativity within the context of her homeland, Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg[155], using it interchangeably with 'Nishnaabewin' or 'Nishnaabeg intelligence'[156]. This refers to "all of the associated practices, knowledge, and ethics that make us Nishnaabeg and construct the Nishnaabeg world"[157]. As I will elaborate shortly, Nishnaabeg's grounded normativity is the theoretical terrain on which I propose to build an alternative to an extractivist approach to art instituting.

Nishnaabeg ethical intelligence is a "*procedure* or practice of living"[158] wherein "theory and praxis [are] intertwined"[159] with each other. As a non-extractivist political system, Nishnaabewin is grounded in "ethics and values"[160] that "[create] process-centred modes of living that generate profoundly different conceptualizations of nationhood and governmentality – i.e. ones that aren't based on enclosure, authoritarian power, and hierarchy."[161]. In this context, theory and praxis are co-produced through "nonhierarchical relationships"[162] with Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg: "'Theory' is generated and regenerated continually through embodied practice and within each family, community, and generation of people."[163].

As a radically alternative ethical framework, Nishnaabewin is inherently situated, relational, and processual[164]. As Simpson explains:

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[153] Simpson, 22.

[154] Simpson, 56.

[155] The Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg is a vast territory encompassing the area known nowadays as southern Ontario (Canada), which is the traditional homelands of the Michi Saagiig's people (Mississauga Anishinaabeg). More information regarding the Michi Saagiig's historical background are available at the following link: http://box2005.temp.domains/~boldbrus/trcbobcaygeon/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Mitchi-Saagii-Territory-history-and-the-Making-of-Canada.pdf.

[156] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done,* 23.

[157] Simpson, 23.

[158] Simpson, 23.

[159] Simpson, 23.

[160] Simpson, 24.

[161] Simpson, 22.

[162] Simpson, 44.

[163] Simpson, 151.

[164] Simpson, 151.

> Our ethical intelligence is ongoing; it is not a series of teachings or laws or protocols; it is a series of practices that are adaptable and to some degree fluid. […] [It consists in] a series of complex, interconnected cycling processes that make up a nonlinear, overlapping emergent and responsive network of relationships of deep *reciprocity*, intimate and global interconnection and interdependence, that spirals across time and space.[165]

The operational precept that appears to govern the ethics and values lying at the heart of Nishnaabeweg grounded normativity is 'reciprocity'. The affordances of this notion are outlined by Simpson during the above-mentioned conversation with Naomi Klein on extractivism. As noted, the latter is described as a capital-driven mode of reasoning which approaches everything as a potential "resource"[166] from which value can be drawn: "The act of extraction removes all the relationships that give whatever is being extracted meaning. Extracting is taking […] without consent, without thought, care or even knowledge of the impacts the extraction has on the other living things in that environment."[167]. On the contrary, reciprocity is a mode of living wherein "authority [is] grounded and confined to our own body and the relationships that make up our body, not as a mechanism for controlling other bodies or mechanisms of production"[168]. As Simpson explains, within Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, there is "no such things as capital"[169]: "My Ancestors didn't accumulate capital, they accumulated networks of meaningful, deep, fluid, intimate collective and individual relationships of trust."[170].

Fundamentally, reciprocity is that which safeguards the contextual, relational, and dynamic nature of this ethical framework. The ethical principles may adapt to the particular context, but the underlying approach remains consistently reciprocal: "reciprocity […] [i]s respect, it's relationship, it's responsibility, and it's local."[171]. It is due to these considerations that I assert reciprocity as a valuable and radical alternative to extractivism.

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[165] Simpson, 24 (emphasis added).

[166] Simpson, 75.

[167] Simpson, 75.

[168] Simpson, 78.

[169] Simpson, 77.

[170] Simpson, 77.

[171] Simpson, 75.

More precisely, when compared to extractivism, it appears that the key to ensuring the long-term sustainability and generativity of the situated, relational, and process-oriented code of ethics underpinning this alternative mode of living is the establishment of a reciprocal movement between thinking and organising. Nishnaabeg's brilliance lies in the fact that "Theory and praxis, story and practice are interdependent, cogenerators of knowledge. Practices are politics. Processes are governance. Doing produces more knowledge."[172]. The chapter "Land as Pedagogy" specifically operationalises this interconnectedness and reciprocity between theory and action within the Nishnaabeg community. It underscores how their pedagogical model is driven by the belief that land-based practices and processes are integral components of political systems and governance. In particular, it highlights the notion that embodied praxis not only shapes meaning but also generates an ongoing cycle of wisdom[173]. In Simpson's words:

> This is how our old people teach. They […] know that wisdom is generated from the ground up, that meaning is for everyone, and that we're all better when we're able to derive meaning out of our lives and be our best selves. Stories direct, inspire, and affirm an ancient code of ethics. If you do not know what it means to be intelligent within Nishnaabeg realities, then you can't see the epistemology, the pedagogy, the conceptual meaning, or the metaphor[174]

This becomes more evident as we briefly go back to the previously outlined extractivist institutional culture. Earlier I noticed how extractivist dynamics can be detected precisely in the existence of a discrepancy between ethical commitments to equality and non-discrimination which are discursively advanced by an institution and its day-to-day course of action. Ahmed demonstrates how pervasive measures such as the addition of charters dedicated to social inclusion in organisational policy generally fail to bring about a transformative impact on the everyday working culture of an institution. Instead, with these non-performative initiatives, words such as diversity often serve merely as "a happy sign, a sign that racism has been overcome"[175], which are uttered precisely as a way "not to do things"[176]: "how naming something does not bring something into

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[172] Simpson, 20.

[173] Simpson, 152.

[174] Simpson, 152.

[175] Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," 164.

[176] Ahmed, "How Not to Do Things with Words," 1.

effect, or how something is named *in order not to bring something into effect*."[177]. Premised on a strategic separation between politics and culture, this un-reciprocal movement between institutional discourse and praxis is a key mechanism behind the reification of institutional whiteness.

On the contrary, Nishnaabeg's intelligence is founded upon the pedagogical and ethical imperative of reciprocity between word and action: "One has to be the intervention, one has to not only wear the theories but use them to navigate life."[178]. Accordingly, radical resurgence can be understood as the work of mending such a gap between thought and practice, to bring an end to the neoliberal co-option of the social justice discourse and, therefore, as the entry point to socio-cultural transformation. That is to say, working for the establishment of reciprocity between the discourse and praxis of institutional transformation holds the potential to pose an end to institutional non-performativity by forcing organisations to genuinely address "the foundational problems of culture, race and socio-political power"[179].

The core aim of the present research is precisely to translate Simpson's teachings – and the core ethical principles at the heart of Nishnaabeg intelligence more broadly – into an art institutional context, with the purpose of understanding how a reciprocal mode of thinking and organising grounded in feminist and decolonial ethos might help to counter extractivism in this setting. Specifically, I propose to sketch out what a *reciprocal mode of art instituting* might look like – as a set of situated, relational, and process-oriented institutional ethics and practices. Put differently, I employ the concept of reciprocity as the operational ground for developing a non-extractivist institutional ethos, one that approaches curating in situated, relational, and processual terms.

I refer to such a mode of art instituting under the notion of *radical reciprocity*. Conceptualised as a verb, the latter is a dynamic approach embodied in the idea of 'transform-*ing* with'. The use of the prefix 'radical' is intended to emphasise that its philosophical foundation diverges from the Western system of thought, reiterating the necessity of approaching reciprocity through a dedicated and committed engagement to the Radical Resurgence Project. This perspective implies that every argument advanced in the present research should be viewed as situated, collective, and ongoing.

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[177] Ahmed, 6 (original emphasis).

[178] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 29.

[179] Titley and Lentin, "More Benetton than Barricades?" 13.

In *As We Have Always Done*, Simpson stresses the extent to which the production of knowledge is to be regarded as always inherently relational: "[T]he journey changes with a companion, the methodology is relational. […] One's experience of the world, of knowledge, or of learning is profoundly contextual, and the body of knowledge generated the second time is different from the first."[180]. In simpler terms, the art instituting approach outlined here is not a definitive, universal model suitable for all contexts and purposes, and I don't claim ownership over its ideation.

This also implies that the concept of radical reciprocity cannot be conceived in isolation – that is, in the absence of a specific case study. As I commit in first person to establishing a reciprocal relation between discourse and praxis in my research, the theoretical development of such an alternative mode of instituting will evolve in reciprocity with my case study analysis. Therefore, in the upcoming section, I begin to sketch out what institutional ethics and practices should be embraced by a cultural institution to achieve institutional reciprocity by connecting Simpson's conceptualisation of the concept with the theoretical insights gained from my research on the case study.

I.IV **Radical Reciprocity as Instituent Pedagogy**.

The present section explores the implications that arise when institutional transformation is conceptualised as a situated, relational, and pedagogically-oriented process. To this end, I introduce the three-step decolonial scheme elaborated by scholar and professor Rolando Vázquez in *Tools of Collective Learning*. I suggest employing this model as the analytical foundation for my inquiry into the NCI, ultimately aligning it with three reciprocal ethics. Once again, the overarching purpose is to draw a first picture of what a radically reciprocal mode of art instituting might look like in relation to the specific institutional context of FKAWdW, and in particular to understand what course of action could be undertaken by the organisation to undo its extractivist institutional culture. Finally, while each pedagogy and related ethics will be elaborated upon in the forthcoming chapters, the emphasis here is on underscoring the pedagogical – i.e. the theory and practice of education – as a crucial aspect of cultivating institutional reciprocity.

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[180] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 57-58.

In interpreting the *Open Letter to Witte de With* as a strategy of resistance against the extractivist institutional dynamics at play in the exhibition *Cinema Olanda: Platform*, I pointed out how the generative refusal performed by the authors works precisely to underscore the gap between institutional discourse and praxis while advancing an invitation to FKAWdW to embark in a radical political reform of its organisational culture. The institution was provided from the outset with clear-cut instructions as regards how such a process of infrastructural undoing must be approached. The chapter of *Tools of Collective Learning* titled "Positionalities, Potentialities" involves a conversation featuring Vázquez, director Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, art curator Alex Klein, and sociologist Teana Boston-Mammah. In this exchange, the participants address the socio-cultural challenges of social inclusivity from a decolonial standpoint, reiterating and expanding upon concerns previously raised by the authors of the open letter.

During the discussion, Vázquez contends that the question from which the institution must start in the attempt to "undo itself"[181] and transit towards a new institutional identity is primarily a pedagogical one[182]. The author suggests that genuine decolonisation requires a shift of focus "from nouns to verbalises"[183], emphasising the importance of *how* actions are taken rather than focusing solely on *what* is done or achieved. Decolonisation, according to the author, is to be approached as a multifaceted, ever-evolving unlearning-learning process, not as a static set of symbolic gestures. More accurately, revisiting current modes of art instituting involves "re-thinking arts pedagogy and what arts institutions and their infrastructures look like"[184].

Along similar lines, Klein maintains that to "shift the way [the institution] tells [a] story"[185], it is first and foremost necessary to begin from a "shift in thinking"[186]. Namely, to decolonise the institution 'brain' by reconsidering the "dominant languages and management styles"[187] that have informed the institutional operationality until then. The priority for the institution is to act upon "the

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[181] Martina et al., "Open letter to Witte de With."

[182] Teana Boston-Mammah, Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, Alex Klein, and Rolando Vázquez Melken, "Positionalities, Potentialities," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), 207.

[183] Boston-Mammah et al., 208.

[184] Boston-Mammah et al., 206.

[185] Boston-Mammah et al., 214.

[186] Boston-Mammah et al., 214.

[187] Boston-Mammah et al., 213.

structure of existing bureaucracies and hierarchies"[188] currently governing its working culture, for there is "where a lot of the violence is located"[189]: "our quotidian institutional routines […] [are] deeply connected to colonial models of capitalism and patriarchy that are completely extractive and exploitative"[190]. This is because, as Klein continues, "at the root of it we are talking about how power operates within these institutions"[191].

Applied to our context, this implies that, in undertaking a process of transformation of its institutional identity, FKAWdW must commence by unlearning ingrained working ethics and associated practices that have become institutionalised. Rather than starting from the stipulation of a new name and mission statement, the organisation must instigate a renewal of its institutional culture. To put it differently, to move away from an extractivist mode of instituting, the organisation must rethink the processes governing its internal reality, starting from those regulating the ecology of relations that sustain its infrastructure on a daily basis. As the institution unlearns its extractivist modes of thinking and organising, so the way knowledge is framed – that is, the institutional framework – will shift accordingly.

Likewise, above I indicated that embracing radical resurgence from an institutional perspective fundamentally implies upturning extractivist approaches to art and art instituting and instead developing "robust, ethical, and sustainable alternatives"[192] that are deeply reciprocal – i.e. situated, relational, and process-oriented. Specifically, in applying the ethical framework provided by Simpson's Nishnaabeweg grounded normativity to an art institutional context, I proposed to see the development of a reciprocal movement between discourse and praxis as the core effort at the heart of any meaningful involvement in the Radical Resurgence Project. As we tie in Vázquez's insights with Simpson's theory, it follows that in order for an institution to learn how to institute reciprocally, it is simultaneously necessary to unlearn the extractivist working precepts that have been driving the institutional modus operandi until this moment. That is to say: within a Western institutional context, the establishment of reciprocal ethics and practices necessitates a prior, transformative unravelling of the current institutional culture.

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[188] Boston-Mammah et al., 205.

[189] Boston-Mammah et al., 205.

[190] Boston-Mammah et al., 207.

[191] Boston-Mammah et al., 206.

[192] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 50.

Advocating for the pedagogical nature of any meaningful process of decolonisation, Vázquez proposes a three-step unlearning-learning methodology, encompassing three distinct pedagogies: *pedagogies of positionality*, *pedagogies of relationality*, and *pedagogies of transition*[193]. The idea is that, through this structured approach, an organisation can deconstruct its colonial infrastructures and progress toward the cultivation of a new public identity. From this perspective, this pedagogical model emerges as a valuable trajectory for FKAWdW to disentangle from its extractivist operational precepts while facilitating the acquisition of reciprocal ethics. That is, I believe it holds the potential to pave the way for achieving reciprocity between institutional discourse and praxis.

To better grasp the affordances of this approach in connection to Simpson's Radical Resurgent Project, in the following chapters I analyse Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art's systemic and symbolic process of transformation into Kunstinstituut Melly – what came to be known as the Name Change Initiative. By observing some of the pedagogical practices that unfolded in the course of this initiative through the lens of 'reciprocity', my hope is to provide a generative example of what contours a reciprocal mode of instituting might take in both theory and practice. That is, to offer a potential response to the question at the heart of my research: *How can pedagogical practices grounded in reciprocal ethics inform a non-extractivist approach to art instituting?*

As anticipated in the introduction, to unpack the situated, relational, and process-oriented nature of institutional reciprocity within the specific context of this case study, I suggest identifying three core ethical values – *accountability*, *mutuality*, and *vulnerability* – for each of Vázquez's pedagogies. In the forthcoming three chapters, I will interpret Vázquez's pedagogical scheme alongside the ethical framework of Simpson's Nishnaabeg grounded normativity in the following manner:

(i) Pedagogies of positionality are essential for fostering reciprocity between the institution's histories and infrastructures – its cultural archive – and its cultural mandate. This entails learning to practice 'accountability' (i.e. reciprocity via accountability).

(ii) Pedagogies of relationality are necessary to cultivate reciprocity between the institution and its local community of stakeholders. This involves learning to practice 'mutuality' (i.e. reciprocity via mutuality).

[193] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 208-210.

(iii) Pedagogies of transition are crucial for establishing reciprocity between the renaming and the overall pedagogical process undertaken by the institution. This requires learning to practice 'vulnerability' (i.e. reciprocity via vulnerability).

Collectively, these reciprocal ethics and pedagogies form the three crucial procedural differences between a radically reciprocal approach to art instituting and an extractive one. Accordingly, they correspond to my criteria for assessing whether and how the discursive practices implemented by FKAWdW facilitated the establishment of a reciprocal movement between the symbolic actions and the systemic changes that unfolded as part of the NCI.

CHAPTER II

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MORE THAN JUST A NAME: INSTITUTING PEDAGOGIES OF POSITIONALITY

The present chapter focuses on the first moment of Vázquez's decolonial scheme: *pedagogies of positionality*. I begin by considering the latter in relation to the theoretical framework of Simpson's Nishnaabeg ethical intelligence, identifying the ethical principle of *accountability* as the first difference between a reciprocal and extractivist approach to art instituting. Accordingly, the goal of the remaining second and third sections is to comprehend how pedagogies of positionality were put into practice by the institution, and relatedly to what extent accountability was valorised as part of its new institutional culture. I hence proceed the chapter by considering some of the crucial moments marking the initial stage of development of the Name Change Initiative, with particular attention to the exhibition "Witte de With; What's in a Name?" (2017) and the Public Input phase of the Renaming Process (July–October 2020) in the second and third section respectively. For what concerns the publication *Tools of Collective Learning*, my chapter analysis is grounded in the research materials provided by the chapters "A Name is a Debt" by Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, and "Art as a Platform for Change" by Rosa de Graaf. I selected these texts because they provide an account of the discourses and actions officially undertaken by the institution regarding its past and future public identity. Therefore, they in turn reflect the initial unlearning/learning process undergone by FKAWdW, specifically in terms of practising institutional accountability. I complement these documents with the "Public Reports & Announcements" compiled and published online at various stages of the NCI. These official records are crucial as they outline the requests advanced by the local stakeholders concerning the institutional positioning. Consequently, they identify the areas in which the institution must be held accountable during its transformative effort.

II.I **On *Accountability* as a Reciprocal Ethic**.

Turning attention to my research question, I begin a situated exploration of the reciprocal ethics and pedagogies that can be cultivated to overturn extractivist approaches to art instituting. In the chapter "Positionalities, Potentialities", Vázquez maintains that the imperative initial step towards dismantling colonial infrastructures is "to name the positions of power that have remained unnamed"[194]: i.e., whiteness[195]. Decolonial scholars have actively worked against "the universal narrative of the West"[196] by developing alternative grammars and vocabularies, introducing names and concepts to acknowledge diverse histories of oppression marginalised within Western epistemologies[197]. Within the three-step decolonial model suggested by the author, this first crucial phase relates to practising 'pedagogies of positionality'[198].

As a former colonial empire, the contemporary socio-cultural reality of the Netherlands is based on "an imperial archive in which race plays a vital but unacknowledged role"[199]. As articulated in the first chapter, scholar Gloria Wekker argues that "whiteness is not recognized or acknowledged as a racialized/ethnicized positioning and thus as a worthy object of study."[200]. Yet, "[t]his silent ordering of people, which is at the same time vehemently denied when it is pointed out […] automatically and immediately presents itself in organizational and discursive principles in the Dutch context."[201]. Wekker develops the concept of 'white innocence' precisely to highlight how denial and disavowal are the dominant modes through which the Dutch white population responds to charges of racial discrimination and xenophobia, as well as how such a defensive attitude works as a mechanism for preserving the country's self-image as an egalitarian, tolerant, and colour-blind society[202].

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[194] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 209.

[195] Boston-Mammah et al., 208.

[196] Boston-Mammah et al., 209.

[197] Boston-Mammah et al., 209.

[198] Boston-Mammah et al., 209.

[199] Wekker, *White Innocence*, 69.

[200] Wekker, 68.

[201] Wekker, 63.

[202] Wekker, 18.

As Vázquez explains, the reasoning behind the effectiveness of decoloniality lies in its emphasis on a social-historical positionality rather than solely self-identity[203]. This approach involves recognising one's own position, particularly acknowledging whiteness as part of one's history, making it impossible for individuals to disassociate from this aspect of their past:

> Whiteness is one of the key issues that has to come about to enable everyone to be positioned. We should not be in a situation where some people are not positioned, are everywhere and nowhere, which is the *unaccountable* position of whiteness when it remains unnamed."[204].

Similarly, a profound commitment to the Radical Resurgence Project is to be grounded in a "process of ethical engagement"[205] towards the oppressed and their theories and practices, thus actively "decenter[ing] our intellectual study from whiteness"[206]. However, as Simpson specifies: "I cannot not just *take* their theories."[207]. This ethical engagement proves effective when coupled with a sense of responsibility to comprehend one's location as a socio-historical subject within these systems of subjugation: "[T]o engage in a truthful way, we have to first know who we are."[208]. This act of self-recognition of one's own positionality is fundamental to acknowledging our role in producing and reproducing whiteness – that is, to "[illuminate] colonial thinking in myself"[209].

As mentioned earlier, in considering Vázquez's pedagogical model within the ethical framework of Simpson's Nishnaabeg grounded normativity, I propose to locate *accountability* as the core ethical value at the heart of a pedagogy of positionality. The latter principle is to be conceived as the first key difference between a radically reciprocal approach to art instituting and an extractivist one. This means that to reach reciprocity between institutional discourse and praxis, accountability is the first operational principle to be learnt as part of the new working culture promoted via the NCI.

One of the main reasons why customary approaches to social inclusivity are unable to tackle problems of institutional racism and discrimination is precisely because they do not consider the

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[203] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 209.

[204] Boston-Mammah et al., 209 (emphasis added).

[205] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 66.

[206] Simpson, 66.

[207] Simpson, 66.

[208] Simpson, 67.

[209] Simpson, 66.

socio-historical specificities of a given institutional ecosystem. To put it differently, the promotion of initiatives such as diversity and inclusivity policies lacks efficiency largely due to their supposed universality. As a result, they fail to comprehend the peculiarities of that institutional working culture as given in its relationship to its colonial archive, and, in turn, lack any understanding of how discrimination and inequality might present themselves in its space.

Additionally, since "Whiteness is not a White topic"[210] but a decolonial one, to speak of whiteness in an institutional setting implies an engagement with "epistemologies, methodologies, and objectives that go beyond the institutional framework"[211]. This would not only un-silence those "voices from the South"[212] that have no room within the big narratives of Western disciplines but also bring about a progressive shift in institutional thinking and organising. In other words, a commitment to decolonial pedagogies in everyday institutional discourses and operations is a crucial step to be undertaken in order to "transform the framework of references"[213] – i.e., what, as already mentioned above, Feagin refers to as "white racial frame"[214]. Conversely, "if you just transform the content, it keeps on being consumed through the white gaze, the imperial gaze"[215].

Another crucial problem when it comes to extractivist approaches to social inclusion is precisely that whiteness is presupposed to be "included by default"[216]. This implies that while whiteness "sets the field of inclusion […] it is not part of those who have to be included."[217]. In so far as the focus remains exclusively on diversity, it is easy for an institution to appropriate, benefit, and exploit the decolonial discourse, and thus to merely "become showcases of color"[218]. In other words, when the work produced by non-white cultural workers is "exhibited without proper pedagogical and curatorial framings"[219], it ends up being "absorbed and instrumentalised"[220] by the

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[210] Boston-Mammah et al., 209.

[211] Boston-Mammah et al., 211.

[212] Boston-Mammah et al., 209.

[213] Boston-Mammah et al., 213.

[214] Feagin, "Systemic Racism," 23.

[215] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 213.

[216] Boston-Mammah et al., 210.

[217] Boston-Mammah et al., 209.

[218] Boston-Mammah et al., 208.

[219] Boston-Mammah et al., 213.

[220] Boston-Mammah et al., 206.

institution, becoming another tool for the extraction of socio-economic value. In line with this, Vázquez claims "the big challenge"[221] from which an institution must start pursuing meaningful social change is: "How can we create spaces of […] contemporary art […] that enables Whiteness to be seen and that is not only about seeing the other?"[222].

Ultimately, the first step to be undertaken by the institution to generate "ongoing ethical systems of accountability and responsibility"[223] is to develop a "historical consciousness"[224] by situating itself "in relation to the colonial difference"[225]. The organisational approach to social inclusivity needs to be shifted from promoting the ethos of diversity to the acknowledgement of whiteness as its socio-historical positioning. Crucially, this implies becoming accountable for the organisation's cultural archive – that is, for those structures of oppression of which its namesake is not only a symbol but also an active reproducer.

By actively practising institutional accountability, the extractivist system of reference of FKAWdW will start to be substituted with one grounded in reciprocal thinking and operating. This shift is crucial for achieving reciprocity within the discourse and praxis of institutional transformation, fostering the creation of a contemporary art space that can be generatively navigated by non-white bodies. As Boston-Mammah succinctly puts it: "[W]ithout you understanding your *position*, you can have no *relationship* to me, the discourse, or the Black or Brown bodies in this room. We can have no relationship to each other, because we don't understand each other, and without that, we don't get *transformation*."[226]. As the way the institution thinks and operates is altered, FKAWdW will be able to start moving towards a new positionality – that is, towards building a new institutional identity – in a manner that is reciprocal to the systemic changes cultivated in its working culture.

In the following two sections, I examine how the institution implemented Vázquez's pedagogies of positionality during the initial phase of the NCI. The purpose is to assess the extent to which

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[221] Boston-Mammah et al., 213.

[222] Boston-Mammah et al., 213.

[223] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 157.

[224] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 209.

[225] Boston-Mammah et al., 209.

[226] Boston-Mammah et al., 212 (emphasis added).

institutional accountability was prioritised in the transformation process of FKAWdW's public identity.

II.II **Acknowledging Whiteness as Institutional Positioning**.

The present section explores the actions undertaken by FKAWdW in the process of acknowledging its socio-historical positionality and assuming accountability for its cultural archive. To this end, I examine crucial decision-making moments marking the early stage of the Name Change Initiative, culminating with an overview of one of the first outputs of the institutional process of unlearning-learning as related to Vázquez's pedagogies of positionality: the exhibition *Witte de With; What's in a Name?* (2017).

As outlined in the first chapter, the online circulation of the *Open Letter to Witte de With* – published on June 14, 2017, a few days before the opening of the art exhibition *Cinema Olanda: Platform* – catalysed an intense public debate around the institution, which in turn destabilised the latter from within[227]. The open letter addressed the implicit inequality dominating the art sector, underscoring the role of FKAWdW in reproducing this condition. The institution was specifically called out for curating an art project on decoloniality without critically addressing its cultural archive, thereby further concealing its systemic whiteness[228].

As art curator Rosa de Graaf accounted for in "Art as a Platform for Change", the directness of these critiques engendered "varying levels and triggers of discomfort"[229] among the team members, significantly affecting the stability of its internal ecology of relations and emotions. The reactions prompted by the experience of this common feeling of uneasiness were everything but cohesive and unifying. Whereas a portion of the team was mostly preoccupied by the "detrimental impact"[230] the letter could have on the institution's reputation and alarmed by the very possibility of changing the institution's name, for the other the experience of discomfort arose from the

[227] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 17.

[228] Cuy, 17.

[229] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 43.

[230] de Graaf, 43.

"conscious[ness] of their own ignorance"[231] in having left the colonial roots of the institution's namesake unquestioned. Several team members "felt under attack"[232], frustrated by the fact that the critical work carried out by the institution was being discredited and that their good intentions were not being recognised[233] – an attitude of denial and disavowal which, as observed above, coincide perfectly with the affective economy of defensive mechanisms that Wekker associates to the notion of 'white innocence'.

Drawing together these disparate reactions was the sense of disorientation induced by the disjunction felt between self-perception and public reception, between the self-image the institution had constructed of itself and the one that was reflected back from its outside[234]. As maintained by de Graaf:

> It was traumatic for an institution that […] saw itself as a progressive promoter of diversity and inclusion to be confronted with its own agency in perpetuating entrenched power dynamics, and to grasp its responsibility to deal with this openly, expeditiously, and with honesty.[235]

In essence, by publicly exposing the gap between institutional discourse and practices, and hence the extractivist rationale governing the institution's modus operandi, the generative refusal performed by the signatories of the open letter forced FKAWdW to confront its institutional whiteness directly and, as a consequence, to fall into an intense identity crisis.

The visions about how to tackle this identity crisis soon split the organisation's team members into two halves[236]. On the one side, those refuting the letter's solicitation to face the colonial legacy of the institution and revisit its name. On the other, those willing to be accountable for the institution's course of action and committed to embracing the decolonial call advanced in the

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[231] de Graaf, 43.

[232] de Graaf, 43.

[233] de Graaf, 43.

[234] de Graaf, 43.

[235] de Graaf, 43.

[236] de Graaf, 43.

letter[237]. Such an internal chasm was reflected in the public arena, where an "intensive period of changing value system"[238] was destabilising the ecosystem in which the institution is situated.

The controversy that struck the institution is symptomatic of the emergence of "a wider movement promoting cultural inclusivity and anti-racism, locally and globally"[239]. Several were the art and cultural institutions across the Global North facing similar "public demands for social inclusion along with racial and gender justice"[240], and consequently the pressing challenge of how to adequately "participate in and serve projects of social transformation"[241] given their "legacy in the service of imbalance social structures."[242]. On a local level, several events inflamed the critical debate on decolonisation in the Dutch cultural and socio-political landscape, among which the foundation of the Dutch activist movement *Kick Out Zwarte Piet* (*Kick Out Black Pete*, KOZP) in 2014; the publication in the same year of *Dutch Racism* (2014), a volume edited by Isabel Hoving and Philomena Essed which addressed the complex nature of everyday racism in the Netherlands; the establishment in 2016 of a Diversity Commission at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) as a response to its occupation in 2015; as well as the publication of the already much-cited *White Innocence* (2016)[243].

The multiplicity and intensity of these public debates eventually tipped the scale in favour of FKAWdW's decision to come to terms with the colonial legacy of its namesake and, more broadly, to become accountable for its cultural archive[244]. In the summer of 2017, a few months after the publication of the open letter, the official decision to change the institution's name was taken and publicly announced by the then director Defne Ayas, together with the Supervisory Board[245]. This symbolic action laid the groundwork for a much larger and challenging project of systemic transformation of the institution's public identity: the Name Change Initiative.

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[237] de Graaf, 43.

[238] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 13.

[239] Cuy, 13.

[240] Vivian Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), 59.

[241] Ziherl, 59.

[242] Ziherl, 59.

[243] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 36.

[244] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 21.

[245] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 45.

Officially begun in 2018[246], the stated mission endorsed by the institution with this transformative initiative was "a task beyond renaming"[247]. According to the account given by the new Director Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy in "A Name is a Debt", the will to fully embrace Wekker's "call to discontinue disavowing people"[248] – that is, to acknowledge the extent to which "race [is] a guiding organizational principle"[249] of Dutch society – pushed the institution to embark in a "process of decolonisation"[250] that considerably exceeded the renaming itself. Specifically, as Cuy clarifies:

> The reason for this – the perceived slowness, the ongoing work – is that the call to make a change of name was not handled as institutional rebranding; instead, it was approached as an opportunity for initiating a timely and systemic transformation at our institution.[251]

Accordingly, the NCI was conceived as a slow, "ongoing"[252] and collective effort to become a "more inclusive and welcoming institution"[253] by rethinking its current extractivist approach to social engagement. Hence, despite the denomination, the name change eventually became only one amidst several "transformative actions"[254] within a long-term, "multifaceted roadmap"[255] which centred around decolonising the institutional working culture.

Given such a preliminary discursive framing, I now move to consider the course of action undertaken by FKAWdW at the stage prior to the official development of the NCI. As articulated above, any pursuit of social inclusivity must be approached in context-specific terms, avoiding generalisation and emphasising a socio-historical grounding. The first moment of the pedagogical scheme proposed by Vázquez crucially encompasses the act of acknowledging the socio-historical positionality of the institution by inquiring into its cultural archive. Practising pedagogies of

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[246] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 13.

[247] Cuy, 21.

[248] Cuy, 21.

[249] Wekker, *White Innocence*, 52.

[250] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 197.

[251] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 15.

[252] Cuy, 15.

[253] Cuy, 25.

[254] Cuy, 14.

[255] Cuy, 13.

positionality involves learning about the institutional legacy as related to the broader ecological system where the institution is situated and operates[256]. Specifically, the signatories of the open letter made blatantly clear that the decolonisation process of the institution's public identity must commence by delving into the colonial legacy associated with its current namesake, 'Witte de With'.

The significance of this initial step towards accountability seems evident to the new Director Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, who asserted: "When thinking about pursuing positive institutional change the process starts with analysing the reality of your surroundings and your own infrastructure and histories"[257]. In alignment with this statement, the institution chose to commence by leveraging the collective knowledge generated from the renaming journeys undertaken by other cultural organisations[258]. This decision aimed "to set the basis for the kind of inquiries and work"[259] to be carried out in the course of the NCI. According to Cuy, the immediate lesson learned from these past instances of institutional transformation was that

> Research, narrative, and anecdote may help elucidate the background of given names, of giving names, and of the meaning of names. These explorations are fundamental when a proper name is used for a cause. These are also relevant when a namesake is meant to communicate a particular vision. […] What lives and whose causes are being valued with a namesake? By whom and for whom is a particular life or a specific cause deemed meaningful, for what reasons and to what ends?[260]

The chapter "A Name is a Debt" included in *Tools for Collective Learning* comprises several sections dedicated precisely to account for the "[d]issonant [h]eritage"[261] of the organisation, of which I now provide a summary. As described by Cuy, the namesake of the institution derives from that of the street where the building is located: 'Witte de Withstraat'. In turn, the street name was

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[256] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 216-217.

[257] Boston-Mammah et al., 216-217.

[258] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 19.

In particular, the institution reviewed the reports and advice published on the occasion of the renaming process of Calhoun College at Yale University (US) – now Grace Hopper College – and of the British cultural centre Bristol's Coston Hall (UK) – now Bristol Beacon – which both took place in 2017 (Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 61).

[259] Cuy, 19.

[260] Cuy, 19-20.

[261] Cuy, 16.

given in tribute to the seventeenth-century naval officer Witte Corneliszoon de With (1599–1658), who served in two of the major colonising companies of the Netherlands: the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, VOC) and Dutch West India Company (Westindische Compagnie, WIC). These two companies played a crucial role in the country's colonial expansion, significantly contributing to the transatlantic slave trade and the workings of enslavement in its colonies. The street itself was denominated as such in 1871, during a time when the so-called 'Dutch Golden Age' was reanimated and largely promoted to "forge the idea of a shared history"[262], as well as to legitimise the imperialist enterprise. Both efforts were in turn paramount to the wider nineteenth-century Dutch project of "consolidation of the nation-state"[263], throughout which ideas of progress, as well as notions of race and ethnicity, prevailed. It is at this time, and in service of the very same purposes, that the Netherlands formalised the practice of street naming[264].

Conceived between 1986-1989, the institution was originally referred to as 'Kunsthuis' – meaning 'art house' – in all the official documents as well as in the press[265]. Yet, a couple of months before its public inauguration in 1990, the institution was strategically rebranded as 'Witte de With Center of Contemporary Art'. The renaming was carried out during a period when "naming cultural institutions after their location was a common trend"[266]. It was executed by a collective comprising city administrators, policymakers, and cultural stakeholders in Rotterdam, as part of an urban development project to transform the street, hitherto known for its nocturnal and prostitutional activities, into a diurnally-oriented cultural corridor. The organisation hence lacked any direct connection to the naval officer himself. Moreover, for most people, the name Witte de With referred to that of a 'popular street' rather than to the officer[267]. So, whereas the institution's former name "evoked a vocation"[268], for its promoters the latter simply "implied a location"[269].

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[262] Cuy, 16.

[263] Cuy, 16.

[264] Cuy, 16.

[265] Cuy, 20.

[266] Cuy, 20.

[267] Cuy, 21.

[268] Cuy, 20.

[269] Cuy, 20.

The controversy surrounding the exhibition *Cinema Olanda: Platform* made it clear that there was no reciprocity between the institution's naming and the contemporary reality of its surroundings. Since the organisation's foundation in the nineties, the city of Rotterdam underwent a series of socio-cultural developments, with its population progressively becoming "incredibly diverse and its ethos […] being shaped by a multi-vocal heritage"[270]. According to a report entitled *Rotterdam: A Long-Time Port of Call and Home to Immigrants* and published by the American Migration Policy Institute in 2014, over forty per cent of the city's residents were either first or second-generation immigrants[271]. While most foreign-born residents come from the former Dutch colony of Suriname, a major part of Rotterdam's population has either Turkish, Moroccan, or Dutch-Carribean lineages[272]. In other words, one out of eight Rotterdammers is "a descendant of an enslaved African person."[273]. As argued in the open letter, it was no longer possible for the organisation to 'disavow' and 'deny' these facts: the sociocultural shift that occurred in the local context demanded a shift in the institution's name, as well as in the mission behind it.

In a preliminary attempt to be accountable for such changes, the institution organised *Witte de With; What's in a Name?* (8th September, 2017 – 28th January, 2018) [Fig. 5][274]. The latter consisted of a presentation and series of gatherings curated in concomitance with the opening of the twelfth edition of the long-term exhibition series *Rotterdam Cultural Histories*, on which the programming team started to work when the open letter was released[275]. As explained by de Graaf, at the time the exhibition appeared as an ideal opportunity "to ruminate collectively on issues raised within the open letter"[276]. Eventually, the presentation was set out as "an environment and occasion"[277] for sharing the findings collected as a result of the institution's inquiry into its cultural archive – i.e. the colonial legacies of its name – and to foster meaningful discussions around it with

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[270] Cuy, 21.

[271] Han Entzinger and Godfried Engbersen, *Rotterdam: A Long-Time Port of Call and Home to Immigrants*, Migration Policy Institute (September 2014), last accessed January 26, 2024, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/TCM_Cities_Rotterdam.pdf.

[272] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 21.

[273] Hasna el Maroudi, Peggy Wijntuin, and Charl Landvreug, "Melly TV: Vulnerability" (video), Kunstinstituut Melly (January 27, 2021), last accessed January 26, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDTXyvs26JE.

[274] For more information on the exhibition, visit: https://www.fkawdw.nl/en/our_program/exhibitions/rotterdam_cultural_histories_12_witte_de_with_what_s_in_a_name.

[275] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 44.

[276] de Graaf, 44.

[277] de Graaf, 45.

the general public[278]. Simultaneously, from a more symbolic perspective, the exhibition was also approached by the organisation as an opportunity "to signal a desired shift in institutional positioning: from silent to vocal, from ignorant to aware, *accountable*, transparent."[279].

Fig. 5
Exhibition overview *Rotterdam Cultural Histories #12: Witte de With; What's in a name?*
Witte de With Center of Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, 8 September 2017 – 28 Januari 2018.
Photography by Aad Hoogendoorn.

This new institutional positioning was emphasised by the modality in which *Witte de With; What's in a Name?* was curated. Staged in a small gallery on the first floor, a prominent feature of the exhibition was a large archival print of a portrait of Witte Corneliszoon de With hanging on one of the walls[280]. At the centre of the space were some chairs and a table from the institution's kitchen, on which was placed a selection of material, ranging from general publications related to naming and renaming to reports assembled collectively concerning the socio-historical research carried on by the institution. The latter regarded three aspects of its cultural archive: the figure of Witte

[278] de Graaf, 45.

[279] de Graaf, 44 (emphasis added).

[280] de Graaf, 44.

Corneliszoon de With, the reasons behind the street naming in the nineteenth century, and, finally, the institution's original naming back in 1990[281]. In parallel to the exhibition, a weekly series of public lunches was planned, with each session hosted by different team members and conceived as a moment to stimulate debates and ascertain public opinion around the question of "whether or not the institution should change its name."[282].

According to de Graaf, the gatherings unfolded as unique moments of "joint reflection, highlighting doubts, frustrations, and demands for the path of renaming moving forward"[283]. With the closing of the exhibition, the presentation's findings were stored in the institution's public archive[284]. Such findings can observed as the very first collective knowledge generated as part of FKAWdW's process of infrastructural undoing, specifically as related to acknowledging and unpacking that discrepancy between its self-image and its socio-historical positionality – i.e. to practising pedagogies of positionality. From this perspective, *Witte de With; What's in a Name?* inaugurated the first practical application of the principle of 'collective learning'. As I will explore in the following chapter, the latter soon thereafter became the discursive framework as well as the core pedagogical and curatorial approach driving the NCI.

Nevertheless, the overall intention and impact of these public gatherings were altered when, a couple of days ahead of the first lunch, the then Director Defne Ayas, together with the Advisory Board, announced the decision to change the institution's name. The announcement was followed shortly after by a statement from the incoming Director Cuy asserting the intention to embark on a more systematic process of transformation of the institution's identity that would exceed the renaming itself[285].

I interpret this long-term commitment as a tangible sign of the institution's determination to enhance accountability for the concerns articulated in the open letter. From a broader perspective, an examination of this preliminary phase of the NCI indicates the emergence of a discourse centred on institutional accountability within FKAWdW. Notably, the institution took crucial initial steps towards acknowledging whiteness as its socio-historical positioning. Furthermore, it embarked on

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[281] de Graaf, 45.

[282] de Graaf, 45.

[283] de Graaf, 45.

[284] de Graaf, 45.

[285] de Graaf, 45-46.

such a process by reaching out and engaging with the local public, thereby establishing the groundwork for cultivating a stronger reciprocal relationship with the community of Rotterdam.

However, the institution's announcement was not positively received by a significant portion of the public, including Van Oldenborgh and Ayas themselves. Rather, it was perceived as a "discontinuation of a conversation that had been conducted with the public"[286] and, more specifically, as defeating the opportunity for the local community to provide "a more meaningful contribution towards institutional decision-making."[287]. Furthermore, De Graaf notes that despite the good intentions and general importance of assuming control of the situation, this decision was inherently limited given that, in calling out for a radical institutional reform, the authors of the open letter categorically intimated that:

> Witte de With should not wrestle with these questions behind closed doors. It should be transparent and *accountable* towards audiences and participants for how it will be working toward undoing its institutional structures. It should go without saying that this project of undoing should not be spearheaded by the same people responsible for the sanitization of colonial violence. It is not for Witte de With to establish when nor under which terms its praxis and existence are questioned.[288]

If the institution is committed to effectively serving the mission of social justice and social change, along with being accountable for the diversity of the local community, the institution can not confine its efforts solely to introspection but must further extend its reach outward to the socio-cultural reality of its surroundings. For its new public identity to authentically mirror the local reality, the institution must prioritize the cultivation of a reciprocal relationship with those who inhabit it. It is indeed imperative that its name as well as its cultural mandate are reimagined in dialogue with the local stakeholders. Put differently, as suggested by Klein, it was no longer sufficient to "look inside ourselves, but we also had to reach outwards"[289].

This marks a moment to venture beyond the confines of the institutional archive and actively explore the larger ecosystem where the institution is situated. By doing so, the institution can gain a deeper understanding of and effectively respond to the diverse and dynamic context in which it

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[286] de Graaf, 46.

[287] de Graaf, 45.

[288] Martina et al., "Open letter to Witte de With" (emphasis added).

[289] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 204.

operates. In the forthcoming section, I delve into a detailed examination of the course of action undertaken to rethink the FKAWdW's public identity, evaluating the institution's dedication to accountability and its proactive responsiveness to the diverse array of requests originating from its surrounding community.

II.III **Building an Open Community of Learning**.

Institutional accountability does not relate uniquely to the institution's socio-historical positioning. Rather, as a core reciprocal ethic to be valorised as part of the new institutional culture promoted, it needs to be practised also with regards to the future identity of the institution. This is because – to reach reciprocity between institutional discourse and praxis – the process of systemic transformation of the institution's public identity triggered through the NCI is meant to result not just in a new name, but most importantly in a renewal of the socio-cultural role assumed by the institution in the context where it is situated – i.e. its institutional mission. FKAWdW took steps towards this objective by implementing practices that would increase institutional accountability by building reciprocity with its community of stakeholders.

As previously mentioned, in the aftermath of FKAWdW's announcement of its renaming project, the institution was reported for not having consulted its audiences during the decisional process. As these criticisms were raised, the institution promptly responded with the establishment of a dynamic and collaborative decision-making structure for the collection of public input over the institution's future identity. As a result, the input given by members of the local community – among which many of the participants to *Cinema Olanda: Platform*, as well as several critical voices involved in the open letter (artist Egbert Alejandro Martina included) – came to inform the overarching institutional approach framing the politics and practices implemented throughout the NCI. Significantly, as de Graaf claims, in asking for the intellectual and emotional support of the community of Rotterdam, the "assumption inherent in the framing of the project as a 'platform'"[290] was finally being subverted, and together with it the extractive relationship between the institution and those 'included' in its space: rather than the latter looking at the former for recognition and

[290] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 44.

visibility, it was now "the institution that needed their work and guidance in order to be *held accountable* to its mission."[291].

I interpret this decision as a sign of FKAWdW's commitment to enhance its accountability towards the local community. In the following analysis, I critically engage with this emerging institutional language around accountability, by delving into some of the pedagogical practices adopted by the organisation as it strives to learn how to establish a more situated – i.e. reciprocal – approach to art instituting, specifically in connection to its pursuit of social inclusivity. The practices developed to give agency to the local community over its transformation process are manifold. Whereas several will be introduced as my analysis unfolds, in the present section I focus uniquely on those that have shaped the overarching roadmap to the NCI. Moreover, while I deliver a more detailed account of the overall structure of the Renaming Process in the fourth and last chapter of my analysis, my attention here is exclusively on the Public Input phase involving civic participation (July–October 2020), and specifically on the two instituent practices implemented for gathering these feedback: the Online Survey and the Public Forum. Finally, my investigation primarily draws upon the Public Reports released at various phases of the Renaming Process, scrutinising how the reciprocal ethic of accountability is invoked or addressed within these documents. I selected these reports as they represent formal records detailing the suggestions advanced by members of the local community during these encounters, thus constituting a crucial source for understanding their specific perspective on institutional accountability.

The Public Input phase corresponds to the third stage of the Renaming Process. This stage formally began on June 14, 2020, and officially ended with the ratification of a new name[292]. As illustrated in Public Report #7, it encompassed "various types of activities and platforms"[293] during which over two hundred participants, both online and in person, were invited to provide feedback over the future identity of the institution[294]. Significantly, the local stakeholders were involved not only in the name renewal but also in the definition of the new institutional mission: "[T]he public input components of the Renaming Process sought feedback not only upon possible new names but

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[291] de Graaf, 44 (emphasis added).

[292] Vivian Ziherl, "Report #7 – On the Public Input Phase of the Renaming Process" (September 22, 2020), "Public Reports & Announcements," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), 99.

[293] Ziherl, 99.

[294] Ziherl, 99.

on the future vision of the institution."[295]. In this sense, three were the core questions at the heart of these community meetings: "How can our institution transform? How is this connected with social transformation? And what name can help to make this happen?"[296].

The first of the instituent practices to be tested was the Online Survey. This was completed by a total of 134 stakeholders in both English and Dutch; among them, sixty-eight respondents identified as white, with an average age of forty-eight years[297]. As stated in Report #7, the Survey "was designed for voicing ideas, creating perspectives, and identifying challenges"[298] as regards to the institution's transformation, and specifically to gather suggestions and feedback on the potential criteria for the new naming[299].

The outcomes of the Online Survey were then further and carefully examined in the course of the Public Forums, the second moment of the decision-making structure sketched out for the Renaming. These encompassed a total of five focused sessions, each hosted by a different "guest moderator"[300] and open to the general public through registration[301]. Dsue to the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing measures, one Public Forum occurred online, while four were conducted as live events with limited seating[302]. The average number of public participants varied

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[295] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 64.

[296] Ziherl, "Report #7," 99.

[297] Veronika Babayan and Vivian Ziherl, "Report #6 – Analysis of Outcomes of the Online Survey" (September 22, 2020), "Public Reports & Announcements," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), 95.

Notably, of the thirteen individuals expressing opposition to the institutional renaming in the Online Survey, twelve were Dutch (Babayan and Ziherl, 95).

[298] Ziherl, "Report #7", 101.

[299] Ziherl, 101.

All seven questions featured in the Online Survey are exclusively accessible in the printed version of Report #7, located within the publication *Tools for Collective Learning*. Subsequently, in what follows, I provide a complete transcription of the question list:

1. In the past five years, how often did you visit Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art?
2. What artistic or cultural considerations do you feel we should bear in mind in our renaming?
3. What aspects of our institutional history should be acknowledged with a new name?
4. How do you think we should acknowledge Dutch seventeenth-century histories associated with our current namesake, the Witte de Withstraat?
5. If you have a name proposal or naming typology that you would like us to consider, please share.
6. If you have an example of a name change that you would like us to know about, please share.
7. If you have any other thoughts, please share.

[300] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 64.

[301] Ziherl, "Report #7", 101.

[302] Ziherl, 101-103.

across sessions, ranging from a minimum of five to a maximum of twenty-three respondents per session (excluding the moderator, NCI Work Group representative, note-taker, and the individual responsible for overview and accountability). Three were the core discursive themes of these public encounters[303]: *Legacies and Futures*, focusing on the connection between historical awareness and the name change, with sessions in Dutch and English moderated by theoretical archaeologist Marjolijn Kok and Vázquez, respectively; *Naming and Communication*, delving into how the choice of name links to institutional identity, conducted in a single English session moderated by Prem Krishnamurthy; and *Engaging and Changing*, centring on how the institutional transformation relates to social engagement and social change, with sessions in Dutch and English, both moderated by brand strategist Quincy Mahangi. Since conducting an exhaustive analysis of each gathering exceeds the scope of this research, my focus in what follows is to outline the key discussion points that emerged in both the Online Survey and Public Forums regarding the setup of the NCI.

From a general perspective, the findings reiterated one of the core points raised in the letter about the future identity of FKAWdW: the need for the renaming to be grounded in a more radical process of renewal of the institutional working culture. In essence, the necessity to establish a reciprocal movement between the symbolic actions and the systemic changes carried out as part of the process of institutional transformation. In the Online Survey, emphasis was put on "[t]he need for an ongoing and structural change"[304], with many respondents noting that "institutional transformation was as important as the name change"[305], or that the latter was an opportunity for "institutional redefinition"[306]. Similarly, in one of the public forums, the renaming was labelled by the participants as "a moment of 'reframing'."[307]. And because "the name should reflect what the institution does"[308], the definition of a novel approach to social engagement must be at the centre of the institution's transformative journey.

Aligning with what was stressed above with regards to Vázquez's pedagogies of positionality, the institution was advised to renew its public identity starting from a re-evaluation of its socio-cultural role in connection with the local context. For it to stand as a symbol of its new

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303 Ziherl, 101.

304 Babayan and Ziherl, "Report #6," 95.

305 Babayan and Ziherl, 95.

306 Babayan and Ziherl, 95.

307 Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 64.

308 Babayan and Ziherl, "Report #6," 95.

positionality, the name must encapsulate the institutional mission that FKAWdW wishes to be accountable for in the future. More precisely, during the Public Forums, the institution was prompted to initiate a transformation of its working culture by formulating its own interpretation of art, defining the role of art in contemporary society, and, relatedly, outlining the mission that an art centre should undertake in the twenty-first century[309]. The subsequent crucial step would then be to inflect these theoretical definitions in the realm of institutional praxis – i.e. in its mode of art instituting – as well as to situate them in the socio-cultural context where the organisation operates: "[T]he renaming is about redefining what art is and does *here*."[310].

Explicit guidelines were then given for what concerns the specific nature of the new institutional mission to be carried forward. On the one hand, the findings highlighted a strong common desire: the need for a renewal of its social license to operate, indicating a call for reciprocity between the new institutional mandate and the local community of stakeholders. When respondents were asked to provide opinions on the identity profile the institution should adopt, the traits mentioned in the Online Survey included: "'being a forerunner', 'community', 'care', 'kinship', 'radicality', 'trust', 'bravery', 'dialogue', 'international', and 'Rotterdam'."[311]. In particular, "[t]he demographic cultural diversity of Rotterdam was often mentioned as an important grounding to the future shape and responsibilities of the institution"[312], with one feedback mentioning the need for an "international focus but with a strong anchor in Rotterdam"[313].

At a later date, the institution's identity crisis was linked to the lack of a "clear vision"[314] regarding its role as a contemporary art space precisely as related to the ecological system where it is situated. When asked during an interview about her "first experience with what was then the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art"[315], Rotterdam-based cultural worker Yahaira Brito

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[309] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 64.

[310] Veronika Babayan, Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, Prem Krishnamurthy, Jeroen Lavén, and Vivian Ziherl, "Report #3 – Public Forum 3: Naming and Communication" (September 11, 2020), in "Public Reports & Announcements," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), 87 (original emphasis).

[311] Babayan and Ziherl, "Report #6," 95.

[312] Babayan and Ziherl, 95.

[313] Babayan and Ziherl, 97.

[314] Yahaira Brito Morfe, Tayler Calister, Stijn Kemper, Jessy Koeiman, and Aqueene Wilson, "Collective Learning in Practice," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), 174.

[315] Brito Morfe et al.,174.

Morfe claimed that at the time the institution was "hard to reach and difficult to grasp. […] [It] did not feel like part of Rotterdam […] It was like it floated above the city; something people knew was there but did not really understand."[316]. Morfe, in particular, mentioned the existence of a "barrier"[317] between FKAWdW's mode of art instituting and its public stakeholders, with the content of its programmes and activities "creat[ing] a distance for me as a viewer"[318] rather than representing an invitation to visit the institution: "[E]verything was difficult and vague and not intended to be digested by member of the public"[319]. In summary, a substantial segment of the Rotterdam public perceived the institution as inaccessible, mainly due to the lack of emphasis on community engagement in its approach to instituting.

On the other hand, and relatedly, 'education' was the key theme raised in regard to how community engagement was to be promoted as part of the institution's pursuit of social change[320]. During Public Forum #4, participants maintained that FKAWdW should shape its new institutional mission by reflecting on "the role of art in relation to education, and how this relates to inclusivity both in the role of the institution and in what kinds of art are considered 'art'."[321]. In providing their response to the question "What is art?"[322], members of the community argued for the importance of centring pedagogy in the process of transformation of the institution's working culture: "To move forward […] the institution should consider itself in relation to pedagogy."[323]. Put differently, what surfaced was the necessity to establish a reciprocal relationship between art instituting and education.

Pedagogy thus emerged as a focal point where the transformation of the institution's working culture intersected with its commitment to prioritise social engagement and social change in its new institutional mission. Specifically, as highlighted in Report #7, the institution was urged

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316 Brito Morfe et al., 174-175.

317 Brito Morfe et al., 175.

318 Brito Morfe et al., 175.

319 Brito Morfe et al., 177.

320 Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 64.

321 Veronika Babayan, Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, line kramer, Jeroen Lavén, Quincy Mahangi, and Vivian Ziherl, "Report #4 – Public Forum 4: Engaging and Changing" (September 19, 2020), in "Public Reports & Announcements," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), 89.

322 Babayan, 89.

323 Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 64.

to “imagin[e] itself a*s a venue of mutual social learning*.”[324]. As Ziherl elucidates, participants in the forum contended that, to foster reciprocity with the Rotterdam community, the institution should concentrate on developing a ‘relationship with schools’ and committing to the project of ‘educational curriculum reform’[325]. This reform involves “a process that aims to change the objectives of learning and the way learning takes place”[326]. The institution’s identity crisis, in relation to the unacknowledged colonial legacy of its namesake, was linked by the participants to a broader “impasse in education in the Netherlands”[327]. The ordinary educational curricula of the country, determining “which stories are taught, colonial or otherwise”[328], were seen to uniquely value “certain knowledge”[329] while considering others as marginal or informal. In summary, the findings suggest that to foster institutional accountability towards the Rotterdam community, a crucial focus of FKAWdW’s transformative journey should be on the socio-pedagogical role of art and art institutions, directing its new institutional mandate towards becoming an active local promoter of education.

Based on the observations made thus far, the institution’s line of conduct points to a concrete commitment to fostering a non-extractivist approach to social engagement. The implementation of instituent politics and practices, such as the Online Survey and Public Forums, worked to enhance its accountability towards the local community, representing generative efforts to envision a new identity in a manner that is reciprocal to the requests from the local context where the institution is situated. In other words, by seeking input and guidance from its local stakeholders in the process of renewing its institutional positionality, the institution took an initial step towards the development of a working culture grounded in the operational principle of radical reciprocity. In conclusion, I believe that when it comes to practising pedagogies of positionality, the decision-making structure developed for the collection of public input to the Renaming Process ultimately stands out as an example of institutional best practice.

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[324] Ziherl, 64 (emphasis added).

[325] Ziherl, 64.

[326] Pierre Gouëdard, Beatriz Pont, and Susan Hyttinen Pinhsuan Huang, “Curriculum Reform: A Literature Review to Support Effective Implementation,” *OECD Working Paper*, no. 239 (December 2020): 10.

[327] Ziherl, “The Renaming Process,” 64.

[328] Ziherl, 64.

[329] Ziherl, 64.

As the institution gathered public feedback on its future identity, FKAWdW entered a phase wherein it was imperative to stipulate a new institutional mission that aligns with the requests advanced by the local public. As stated by Ziherl: “The vitality and integrity of the Renaming Process was inseparable from listening and responsiveness”[330]. Indeed, this mission would not only serve as the foundation for accountability during the NCI but also in the future. Accordingly, it is now necessary to proceed towards the second moment of Vázquez’s decolonial methodology: pedagogies of relationality.

[330] Ziherl, 65.

CHAPTER III

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COLLECTIVE LEARNING BETWEEN THEORY AND PRAXIS: INSTITUTING PEDAGOGIES OF RELATIONALITY

The present chapter revolves around the second step of Vázsquez's decolonial approach to institutional transformation: *pedagogies of relationality*. As in the previous one, I begin by observing this pedagogy in connection to the ethical system sketched by Simpson, identifying mutuality as the core ethical value underpinning this pedagogy, and hence as the second operational precept driving a reciprocal mode of art instituting as opposed to an extractivist one. To understand how pedagogies of relationality were put into practice by the institution and hence to what extent mutuality was valorised as part of its new institutional working culture, I continue chapter two by examining the curatorial discourse framing the theoretical and practical development of the NCI: 'collective learning'. In particular, objects of analysis here are the chapters "Troika"[331] by Prem Krishnamurthy and "Collective Learning in Practice", an interview conducted by curator Jessy Koeiman with several participants to various edition of the annual arts educational programme *Collective Learning in Practice* (CLIP, 2018 – ongoing): Yahaira Brito Morfe, Tayler Calister, Stijn Kemper, and Aqueene Wilson. In the second section, I explore the discursive articulation of collective learning as an art instituting approach by those engaged in its development. Moving on to the third and final section, I examine its factual implementation, pointing out the challenges associated with practising mutuality within the extractivist relational dynamics present within the organisation. Finally, the overarching aim is to evaluate the extent to which reciprocity between institutional discourse and praxis was reached at this second stage of FKAWdW's transformative journey.

[331] The chapter "Troika" was selected because it delves into the pedagogical approach employed during the third edition of the CLIP programme, which focused on the collaborative creation of a new visual identity for the institution (Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 14-15).

III.I **On Mutuality as a Reciprocal Ethic.**

In this section, I link Vázquez's pedagogies of relationality to Simpson's Nishnaabeg grounded normativity, and I contend that, to reach reciprocity between the discourse and praxis of institutional transformation, *mutuality* is the second ethical value to be learnt as part of the new working culture promoted by FKAWdW. Specifically, I consider how the implementation of this principle is crucial to the establishment of a relationship of "[r]eciprocal recognition"[332] between the institution and the local community of stakeholders, which is the ground on which a non-extractivist approach to social engagement can be generated.

According to Vázquez's decolonial model, the second crucial step for undoing power structures corresponds to 'pedagogies of relationality'[333]. As the author explains, the working culture of white institutions was built on the racial-capitalist "logic of the self, of property, of ownership"[334] – a rationale that most individuals dwelling in the Global North have internalised, albeit at different extents. In order not to reproduce the extractivist dynamics governing dominant institutional approaches to social inclusivity, it is necessary to first unlearn our un-reciprocal modes of engagement with others. For Vázquez, this process starts from the acknowledgement "that a meaningful life has to do with relations, that you can have a successful life by yourself, on your own, but you cannot have a meaningful life on your own"[335]. Essentially, practising pedagogies of relationality is about shifting from a working culture based on the "paradigm of the individual"[336] onto one grounded in a "relational paradigm, where we have to do things in relation"[337].

Similarly, as illustrated in the first chapter, Nishnaabeg intelligence is a situated, relational, and process-oriented mode of thinking and operating generated via a continuous, genuine engagement with the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg ecosystem. Engagement here is intended as the ethical process of creating and nurturing "balanced relationship[s] of mutuality"[338] between humans as well as more-than-human beings. As Simpson writes: "[G]rounded normativity […] creates process-centered modes of living that generate profoundly different conceptualizations of

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[332] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 182.

[333] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 210.

[334] Boston-Mammah et al., 210.

[335] Boston-Mammah et al., 210.

[336] Boston-Mammah et al., 210.

[337] Boston-Mammah et al., 210.

[338] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 157.

nationhood and governmentality – ones that aren't based on enclosure, authoritarian power, and hierarchy."[339]. Instead, the key to the functioning of Nishnaabeg's relational ethics is "the practice and often coded *recognition* of obligations and responsibilities within a nest of diversity, freedom, consent, noninterference"[340]. In particular, it is due to its mutual quality that the process of "[r]eciprocal recognition"[341] sketched out by Simpson enables the establishment of nonhierarchical relationships[342]:

> Recognition within Nishnaabeg intelligence is a process of seeing another being's core essence; it is a series of relationships. *It is reciprocal, continual, and a way of generating society*. […] Not possession […] but connection, a coded layering of intimate interconnection and interdependence that creates a complicated algorithmic network of presence, reciprocity, consent, and freedom.[343]

As anticipated above, in considering Vázquez's model through the framework of Nishnaabeg political system, I propose to posit *mutuality* as the main ethical principle at the heart of pedagogies of relationality. This, in turn, corresponds to the second crucial operational difference between a reciprocal approach to art instituting and an extractive one.

To better clarify the implications of mutuality as a reciprocal ethic, it is helpful to compare Simpson's concept of reciprocal recognition with that of colonial recognition as discussed by Glen Sean Coulthard in the already mentioned *Red Skin, White Masks*. Taking as a departure point Frantz Fanon's critique on the politics of recognition as advanced in *Black Skin, White Masks*[344], Coulthard maintains that, in authoritarian scenarios, the dialectical progression to reciprocity in relations of recognition is usually absent: "[W]hen applied to actual struggles for recognition between hegemonic and subaltern communities the *mutual* character of dependency rarely exists."[345]. Significantly, it is precisely due to the deep asymmetry governing hegemonic relations of recognition that,

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[339] Simpson, 22.

[340] Simpson, 182 (emphasis added).

[341] Simpson, 182.

[342] Simpson, 182.

[343] Simpson, 185.

[344] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 171.

[345] Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 40 (emphasis added).

> instead of ushering in an era of peaceful coexistence grounded on the idea of *reciprocity* or *mutual* recognition, the politics of recognition in its contemporary liberal form promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples' demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend.[346]

In this regard, analogous unequal relations of power appear to sustain diversity and inclusivity politics. This is because the promotion of these values by white institutions is generally not moved by either a necessity or a real commitment to recognise and be recognised by cultural workers embodied in difference (and, more broadly, by the minority groups they represent). Rather, what those governing these institutions appear to seek is the recognition of the dominant population and its neoliberal government. That is, to use Coulthard's words, "there is no mutual dependency in terms of a need or desire for recognition"[347] in the relationship between white institutions and the minority subjects that are 'included' in their spaces. As a result, instead of effectively undermining the existing power hierarchies, the implementation of these initiatives replicates the very asymmetrical relations of domination that they propose to dismantle, while further concealing systemic forms of oppression and discrimination.

On the contrary, a genuine effort to promote the ethical value of mutuality within a given institutional working culture through the implementation of pedagogies of relationality could assure the establishment of nonhierarchical – i.e. reciprocal – relationships of recognition between its employees and those invited to join its workforce. This implies that the development of a non-extractivist approach to social engagement goes beyond the simple formulation of a new mission statement grounded in abstract notions of collectivity. Instead, it calls for a radical renewal of the institution's working methodology by rethinking "the process, the way we relate to other people, the ways we have meetings with each other"[348], and so on. As already pointed out, for Vázquez the crucial problem when it comes to dominant curatorial approaches is that they "tend to focus on the thing, and not on the doing"[349]. Conversely, by shifting the priority from outcomes to working processes, the word 'institute' would cease to be only a 'noun' and become a 'verb'[350]. As designer,

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[346] Coulthard, 3.

[347] Coulthard, 40.

[348] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 207.

[349] Boston-Mammah et al., 208.

[350] Boston-Mammah et al., 205.

curator, and educator Prem Krishnamurthy asserted in reference to FKAWdW's process of transformation of its public identity:

> [T]he real frontier […] is not to change what you're making, but rather how you're making it. How is the team composed? Whom do you involve in a process? What are their roles? How do you relate to each other? Perhaps even more meaningful than what the identity ultimately looks or feels like is who created it, and by what means.[351]

Along the same lines, in the previous chapter I articulate how during the Public Input phase of the Renaming Process community members explicitly conveyed that the primary emphasis of this transformative initiative should not be on the name per se but rather on the name-change process. The focus of the NCI should be on "doing things differently to how the institutions usually acted in its decision-making processes"[352], and, specifically, on "the creation of a democratic methodology"[353] through which to revitalise its current management procedures.

The institution already moved in this direction by arranging the Online Survey and Public Forums, which allowed the "future vision of the institution"[354] to be sketched in collaboration with the Rotterdam community. However, if the driving purpose of the Name Change Initiative is to transform FKAWdW into a more inclusive and accessible institution in the long term, the following step to be undertaken by the institution is to involve new voices in its internal decisional structures[355]. Moreover, if as maintained during these public meetings art instituting is to be understood as a pedagogical practice actively serving the mission of socio-cultural transformation, the process of rethinking extractivist modes of instituting must encompass the creation of enduring forms of public engagement which ensure that the stakeholders community it wishes to enter in a reciprocal relation with "is diverse both in terms of demographics and forms of knowledge so as to keep the institution transforming and relevant"[356].

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[351] Prem Krishnamurthy, "Troika," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), 145.

[352] Brito Morfe et al., "Collective Learning in Practice," 172.

[353] Brito Morfe et al., 172.

[354] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 64.

[355] Ziherl, 64.

[356] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 214.

In other words, to be accountable for the public requests advanced, the process of transformation of its extractivist working culture cannot be approached exclusively as an intra-institutional matter. Rather, for a renewal of both its mandate and social licence to operate, community engagement must be at the very heart of this methodological challenge[357]. This requires the development of a working method through which to enter into a relationship of mutual recognition with the local community of stakeholders, which in turn is to be premised on a decentralisation of its ordinary institutional processes.

Accordingly, in the remaining sections of the present chapter, I focus on exploring the theoretical and practical facets of the mode of art instituting envisioned by the organisation to promote a non-hierarchical, pedagogical approach to social engagement and social change: collective learning. This is functional for evaluating the extent to which the reciprocal ethic of mutuality was operationalised within the novel institutent practices advanced during the NCI.

III.II **Collective Learning as an Art Instituting Approach**.

Before delving into the systemic changes implemented by the institution to undo its extractivist working culture and learn how to institute reciprocally, it is fundamental to unpack the curatorial discourse driving the theoretical and practical development of the Name Change Initiative. Such a first step is required to comprehend the extent to which the pedagogical and curatorial approach to social engagement it encourages can be deemed to be guided by the ethical value of mutuality. As previously mentioned, one of the core tasks to be endorsed by FKAWdW through its transformative endeavour corresponded to the definition of a working methodology that could contrast institutionalised extractivist working precepts, enabling the generation of a relationship of mutual recognition with the local community of stakeholders. Accordingly, the present section offers an introduction to the art instituting approach advanced by the institution, specifically as discursively articulated by those involved in its elaboration.

[357] Boston-Mammah et al., 214.

The institution's transformative journey was curated according to the "philosophy of collective learning"[358], meaning that this concept frames and guides each of the instituent politics and practices implemented under the NCI's banner. Collective learning is the approach to social engagement conceived by FKAWdW in an attempt to be accountable for the requests advanced by the local stakeholders during the Public Input phase. In this sense, it corresponds to both the organisational principle and the working method posited to shift away "from a corporate or top-down approach and instead towards a more lateral and pedagogical process"[359]. Essentially, this concept lies at the heart of the institution's endeavours to cultivate a new community of voices through the decentralisation of its internal decision-making processes and the introduction of innovative forms of public engagement.

This signifies that collective learning is the key conceptual tool employed by the organisation to address the challenge of social inclusivity. As a more horizontally structured organisational model, it was designed to further facilitate the involvement of the local public in the renaming process. As discussed earlier, an initial step in this direction was taken by the institution with the collection of public input through the Online Survey and Public Forums. The promotion of collective learning as a new operational principle represents the second step undertaken in this direction, with a focus on enhancing institutional mutuality rather than solely accountability. Significantly, this shift moves beyond understanding institutional transformation as a mere assimilation of external voices under the NCI's banner and towards rethinking the institution as a socio-cultural platform wherein voices from both the team and the community could converge and mutually learn from one another.

From this perspective, the rationale behind the principle of collective learning seems to be more aligned with promoting mutual exchange between the institution and the local community, rather than simply focusing on inclusivity. For instance, this is the reasoning that appears to drive the following statement from the new Director Cuy: "[W]hen there is an institutional aim for social inclusivity […] [w]e have to begin by thinking about being a receiver, someone that welcomes."[360]. Towards the end of the aforementioned interview, former CLIP participants provided insights into

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[358] Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, Fariba Derakhshani, Timme Geerlof, Stijn Huijts, Annet Lekkerkerker (Chair), Gabriel Lester, Annuska pronkhorst, and Katarina Kdjelar, "Announcement #3 – On the Selction and Ratification of a New Name" (September 30, 2020), in "Public Reports & Announcements," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), 125.

[359] Krishnamurthy, "Troika," 137.

[360] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 218.

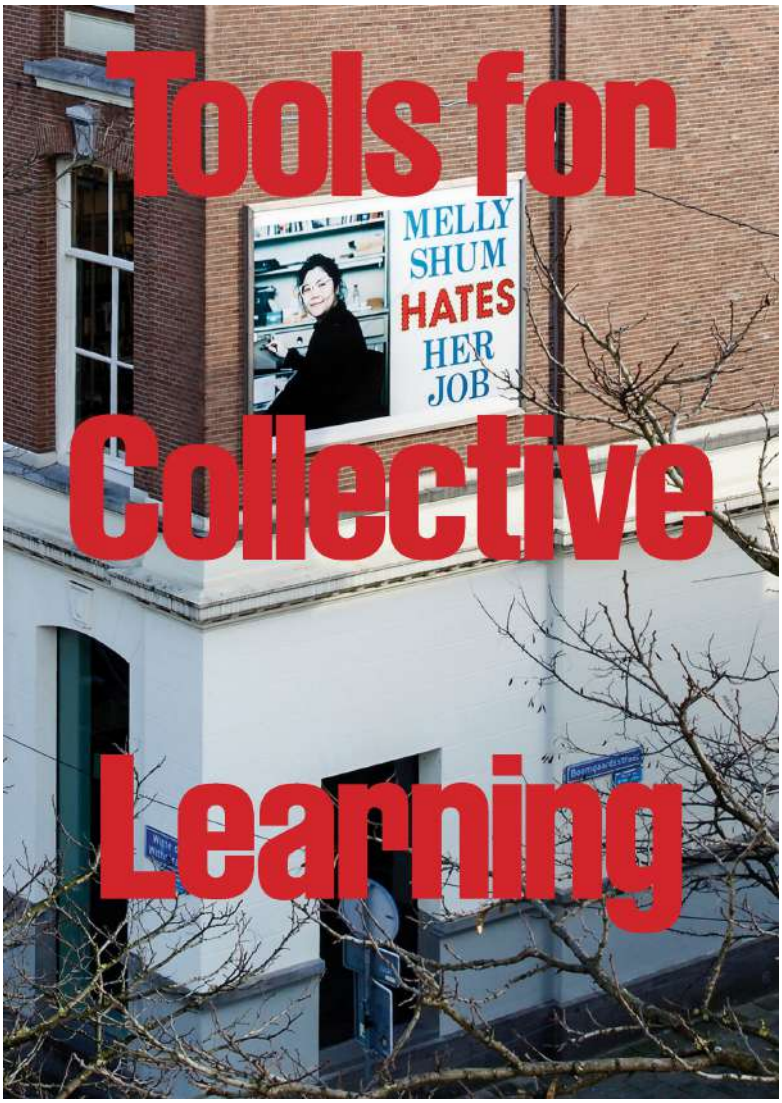

Fig. 6
Front cover *Tools for Collective Learning*
Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022.
Retrieved: Kunstinstituut Melly (official website).

their understanding of becoming a 'receiver' in a nonhierarchical pedagogical process. They emphasised that it involves "the act of stepping back from a position in which there is only room for one truth, or a singular narrative"[361]. In particular, Acqueene Wilson highlighted that the underlying effort of the working precept of collective learning is "the creation of a space and opportunities for others to share and learn, to find connection"[362]. In other words, at least from a theoretical perspective, this approach seems to aim at establishing a relationship of mutual recognition with its stakeholder community, centred around the socio-pedagogical potential of art.

[361] Brito Morfe et al., "Collective Learning in Practice," 189.

[362] Brito Morfe et al., 189.

In deciding to invite community members into its spaces, the institution aims to position itself as an active listener, engaging directly in the overall process of institutional change as one of collective learning; as articulated by the Cuy: "When an institution decides to chart an unknown path towards transformation, it's also learning."[363]. The idea at the root of this new organisational philosophy is indeed that of "learning by doing"[364], with theory and praxis reciprocally informing one another. On the one hand, such a bifocal understanding of collective learning was advanced as an attempt to pay heed to one of the main points stressed during the public forums about the new institutional mandate: the need for the institution to reimagine itself as a local promoter of education via the establishment of reciprocity between art instituting and pedagogy. On the other hand, it follows the belief shared by those involved in its elaboration that "experimentation and exploration situated within an applied context"[365] is the most generative approach to learning. Certainly, the theoretical development of this concept unfolded concurrently with its hands-on application[366].

In the chapter of *Tools for Collective Learning* titled "Troika", Prem Krishnamurthy – a leading figure in the theoretical and practical development of the institutional philosophy of collective learning – asserts that the generative potential of this pedagogical approach is to be situated in its "radical openness"[367]. That is, collective learning always already involves "time, attention, missteps"[368]. As explained by Krishnamurthy, dominant institutional working models are usually accompanied by "a relatively clear sense of role and power dynamics"[369] and, as a result, by a more definite set of expectations regarding the overall process. On the contrary, collective learning is a "less hierarchical and more open-ended [method]"[370] which crucially "requires a

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[363] Krishnamurthy, "Troika," 139.

[364] Krishnamurthy, 139.

[365] Krishnamurthy, 138.

[366] Prior to receiving its official designation, the logic underlying the pedagogical model of collective learning was already operational in several instituent structures developed at a preliminary stage of the NCI. This encompassed initiatives such as the scrutinised Online Survey and Public Forums organized for the collection of public input, as well as the *Work/Learn Programme* (later rebranded as *Collective Learning in Practice*). Both initiatives were implemented with the aim of empowering community members in steering the transformation of FKAWdW's identity.

[367] Krishnamurthy, "Troika," 140.

[368] Krishnamurthy, 139.

[369] Krishnamurthy, 141.

[370] Krishnamurthy, 137.

certain level of patience, *mutual* understanding, and the ability to allow expectations to evolve over time"[371].

As a "counter model of pedagogy from the top-down, hierarchical model of education"[372], collective learning also requires reconsidering in reciprocal terms the quality of the interaction between teacher and student. As Krishnamurthy articulates, if the learning process is to be collective, the hierarchical relational dynamics between the two parts must be undone, and the teacher must start "[w]orking with the students to create a communal space"[373]. To better exemplify this renewed mutual relationship, the author mentions the dual meaning of the Dutch word 'onderwijzen', which stands for both 'to teach' and 'to learn'[374]. Rather than an ultimate knowledge keeper, the educator must conceive of themselves as an "interlocutor, someone to offer structures and references and to ask questions, yet without knowing or pretending to know all the answers."[375]. In other words, as highlighted by Yahaira Brito Morfe, the essence of collective learning is: "we learn from you, but you also learn from us."[376] – an understanding that fundamentally aligns with the operational logic underlying the ethical principle of mutuality.

The chapter "Troika" provides several insights into the concrete forms that the principle of collective learning might assume when transposed into the realm of praxis. In particular, the instituent method favoured by the institution in the attempt to establish a more mutual decision-making process is that of "feedback"[377]. Considered from a terminological perspective, the word *feedback* already entails a certain dynamism, a movement back and forth; in its usage as a verb, 'to feed back' means "to return (a fraction of an output signal) to an input of the same or a preceding stage of the circuit, device, process, etc., that produced it."[378]. The reciprocal movement governing the practice of feedback is also accurately illustrated by Krishnamurthy's description of the so-called "Troika consulting"[379] method, a feedback-based exercise to be employed to enhance

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371 Krishnamurthy, 139 (emphasis added).

372 Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 206.

373 Krishnamurthy, "Troika," 143.

374 Krishnamurthy, 148.

375 Krishnamurthy, 143.

376 Brito Morfe et al., "Collective Learning in Practice," 188.

377 Ziherl, "Report #7," 99.

378 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "feed (*v.*)," last updated December 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7764090623.

379 Krishnamurthy, "Troika," 133.

collaboration in a work setting. The author defines troika consulting as a "three-way tool for learning"[380] based on "listening and feedback"[381] that can quickly generate "insights and understanding"[382] during collective working processes, and hence helpful for finding common ground in situations where multiple concerns and interests are at stake.

Implicit in any collective learning process is a profound commitment to substantive collaboration, akin to expressing itself verbally as a 'work with.' Accordingly, the pedagogical precept at the heart of troika emphasises "learning through dialogue"[383], an inherently "relational process"[384] which involves the practice of "collective questioning"[385]. Krishnamurthy explains that to collaborate with others in a generative manner, it is necessary to both give and receive "trust"[386], and only by embracing the "discomfort"[387] entailed in such a process is possible to actually "[transform] each other *mutually*"[388].

In this sense, engaging in the troika exercise proves valuable for establishing the foundation of "*reciprocal* trust"[389] that is essential for building meaningful and resilient connections. To make it more tangible, the author suggests a variation of the troika consulting method specifically designed to help a group embrace the discomfort required to kickstart a meaningful collaborative working process:

> Ask everyone in the room […] to complete a quick exercise: everybody has one minute to write down all the things that they 'fear' regarding this particular project. These can be personal or professional, individual or institutional fears. Then, proceeding round-robin style,

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380 Krishnamurthy, 133.

381 Krishnamurthy, 133.

382 Krishnamurthy, 133.

383 Callum Dean, Wooseok Jang, Nina Schouten, Alexander Tanazefti, Emily Turner, and Yan Zhihan, "Process in Process: A Statement on the Kunstinstituut Melly Identity System," in "Public Reports & Announcements," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), 155.

384 Dean et al., 155.

385 Dean et al., 155.

386 Krishnamurthy, "Troika," 140.

387 Dean et al., "Process in Process," 155.

388 Krishnamurthy, 135 (emphasis added).

389 Krishnamurthy, 150 (emphasis added).

> each person in turn shares one thing they fear. This loop continues for as many rounds as is necessary until the whole group has added what they would like to contribute.[390]

Titled "I fear"[391], this collective learning exercise appears to be an extremely generative tool for breaking down barriers that hinder the establishment of mutual trust and, consequently, entering into a reciprocal relationship with each other. This is how Krishnamurthy describes the experience of practicing this exercise: "[T]here was something about speaking fears aloud, collectively, that might have helped open up the room, and helped establish some commonalities. Perhaps this is because speaking about fears, particularly in a group you may not know well, requires – and maybe even endangers – a degree of trust"[392].

Considered within this discursive framework, collective learning as a pedagogical and curatorial approach ultimately appears to be predicated on the ethical value of mutuality. The overarching intention behind the development of this novel approach to social engagement seems to be the unlearning of those extractivist working precepts that would impede practising institutional reciprocity. Nevertheless, to evaluate the extent to which reciprocity between institutional discourse and praxis was reached at this second stage of FKAWdW's transformative journey, it is crucial to observe how the principle of collective learning was made operational. This includes underscoring the degree to which extractivist relational dynamics were still dominating the organisation's modus operandi notwithstanding the formal implementation of this new working precept. In essence, the next question to be addressed is: What course of action was undertaken by FKAWdW to integrate the collective learning principle into its institutional culture, and to what degree was the implementation deemed effective?

III.III **Exploring the Trials and Errors in Practicing Institutional Reciprocity**.

In the present section, I delve into the practical affordances of collective learning as a non-extractivist approach to social engagement by exploring the trials and errors in its implementation process. I begin with a concise overview of the systemic changes enforced in the management and

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[390] Krishnamurthy, 134.

[391] Krishnamurthy, 134.

[392] Krishnamurthy, 134.

decision-making structure of FKAWdW, introducing the art educational programme *Collective Learning in Practice*. Subsequently, I analyse a conversation between curator Jessy Koeiman and former CLIP participants through the lens of reciprocity, highlighting the challenges of practising mutuality within the extractivist relational dynamics present in the organisation.

When the moment of devising a roadmap to the Name Change Initiative arrived, one of the immediate tasks involved addressing "institutional agency"[393] – namely, to rethink "*how* and *with whom* major decision-making takes place."[394]. With this mission at the forefront, the philosophy of collective learning was introduced and proposed as a driving working principle for the majority of instituent politics and practices implemented as part of the NCI.

In particular, aligning with Vázquez's pedagogies of relationality, three core interconnected challenges were identified as crucial for establishing the renaming as a more horizontal and collaborative process. Firstly, the renewal of the "governance structures of the institution"[395], empowering the stakeholder community to have a say in internal decision-making processes. Secondly, there was an emphasis on engaging with the Rotterdam and broader publics through "sincere listening, learning, and accountability"[396]. Lastly, the necessity for "this process of accountability […] to be reflected within the internal structures and methodologies of the institution itself."[397]. This entails the redefinition of a new institutional mandate in conjunction with a profound transformation of the institution's modus operandi.

Hence, to foster a relationship of mutual recognition with the communities the institution aims to welcome into its spaces, FKAWdW must undergo an internal restructuring. This endeavour commences with a decentralisation of the decision-making power and a re-evaluation of the current management model. The onset of the NCI coinciding with the conclusion of the six-year tenure of the then-Director Defne Ayas facilitated such a renewal, as novel "leadership styles and administrative processes"[398] were introduced by the incoming Director, Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy[399]. Given that, at that time, decision-making authority was predominantly vested in the figure

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[393] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 60.

[394] Ziherl, 60 (emphasis added).

[395] Ziherl, 60.

[396] Ziherl, 60.

[397] Ziherl, 60.

[398] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 23.

[399] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 45-46.

of the director (albeit under the oversight of a Supervisory Board)[400], Cuy's mandate began with the recognition that the first changes to be carried out concerned undoing the hierarchical and rigid governance structure of the institution[401]. As the Director articulates, such a measure is vital for transforming the institution's relational ecosystem for "the management by and large determines the planning of where human and financial resources are sourced and invested, as much as with whom commitments are made."[402].

The first action undertaken to "restructur[e] the management pathways of the institution"[403] and cultivate a more diverse working culture involved a series of staff hires. Specifically, the process of reconfiguration started with the establishment of "new positions in the programming team"[404]. According to Cuy, this change pushed the institution

> to acknowledge – and, soon thereafter, to systemically and programatically include – different forms of knowledge and expertise beyond the histories and backgrounds, networks and references, and experiences and skills sets traditionally provided by the professional art and museums fields.[405]

The first job position established was that of *Curator Collective Learning* in 2018, with Jessy Koeiman appointed to spearhead the task of formulating "a new community-engaged approach to programming and to audience listening by the institution"[406]. Subsequently, the role of Research and Programs Manager was introduced in September 2019, filled by Vivian Ziherl, whose core task was to "help design and facilitate"[407] the Renaming Process. Concurrently, the institution's team underwent restructuring through a series of "promotions, fellowships programs, and other staff hires"[408]. Notably, Heba Soliman was appointed as *Guest Experience Manager* in September 2019, focusing on enhancing "visitor services and the connection of a new ground-floor space with the

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[400] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 60.

[401] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 23.

[402] Cuy, 23.

[403] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 60.

[404] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 23.

[405] Cuy, 23.

[406] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 60.

[407] Ziherl, 60.

[408] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 23.

upstairs galleries"[409]. Finally, an additional revitalization of the working culture was boosted through the recruitment of new members for the Supervisory Board in June 2019[410].

Upon implementing these systemic changes to its internal working structure, FKAWdW advanced to the second crucial step required for decentralising its decision-making processes: community engagement. This move acknowledges that, in the pursuit of social inclusion, the restructuring of the team must be complemented by a diversification of the institution's interlocutors[411]. In this sense, the first challenge faced by the organisation was to identify the specific publics it aspired to connect with[412], a point emphasised during Public Forum #3:

> Everyone wants 'inclusivity', but what does this mean? Who specifically are the audiences of interest to your institution that are meaningful? Who is the community that you want to reach? Currently this is still unclear. We're aware that you're transforming but it's unclear how.[413]

Rephrased within the context of my research, the query becomes: Whose mutual recognition is the institution aiming for? From the standpoint of reciprocity, it is neither conceivable nor appropriate to strive for 'including' everyone. Rather, if one of the core tasks driving the NCI is to diversify the institution's stakeholders and renovate its social license to operate by connecting to those communities that have been excluded so far, it is to them that its new public identity should be recognisable. Put differently, should resonate with the communities the institution aims to identify itself with. Therefore, to offer a meaningful response to these inquiries, the institution must adopt new practices that empower members of the local community in shaping both its transformative process and decision-making procedures more broadly[414]. Through this approach, the institution's

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[409] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 60.

[410] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 23.

In the course of 2019, the composition of the Supervisory Board changed as follows: Kees Weeda served as Chair until June 2019, succeeded by Annet Lekkerkerker as interim Chair from June 2019 onwards. Fariba Derakhshani, Timme Geerlof, Stijn Huijts, Gabriel Lester, Jeroen Princen (until June 2019), Annuska Pronkhorst (from June 2019), Nathalie de Vries (until June 2019), and Katarina Kdjelar comprised the rest of the board ("Melly Team," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. 2022, 265).

[411] Cuy, 23.

[412] Babayan et al., "Report #4," 89.

[413] Babayan et al., "Report #3," 87.

[414] Brito Morfe et al., "Collective Learning in Practice," 171.

new identity – encapsulated symbolically in its new name – will be collectively defined with its prospective public.

From this perspective, the pedagogical practice that had the greatest impact on the institutional working culture and its hierarchical infrastructure is the *Collective Learning in Practice* programme (named *Work/Learn Programme* until 2022). CLIP is an annual, experimental arts education project which was launched in 2018 (and is currently still ongoing)[415] as a response to the invitation advanced during the Public Input phase to centre art pedagogy in the process of re-imagining the institutional approach to social engagement. Specifically, as illustrated by Koeiman – curator of the programme's first two editions – the purpose underlying the establishment of this project was to directly involve emerging professionals (between seventeen and twenty-four years old) based in Rotterdam "in making enduring change in the institution"[416].

The objective of the remaining section is to assess the effectiveness of collective learning as a non-extractivist approach to social engagement. To this end, I conduct a discourse analysis of an interview held by curator Jessy Koeiman and former participants of the first two editions of the CLIP programme: graphic designer Yahaira Brito Morfe, guitarist Tayler Calister, curator Stijn Kemper, and creative entrepreneur and photographer Aqueene Wilson. Arranged in the summer of 2021 on the occasion of the publication *Tools for Collective Learning*, the goal of the conversation was, according to Koeiman, threefold: "[T]o identify where, as people and as an institution, we have learned; when and how we have failed; and how and why we could best learn with a community-in-the-making."[417]. Correspondingly, by examining how extractivist relational dynamics persisted within the organisation during this later stage of the NCI, I aim to highlight the challenges of practising institutional mutuality.

When participants were prompted to depict their overall experiences in the programme, a prevailing sentiment of frustration and annoyance surfaced[418]. The primary reasons cited for these feelings were associated with a perceived paternalistic attitude from most team members and, more broadly, with "how bureaucratic and hierarchical everything was."[419]. Notably, one participant's

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[415] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 15.

[416] Brito Morfe et al., "Collective Learning in Practice," 171.

[417] Brito Morfe et al., 172.

[418] Brito Morfe et al., 178-179.

[419] Brito Morfe et al., 179.

statement stands out as particularly emblematic when assessing whether an extractivist rationale still held dominance:

> It just made me feel that we were only there to check a box on some diversity checklist. We were being listened to, but nothing was getting done. […] So, we could have all these ideas, but at the end of the day nothing was going to be done with them. […] I remember the collective feeling of desperately wanting to be heard whilst also not being listened to.[420]

Precisely, the latter testimony points to the manifestation of what, as discussed in the first chapter, Ahmed refers to as institutional non-performativity:

> A tick is a check mark that says yes. A tick box approach is when an action is completed to indicate yes. If commitment can become a tick in the box, it suggests that institutions can make commitments without being behind them. […] As a result, ‘‘being behind’’ can become an institutional performance: a statement of commitment might create an illusion of the behind.[421]

Despite being invited to participate in the institution's transformative process, participants "still felt like it was not the intention that we would *do* something."[422]. Indeed, midway through assisting the institution in developing a new policy plan, participants of the second edition of the programme discovered that their efforts would not come to fruition since "the plan has already been written"[423]. Similarly, another participant interviewed expressed feeling constantly "pulled back, as though there were certain things we were not supposed or not allowed to do."[424]. These personal testimonies significantly echo the earlier-described "experience of the brick wall"[425], articulated by Ahmed as follows:

> We come up against the wall when a decision is made that is discontinuous with the institutional will. […] The gap between the signs of will (the yes or will to diversity) and

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[420] Brito Morfe et al., 179.

[421] Ahmed, *On Being Included,* 119.

[422] Brito Morfe et al., "Collective Learning in Practice," 180.

[423] Brito Morfe et al., 180.

[424] Brito Morfe et al., 179.

[425] Ahmed, *On Being Included,* 26.

> institutional will (the no or the wall to diversity) is noticeable only when one attempts to cross a limit[426]

As per one interviewee, the problematic attitude of "selective listening"[427] prevalent within the institution is linked to their young age: "It felt like we were not being taken seriously because of our age, and that was annoying."[428]. The participants were frequently labelled with the term "youngsters"[429], and generally "felt disconnected"[430] from the institution, as if they were not recognised as equals to other team members but rather:

> just [as] a group of people who will come and go, doing some odd jobs here and there, and then at some point it will finish. Or to put it differently: we were not fellows. […] [A]s participants of the Work-Learn Program we were seen as, to put it plainly, just some students who were somehow involved in the art scene who were allowed to do a project. There was no job-descriptive link between us and an employee.[431]

For participants in the first edition, this asymmetry in their relationship with the institution manifested in their isolation from the rest of the employees, with separate office hours and workspaces, resulting in minimal contact with staff members working in the building. As Kemper noted: "What I also remember is the actual physical distance between 'us' in the ground floor and 'them' in the offices two floors above us."[432]. Furthermore, the group was allowed to enter the institution almost exclusively "at moments that nobody would be at the office"[433]. Even when invited to attend staff meetings on rare occasions, was limited to that of spectators – "to witness the moments in which things were being decided."[434]. During the second edition of the programme, there was a gradual improvement, with participants reportedly having more contact with the team through workshops organised by staff members or the opportunity "to sit and discuss things with

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[426] Ahmed, 129.

[427] Brito Morfe et al., "Collective Learning in Practice," 178.

[428] Brito Morfe et al., 178.

[429] Brito Morfe et al., 178.

[430] Brito Morfe et al., 178.

[431] Brito Morfe et al., 181.

[432] Brito Morfe et al., 181.

[433] Brito Morfe et al., 181.

[434] Brito Morfe et al., 181.

them"[435]. Nevertheless, they still expressed the feeling of "a disconnect"[436] between them and the institution.

While to varying degrees, these testimonies collectively underscore a lack of mutual recognition, pointing to the un-reciprocal character of the relationship between the institution and the community members invited into its spaces, with only the latter side looking for recognition from the former. At this early stage of the NCI, the institutional approach to community engagement appears to be still extractivist in nature; as emphasised by Morfe: "I do not think they [the institution] started the process thinking: we are really going to learn something from these people. […] At first it was all so serious, everything had to look good for onlookers from the outside."[437]. New subjectivities were 'included' in the institution's spaces but not involved or integrated into its internal organisational processes; new voices were incorporated yet not listened to. In other words, no real decisional power over FKAWdW's transformative process was delegated to CLIP participants: "[T]hings were happening too far away from us to be able to have any influence upon the things we wanted to change."[438]. The two 'bodies' of knowledge were kept separate, with no real opportunity for dialogue or confrontation, hindering the practical application of the working principle of collective learning beyond the discursive realm. As Koeiman herself claims:

> The project had been conceived of as a Work-Learn Program, so the group was supposed to work and learn, whilst at the same time, as part of our collective learning concept, the institution was supposed to learn too. In practice though […] much of its processes remained mostly top-down.[439]

According to Kemper, despite being officially invited to make the institution "feel uncomfortable"[440] on account of its new philosophy of collective learning, what was lacking was precisely a "space for discomfort or room to take risk"[441]. Notwithstanding its "big wish for

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[435] Brito Morfe et al., 180.

[436] Brito Morfe et al., 181.

[437] Brito Morfe et al., 184.

[438] Brito Morfe et al., 181.

[439] Brito Morfe et al., 182-83.

[440] Brito Morfe et al., 178.

[441] Brito Morfe et al., 178.

change"[442], the institution was hesitant to embrace it, as "change ushers in uncertainty"[443]. Participants linked this fear to the "identity crisis"[444] the organisation was undergoing since the publication of the open letter. FKAWdW seemed to struggle with reconciling its seemingly clashing desires of "being a renowned art institution with an internationally highly regarded name showing innovative exhibition"[445] and "being of importance at a local level; to have tangible local influence and bring about change."[446]. That is, there was a fear that prioritizing the local would hinder its international standing[447]. Ultimately, according to Wilson, although the institution's stated drive was to "never give in to fear"[448], this soon became "beset by hypothetical reasons not to do things."[449].

In essence, despite the systemic changes enforced in the organisation's management and decision-making structure under the new discursive framework of collective learning, the extractivist hierarchy of relations and emotions was upheld. The lack of mutuality in the relationship of recognition between the institution and the members of the local stakeholder community invited to participate in its internal reality resulted in a performative engagement. This led to the constant management of negative emotions such as frustration, anger, and discouragement by the CLIP participants. In turn, Koeiman had to perform an even greater amount of emotional labour to "maintain a fun, motivating, inspiring, and productive atmosphere"[450].

However, regardless of the challenges that surfaced between the CLIP groups and the larger team, a critical analysis of the interview also highlights that the relationship of recognition between Koeiman and the CLIP participants, as well as the relational dynamics within the group itself, reached a level of reciprocity. Specifically, the curator played a crucial role in instructing the group on maintaining unity, motivation, and perseverance[451] – in other words, in guiding them towards practising pedagogies of relationality. During the interview, participants stressed "how their

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[442] Brito Morfe et al., 178.

[443] Brito Morfe et al., 178.

[444] Brito Morfe et al., 178.

[445] Brito Morfe et al., 178.

[446] Brito Morfe et al., 178.

[447] Brito Morfe et al., 178.

[448] Brito Morfe et al., 186.

[449] Brito Morfe et al., 186.

[450] Brito Morfe et al., 190.

[451] Brito Morfe et al., 186.

collaborative practices and collective learning increased confidence, trust, and solidarity with one another."[452]. Koeiman's openheartedness about her "own struggles"[453] with the institution's hierarchical infrastructure generated a shared sense of solidarity among the group, as expressed by Morfe when addressing the curator:

> [T]hose moments help you realize that you are not alone in your struggle […] it made me feel like: okay, if you are prepared to fight and make sacrifice for this, then why can't I? Can't I join you? Because I knew how much you wanted to change things too, and that for a long time you also felt you were just banging your head against the wall.[454]

The emergence of this sense of collectivity helped many group members to become increasingly "vocal"[455], both in terms of standing up for themselves and "speaking-up for each other"[456]. Specifically, in the conversation, Morfe and Wilson recount instances when fellow CLIP participants defended them when their names were consistently mispronounced by team members. These anecdotes serve as illustrations of their reciprocal efforts to "ma[k]e space and listened to each other […] recognising the importance of the polyphony"[457], as well as "example[s] of the sentiment that it is not just a name, but what the name stands for too."[458].

Moreover, it is through "little gestures"[459] of solidarity, such as those just described, that the institution started to learn to practice pedagogies of relationality. These vocal statements by the CLIP participants compelled the institution to gradually acknowledge "the gap that existed between an external commitment to collective learning and the internal reality."[460]. Consequently, with the unfolding of the renaming process, FKAWdW recognised the "need to start taking them

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[452] Brito Morfe et al., 172.

[453] Brito Morfe et al., 182.

[454] Brito Morfe et al., 179-182.

[455] Brito Morfe et al., 187.

[456] Brito Morfe et al., 187.

[457] Brito Morfe et al., 187.

[458] Brito Morfe et al., 187.

[459] Brito Morfe et al., 187.

[460] Brito Morfe et al., 190.

seriously"[461] and decided to set up a room for listening to their "input"[462]. This realisation materialised in the invitation extended to former CLIP participants (Morfe and Kemper) to join the NCI Advisory Committee, and later on, to be granted fellowships for participation in other projects[463]. Such decisions are described by the group as initial demonstrations of "*mutual* loyalty towards one another"[464], laying the foundation for an authentic relationship of reciprocal recognition to be established between the institution and those community members invited into its spaces. As Kemper emphasises, "For us it was a personal decision to want to remain involved with the institution, but it was also up to the institution to give us a position in which we could continue to do so."[465].

Ultimately, this analysis emphasises the significance of encountering and learning from challenges and mistakes in the pursuit of institutional reciprocity. As Koeiman notes in the interview's epilogue, in the early editions of the CLIP programme, the establishment of conditions conducive to collective learning (or, in Vázquez's to pedagogies of relationality) "was limited by the very hierarchical structures that the institution was seeking to transform"[466]. Accordingly, while only partially achieved at the moment, I suggest considering the CLIP programme as a genuine preliminary effort to dismantle the extractivist relationship between the institution and the local community, working towards the establishment of a relationship based on mutual recognition. On one hand, the examination of the feedback provided by CLIP participants revealed a degree of reciprocity within the group itself. In particular, I interpret the aforementioned anecdotes as sincere expressions of mutual care and as a collective "form of resistance"[467] against the extractivist dynamics at play between the group and the institution. On the other hand, despite initial frictions, the introduction of this instituent practice significantly impacted FKAWdW's hierarchical structure, especially in involving the local community in its transformative process. Indeed, this educational project eventually contributed not only to the broadening of the institution's public but also to that

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[461] Brito Morfe et al., 182.

[462] Brito Morfe et al., 183.

[463] For instance, fellowships were set-up on the occasion of the media programme *Melly TV* launched by the institution in 2021.

[464] Brito Morfe et al., "Collective Learning in Practice," 182 (emphasis added).

[465] Brito Morfe et al., 182.

[466] Brito Morfe et al., 190.

[467] Brito Morfe et al., 187.

of its team, particularly after the decision to hire or grant fellowships to several of its former participants.

In conclusion, while the concept of collective learning theoretically aligns with the ethical principle of mutuality, the pedagogical practices implemented as part of this novel approach to social engagement required time to yield the anticipated results within the institutional working culture. As I will elaborate further in the next chapter, it was only at a later stage of the NCI that the process of unlearning institutionalised extractivist working precepts started to generate outcomes, when FKAWdW began to embrace and practice the discomfort implied in any reciprocal pedagogical process: "For collective learning to unfold fully, the participants needed to feel trusted by the institution to be taken seriously, and, relatedly, to have the room for risk-taking and experimentation."[468]. Therefore, while the CLIP programme represents a first attempt to foster a non-extractivist, reciprocal relationship of mutual recognition with its stakeholder community, achieving reciprocity between discourse and praxis requires progressing towards the third and final stage of Vázquez's decolonial methodology: pedagogies of transition.

[468] Brito Morfe et al., 190.

CHAPTER IV

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TOWARDS A NEW INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY: INSTITUTING PEDAGOGIES OF TRANSITION

The present chapter concerns the third and last moment of Vázquez's decolonial scheme: *pedagogies of transition* (or *re-existence*). I start the chapter by discussing the latter in connection to the theoretical framework of Simpson's Nishnaabeg ethical intelligence, identifying *vulnerability* as the core reciprocal ethic sustaining this pedagogy, and therefore as the third and final operational precept key to the development of a non-extractivist approach to art instituting. Accordingly, the rest of the chapter aims to understand how pedagogies of transition were practised by FKAWdW, and, relatedly, to assess the extent to which the ethical principle of vulnerability was valorised as part of its new institutional working culture. With this purpose in mind, I analyse the chapter "The Renaming Process" by Vivian Ziherl and the "Acknowledgements" section written by Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, which I integrate with the remaining Public Reports and Announcements published during the Name Change Initiative. While focal points in the first half of the second section are several crucial decisional moments and learning experiences that marked the roadmap to the Renaming, in the second half I turn my attention to the so-called "Renewing phase" of the NCI (November 2020–February 2021), with specific regards to the name launch together with the promulgation of the long-term policy plan *The Politics of Care* (2021). Finally, the last section aims to evaluate whether reciprocity between institutional discourse and praxis was reached at this concluding stage of Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art's process of systemic and symbolic transformation into Kunstinstituut Melly.

IV.I **On *Vulnerability* as a Reciprocal Ethic**.

In this section, I examine Vázquez's pedagogical model within the framework of Nishnaabeg grounded normativity, contending that *vulnerability* constitutes the third and final ethical value essential for achieving reciprocity between institutional discourse and praxis. My focus is on elucidating how the adoption of this principle is pivotal in sustaining the ongoing transformation of the institution's public identity.

The final step of the decolonial model proposed by Vázquez corresponds to 'pedagogies of transition or re-existence'[469]. Fundamentally, this pedagogy revolves around the recognition that meaningful institutional transformation necessitates a receptivity to change and a willingness to be transformed[470]. This is because a crucial precondition for any genuine commitment to dismantling colonial structures is rejecting the notion that an institution alone holds the power to instigate change. Central to pedagogies of transition is hence the acknowledgement that self-reflection is insufficient for internal growth. Instead, genuine change involves listening to critiques, suggestions, and propositions, specifically those coming from those who "know the questions that we are dealing with, so that the questions won't go away."[471]. In other words, for a radical overhaul of organisational culture to occur, it is necessary "to foster openness and welcome the possibility that others can help you, us, in community building and cultural understanding"[472].

Similarly, from the perspective of Nishnaabeg ethical intelligence, there can be no change without exchange: change cannot be unidirectional; it cannot be thought of as an isolated activity. Rather, it is intrinsically "contextual and relational"[473]. That is, transformation is generated through an ongoing, deep and reciprocal ethical engagement with grounded normativities, wherein 'engagement' is to be intended as "a strategic, thoughtful process in the present as an agent of change – a *presencing of the present* that generates a particular kind of emergence that is resurgence."[474]. Indeed, according to Simpson, the one of radical resurgence is an "emergent and

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[469] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 210.

[470] Boston-Mammah et al., 218.

[471] Boston-Mammah et al., 215.

[472] Boston-Mammah et al., 218.

[473] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 151.

[474] Simpson, 20.

generative process"[475] based on "[e]veryday"[476] collective acts of generative refusal which create alternative modes of living that are "process-centered"[477]: "Nishnaabeg worlds were created, collectively, out of struggle, and the process of creating and creation was given to us, not the results of that. The process, not the results."[478].

Accordingly, pedagogies of transition can be understood as encompassing the process of learning to practice what, following Vázquez, I refer to as institutional vulnerability[479]. This is the last, fundamental ethical principle to be valorised as part of the new working culture promoted by FKAWdW. Accordingly, the latter corresponds to the third core difference between a reciprocal mode of instituting and an extractivist one. It is crucial to note that my conceptualisation of the notion of vulnerability is confined to an institutional context, employing the term metaphorically without delving into its affective or emotional dimensions.

For Vázquez, an institution becomes vulnerable when "the process is disclosed publicly whilst it remains in progress."[480]. Practising institutional vulnerability thus fundamentally requires unlearning the extractivist logic of market production, which constantly urges art organisations to "[hold] the discourse […] the power of enunciation, of representation"[481]. Pedagogies of transition emphasise shifting the institution's focus on the "power of reception, of listening, o[n] how we become richer by receiving the other, instead of affirming ourselves"[482]. This shift aligns with the deep transformation advocated by decoloniality[483]. By the same token, Simpson contends that a profound commitment to the Radical Resurgence Project is based on understanding that

> *how* we live, *how* we organize, *how* we engage in the world – the process – not only frames the outcome, it is the transformation. *How* molds and then gives birth to the present. The *how* changes us. *How* is the theoretical intervention. Engaging in deep and reciprocal Indigeneity

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[475] Simpson, 49.

[476] Simpson, 17.

[477] Simpson, 22.

[478] Simpson, 226.

[479] Vivian Ziherl, "Report #9 – Public Review Report" (September 27, 2020), in "Public Reports & Announcements," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), 121.

[480] Ziherl, 121.

[481] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 218.

[482] Boston-Mammah et al., 218.

[483] Boston-Mammah et al., 218.

> is a transformative act because it fundamentally changes modes of production of our lives. It changes the relationships that house our bodies and our thinking. […] If we want to create a different future, we need to live a different present, so that present can fully marinate, influence, and create different futurities.[484]

When it comes to FKAWdW's transition to a new public identity and hence to the establishment of its renaming as a vulnerable process, it is crucial to implement policies and practices that ensure transparency and flexibility in institutional procedures. Specific attention should be placed on valuing transparent communication and openness to external feedback. Similar to the institution's efforts with the Public Forums, this can involve creating conflict-positive spaces where diverse viewpoints are negotiated, allowing every decision-making process to "become democratic and learned"[485]. Practising institutional vulnerability is indeed about "working through and with the tensions in society, and not just performing goodness for and outside society"[486]. "[D]ecolonising takes time"[487] precisely because negotiating "new positions, experiences, and perspectives"[488] requires dedicated and ongoing efforts. This approach ensures that tensions are acknowledged openly and informed by various perspectives[489].

Another essential aspect for enhancing institutional vulnerability involves establishing mechanisms to sustain the continuous evolution of the renewal process of the institution, starting from the "understanding that this is a long-term transformation"[490]. During Public Forum #1, specific "emphasis was given to the necessity of [establishing] platforms that would encourage a continuous dialogue"[491] with its stakeholder public. As asserted by Vázquez, this goal can be attained through a consolidation of the "way of working"[492] (i.e. the new approach of art instituting)

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[484] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 19-20.

[485] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 215.

[486] Boston-Mammah et al., 215.

[487] Boston-Mammah et al., 213.

[488] Boston-Mammah et al., 213.

[489] Boston-Mammah et al., 215.

[490] Veronika Babayan, Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, Jesst Koeiman, marjolijn kok, and Vivian Ziherl, "Report #1 – Public Forum 1: Legacies and Futures" (August 29, 2020), in "Public Reports & Announcements," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), 83.

[491] Babayan et al., 83

[492] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 215.

developed in the course of the NCI – that is, by laying it down as a fundament of its "institutional culture"[493] and hence "as a model for how [the institution] will be governed"[494].

One way in which this can be realised is by resuming the collaborative decision-making structures established to involve the local community in the Renaming Process, creating "a parallel governance structure"[495] that can be invoked whenever "important decisions need to be taken"[496]. Rather than being a temporary or one-time initiative, institutional practices like the Online Survey and Public Forum should become "permanent institutional practice[s]"[497]. This would help prevent the transformative process from being confined and mitigate the risk of the institution reverting to its previous extractivist modus operandi. Notably, involving community members who are not part of FKAWdW's permanent staff or supervisory board in these decision-making structures would "safeguard ways of democratising the institution and opening it up to other voices and other bodies"[498].

Finally, fostering institutional vulnerability necessitates an ongoing commitment to engaging with members of the local community. As emphasised earlier, Nishnaabeg's ethical system embodies "[a] way of living that was full of community. A way of living that was thoughtful and profoundly empathetic. A way of living that considered, in a deep profound way, relationality."[499]. From this perspective, it becomes imperative to unlearn the extractivist relational logic inherent in one-time partnerships, where creative voices are invited for a singular project and exploited for the institution's benefit[500]. Instead, this should be replaced by the reciprocal understanding that sustained collaboration is essential for long-term viability.

Accordingly, a new project should be viewed as a vulnerable moment when an institutional partnership is unveiled to the public[501]. It should also include a "maintenance"[502] plan outlining how

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[493] Boston-Mammah et al., 215.

[494] Boston-Mammah et al., 215.

[495] Boston-Mammah et al., 215.

[496] Boston-Mammah et al., 215.

[497] Boston-Mammah et al., 215.

[498] Boston-Mammah et al., 215.

[499] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 22.

[500] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 204.

[501] Boston-Mammah et al., 204.

[502] Boston-Mammah et al., 204.

this instituent relationship will be consistently renewed in the future. In the context of a radically reciprocal approach to instituting, the "real work"[503] lies not solely in conceiving new art projects but in devising vulnerable practices that generate and nourish enduring modes of engagement grounded in the ethical principles of accountability and mutuality. Prioritising the delegation of "some accountability and power, governance, and participation, to the stakeholders who participated in the name change"[504] and integrating them into broader institutional processes exemplifies the preferred approach to nurturing "long-term relationships"[505] of mutual recognition with the local community.

I now turn to observe how Vázquez's pedagogies of transition were practised by FKAWdW in the course of the final stage of the Name Change Initiative. This is functional to evaluate the extent to which the reciprocal ethic of vulnerability was valorised within its new approach to art instituting, specifically as related to "community outreach and stakeholder management"[506]. To this end, in the following section I explore the roles assumed by the *Name Change Initiative Work Group* (NCIWG) and the local community of stakeholders during the Renaming Process by outlining several crucial decisional moments as well as the resulting learning experiences that marked the process of renewal of the institution's public identity, both preceding and accompanying the final act of renaming itself.

IV.II **Work in Progress at *FKAWdW***.

This sub-chapter is divided into three separate sections. I start by introducing the internal decision-making structure established by the institution to set up the renaming as a collective learning process: the *Name Change Initiative Work Group* (NCIWG). I then proceed by observing some of the measures advanced by the latter to enter into dialogue with the local community throughout the name-change process. In the second part of the section, I move to analyse the moment of ratification of the new name, evaluating whether the transition to a new institutional identity can be deemed to

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[503] Boston-Mammah et al., 204.

[504] Boston-Mammah et al., 215.

[505] Boston-Mammah et al., 204.

[506] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 15.

have unfolded in a manner that was vulnerable to the requests of those community members involved in the process, and therefore whether the selection of a new name can be deemed to seal the creation of venue of mutual social learning. Finally, I conclude the section by turning my attention to some of the long-term politics and practices implemented in parallel to the name launch to maintain the institutional process of transformation open to further developments. Once again, the overarching purpose is to comprehend to what extent reciprocity between discourse and praxis was reached at this final stage of the NCI.

iv.ii.i **Unnaming**.

The initial arrangement of the Name Change Initiative points to an early institutional commitment to preserving the vulnerability inherent in this transformative journey. As previously discussed, the decision to change the institution's name came about in a matter of months during the summer of 2017, with the official Renaming Process taking place in a brief period during the autumn of 2020[507]. However, the overall initiative developed according to "a multi-year timeframe"[508] and, for the time being, it "continues to unfold"[509]. The rationale behind this gradual progress is attributed to the deliberate choice of "valu[ing] lasting structural change over short-term symbolic action"[510] from the very inception of this process. In particular, the effort to cultivate a new institutional working culture through the development and implementation of a more decentralised and collaborative pedagogical approach to art instituting – namely, collective learning – slowed down the institutional processes considerably[511].

The internal management structure primarily accountable for promoting a vulnerable approach to institutional transformation is the *Name Change Initiative Work Group* (NCIWK). Established in October 2019 as part of the process of "diversification of the team"[512], the NCIWG

[507] Cuy, 15.

[508] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 46.

[509] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 15.

[510] de Graaf, "Art as a Platform for Change," 46.

[511] de Graaf, 46.

[512] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 23.

was formed by various members of the institution[513]. These were selected through a rotational approach, allowing staff to enter and exit the group as needed[514]. It consisted of an "agile and responsive decision-making structure"[515], which was enhanced through a series of general staff meetings and training sessions centred around both the renaming process and the selection of a new name[516]. Starting from November 2019, the group meetings were held weekly and were centred around the discussion and evaluation of ideas and the definition of new tasks, with every member offering their judgement about any potential institutional operation[517].

One of the major responsibilities appointed to the NCIWG was to lay down the name transition as a collective learning process, and with it "the challenge of involving a community in collectively carrying out meaningful change at the institution"[518]. As articulated in the third chapter, in translating the concept of collective learning into the realm of praxis, the practice of feedback stood out as the privileged instituent methodology for gathering internal and external input as regarding the institutional transformative process and future identity[519]. Accordingly, the NCI Work Group eventually sorted out a multi-step working structure comprehending three key novel instituent practices for community engagement, and terminating with a final decision-making meeting between the Director and the Supervisory Board: an Online Survey, a series of five Public Forums, and an external Advisory Committee[520].

The NCI Work Group actively engaged in practising institutional vulnerability on several other occasions throughout the Renaming Process. First, in the decision to leave the just-outlined roadmap "open to revision based upon feedback both internally and from external agents such as Forum Moderators and public responses"[521]. This regulation eventually led to the institution of a

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513 Ziherl, "Report #7", 101.

Refer to "Report #7 – On the Public Input Phase of the Renaming Process" (September 22, 2020) for details on the composition of the NCI Work Group.

514 Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 61.

515 Ziherl, 61.

516 Ziherl, 61.

517 Ziherl, "Report #7", 101.

518 Cuy et al., "A Name is a Debt," 15.

519 Ziherl, "Report #7," 99.

520 Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 61.

521 Ziherl, 61.

Public Review, requested by moderators Rolando Vázquez and Quincy Mahangu during one of the Forums that took place in the summer of 2020[522]. This additional instituent structure was conceived as a 'Town Hall' moment – namely, as a moment of public confrontation and sharing between the institution and its stakeholders[523] – to be held between two closed-door moments of the Renaming Process: the Advisory Committee's last meetings and the Director and Supervisory Board's final judgement[524].

Moreover, the vulnerability of the roadmap to renaming was further safeguarded by the NCIWG as it stipulated that "all phases of the process would produce publicly available reports"[525]. Compiled and released online after each public assembly, the reports outlined "the findings and learnings"[526] of these moments of communion, therefore consisting of the materialisation of a portion of the collective knowledge produced during the NCI. As a common resource, these public documents became crucial to the "institutional decision-making, from identifying the naming criteria and name selection to imagining and sketching out the graphic design for the chosen name."[527]. Furthermore, by making such knowledge public, the NCIWG aimed to promote "transparency, and to contribute to best practices and 'lowering the threshold' for further institutional change."[528]. As noted above, the Work Group itself drew upon the collective knowledge generated from previous instances of institutional transformation to formulate the renaming itinerary. From this perspective, this decision can be interpreted as an effort to practice institutional reciprocity by reciprocating the favour.

Additional shifts in the established decision-making structure were then carried out on account of exceptional circumstances that arose in the larger ecological system. Specifically, these running changes were undertaken during what came to be identified as the second phase of the Renaming Process (March–June 2020), and developed in the aftermath of the advent of two phenomena that had an impact on a global scale: the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives

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[522] Ziherl, 61.

[523] Ziherl, "Report #9," 121.

[524] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 61.

[525] Ziherl, 61.

[526] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 14.

[527] Cuy, 14.

[528] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 61.

Matter movement[529]. First, the spreading of the coronavirus in March 2020 provoked a compression of the timeline, which posed logistical constraints and exerted pressure on the institution's members[530]. As described by Ziherl, during this phase "the connectivity between the Work Group and the general staff was challenging […] decisions were being taken quickly, and at the same time work-from-home arrangements afforded few avenues for interaction."[531]. Eventually, the overall roadmap had to be rescheduled, with the renaming announcement postponed from March 16 to the end of June[532].

Still, as the Black Lives Matter movement evolved and racial justice protests started to proliferate globally, the NCIWG decided to hasten the announcement, with the official date selected corresponding to the anniversary of the publication of the *Open Letter to Witte de With*: June 14, 2020[533]. As explained by Ziherl, this symbolic date was chosen precisely with the purpose "to dedicate attention and acknowledgement to this originating action."[534]. However, the pathway to the renaming was further and significantly modified as the Dutch activist group *Helden van Nooit* (translatable in English as *Heroes of Nothing*) staged a protest action on June 10, during which three public buildings in the city Rotterdam were stained with red paint, among which also the façade of FKAWdW [Fig. 7][535].

The latter event brought extreme pressure on the institution to change its name, leaving the Work Group conflicted between the will to safeguard the vulnerability and "the integrity of the process itself, and the challenges of meeting public demands or public appearance with internal transformation."[536]. When the NCIWG ultimately chose to reassert its commitment to adhere to the established schedule, this decision once again triggered intense criticisms. Activist Quinsy Gario, who was one of the artists involved in the exhibition *Cinema Olanda: Platform*, voiced his disapproval in an article dated June 13, arguing that:

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[529] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 14.

[530] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 62.

[531] Ziherl, 63.

[532] Ziherl, 62.

[533] Ziherl, 62.

[534] Ziherl, 62.

[535] Ziherl, 63.

[536] Ziherl, 68.

> Dragging this out another six months is insulting and using the protest as a badge of honour until that moment strips it of its urgency. And so, this is another call to the institution to do better, to stop dragging its feet and change that awful name already.[537]

Fig. 7
Building façade detail,
following protest action by activity group *Helden van Nooit* on 10 June 2020,
Witte de With Center of Contemporary Art, Rotterdam.
Retrieved: NOS Nieuws (official website).

The controversy prompted Ziherl to recognise that the current naming would pose "a serious barrier to public engagement"[538], and hence the urgent need for the former name to be divested from the Renaming Process. Accordingly, Ziherl wrote a proposal advocating for "a period of namelessness"[539], which received unanimous support from the NCI Work Group. As of that moment, the institution was regarded with the acronym 'FKA WdW'. The decision was then

[537] Quincy Gario, "The Protracted Renaming of Witte De With, and the Capability of Doing Better," *dipsaus* (June 13, 2020), last accessed February 1, 2024, https://www.dipsaus.org/exclusives-posts/2020/6/13/the-protracted-renaming-of-witte-de-with-and-the-capability-of-doing-better.

[538] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 63.

[539] Ziherl, 63.

announced on June 27, 2020, and symbolically accompanied by the removal of the name plaque and signage from the building façade[540].

Overall, I interpret this operation as a genuine effort to be vulnerable to the demands and changes that arose within the institutional ecosystem. In other words, although this statement might sound counterintuitive, I believe that thorughut this process thet institution attempted to prioritise the aforementioned 'power of reception, of listening' over the 'power of enunciation, of representation'. As elucidated by Cuy, the institution initially sought to avoid "being performative or merely working on symbolic levels"[541]. However, in the described scenario, the symbolic act of un-naming became a crucial element in fostering a mutual exchange between the institution and its public stakeholders. In Cuy's words, "[O]ur name cessation was effective in so far it was a symbolic currency of sorts that we exchanged for participation."[542].

Essentially, rather than "a way of not doing things"[543], this "institutional performance"[544] was enacted precisely to "ma[k]e things happen"[545]. Furthermore, while it was suggested that the name cessation could have occurred earlier in the NCI, such a resolution would not have "produced the same positive effects"[546]. This is primarily due to the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, which not only persuaded initially resistant stakeholders but also "silenced part of the opposition"[547], the renaming process to unfold with less resistance. As Cuy puts it, "BLM created an opening, or, better yet, it accelerated a process of unlearning"[548].

In retrospect, the un-naming carried out by the NCI Work Group emerges as a crucial institutional measure, proving essential for the unfolding of the overall renaming process as a vulnerable and responsive endeavour. This action laid the groundwork for a potential name change that could align with the requests put forth by the local community of stakeholders. As articulated in

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[540] Ziherl, 63.

[541] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 207.

[542] Boston-Mammah et al., 209.

[543] Ahmed, "How Not to Do Things with Words," 1.

[544] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 207.

[545] Boston-Mammah et al., 208.

[546] Boston-Mammah et al., 208.

[547] Boston-Mammah et al., 208.

[548] Boston-Mammah et al., 208.

the Public Review Report: “The process of un-naming embraces the pedagogical imperative of un-silencing and undertakes the stance of *vulnerability*.”[549].

The public challenges outlined above, when viewed collectively, served as significant learning experiences for the NCI Work Group, particularly in the context of Vázquez’s pedagogies of transition and the ethical imperative to “learn to practice an institution in a vulnerable way”[550]. Now, it is opportune to shift focus towards observing the tangible outcomes of this collective learning process. In the subsequent section, I delve into the final stage of the Renaming, specifically examining the process of selecting a new name. I aim to once again understand the extent to which the actual transition to a new institutional identity is guided by the ethical principle of vulnerability. This evaluation, especially in connection to the new institutional mission of building an open community of learning, helps determine whether the chosen name can be deemed to be the product of a collective learning process.

iv.ii.ii **Renaming**.

The third stage of the roadmap to the Renaming involved the Public Input phase involving civic participation. This phase formally began on June 14, 2020, and encompassed an Open Survey along with five Public Forums[551]. As extensively discussed in the second chapter, during these community gatherings, participants recommended that the institution initiate the process of envisioning a new institutional identity by reflecting on the socio-cultural role it aspires to occupy within the framework of Rotterdam: “What art is according to the institution and the place in society that you wish to inhabit[?]”[552]. Consequently, I stressed the significance of addressing the mission of social inclusivity in contextual and relational terms to enhance institutional accountability. This entails considering the institutional ecosystem in conjunction with the specific context in which it operates, and, consequently, establishing a mode of instituting centered around active engagement with the local community. Essentially, it is imperative that the selection of a new name is approached in alignment with the new positionality the institution seeks to convey and to which it will be held

549 Ziherl, “Report #9,” 123 (my emphasis).

550 Ziherl, 121.

551 Ziherl, “Report #7,” 99.

552 Babayan et al., “Report #4,” 89.

accountable in the future. Now, it is time to assess the extent to which the organization was receptive – i.e. vulnerable – to such public requests.

Following these community gatherings, the findings and written reports were delivered to an external Advisory Committee[553]. The Advisory Committee consisted of thirteen individuals, described as "emerging and longstanding leaders in the field of arts and culture in Rotterdam"[554]. Notably, two of them were former participants in the art educational programme *Collective Learning in Practice*: Yahaira Brito Morfe (CLIP 2019/20) and Stijn Kemper (CLIP 2018/19)[555]. After the initial meeting, the Committee assembled a shortlist of three names: *Haven* (suggested by the Online Survey); *kin* (suggested by the general staff); and *CAT / KAT (Contemporary Art & Theory)* (suggested by the NCI Work Group)[556]. However, during a discussion round titled "What's missing?"[557] held within the session, Morfe and Kemper suggested the scrutiny of an additional option which eventually gained "a strong sentiment"[558]: *Melly*.

This option found inspiration in the name of a recently established "public-engagement space"[559] as part of the project to redesign the institution's ground floor. Specifically, in the spring of 2018, this space underwent a temporary renaming to 'Untitled' and was conceptualized as the central unlearning/learning site for the collective experimentation of the pilot edition of the CLIP project (2018/2019), which focused on the development of novel forms of community engagement[560]. Over the course of the one-year program, the venue was subsequently renamed 'MELLY' and transformed from a traditional art gallery into a versatile programming space. It hosted dynamic and predominantly free-admission programmes that aimed to welcome more

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[553] Ziherl, "Report #7," 99.

[554] Cuy and Ziherl, "Report #8," 105.

[555] For a complete list of all the members of the Advisory Committee, see Report #8 (September 23, 2020), available on page 105 of *Tools for Collective Learning* or online at the following link: http://change.wdw.nl/reports-media/report8/.

[556] Cuy and Ziherl, 107.

The Advisory Committee gathered for a total of two meetings. The first was held on Wednesday, September 23, 2020, with a primary focus on devising a set of recommendations for the shortlisted names. The second session occurred in December 2020 and concerned the name launch as well as the development of related policies (Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 65).

[557] Cuy and Ziherl, "Report #8," 109.

[558] Cuy and Ziherl, 107.

[559] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 22.

[560] Cuy, 22.

diverse audiences within the institution[561]. Eventually, with the gradual unfolding of the NCI, the ground floor's metamorphosis came to symbolise "the face of a changing institution"[562], while becoming a case study for FKAWdW's process of renaming[563].

Fig. 8
Billboard detail, *Melly Shum Hates Her Job* by Ken Lum, 1990, Rotterdam.
Retrieved: Ken Lum Art (official website).

The choice of the name for the ground floor was inspired by Ken Lum's artwork titled *Melly Shum Hates Her Job* (1989). The photograph features "a disheveled young woman sitting in her cramped office"[564], accompanied by a sign echoing the artwork's title. Originally used for advertising the artist's exhibition and the institution's inauguration in 1990, the artwork remained permanently

[561] Cuy, 21.

[562] Cuy, 21.

[563] Cuy, 22.

[564] Ken Lum, "Melly Shum Hates Her Job" (artwork), last accessed January 31, 2024, http://kenlumart.com/melly-shum-hates-her-job/.

installed in a billboard format on the side of the institution building, following a request from the local working community [Fig. 8][565].

The selection of the name had dual considerations. On one hand, CLIP participants chose it due to the local resonance and their familiarity with the billboard, as well as the "common experience"[566] evoked by the "wry humour"[567] of the artwork, which resonated with the Rotterdam's working culture. On the other hand, the name choice hinged on the inherent artistic intent of the work, exploring "histories of migration"[568]. In essence, as Kemper asserts, the pivotal factor in settling on this name was the very 'human aspect' of Melly herself: "[T]here is a person behind the image of the woman in the artwork. A person who has experienced similar things to all of us."[569].

When the Advisory Committee was tasked with providing a written assessment of strengths and weaknesses for each of the suggested names, 'KAT' was initially commended among the shortlisted three. However, ultimately, the majority of support coalesced around 'Melly'[570]. In the Advisory Committee's final report, two main motivations were highlighted for this name proposal, reflecting a vulnerable approach that aimed to uphold reciprocal ethics of accountability and mutuality. The first emphasised its association with the city of Rotterdam through Lum's public artwork and the portrayed subject, Melly Shum, who represented an 'antihero' compared to the old name's reference to a coloniser memorialised as a national 'hero' (accountability)[571]. The second reason focused on its invocation of the collective learning "process carried out by a diverse group of emerging arts professionals in Rotterdam"[572] (i.e. the CLIP programme), symbolizing "a new generation and ownership of the institution from many different perspectives"[573] (mutuality).

Moving along the Renaming roadmap, the next step after the Advisory Committee's assessment was the Public Review, an instituent structure that, as seen above, emerged from the

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[565] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 22.

[566] Cuy, 22.

[567] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 66.

[568] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 22.

[569] Brito Morfe et al., "Collective Learning in Practice," 185.

[570] Cuy and Ziherl, "Report #8," 107.

[571] Cuy and Ziherl, 109.

[572] Cuy and Ziherl, 109.

[573] Cuy and Ziherl, 109.

Public Input phase. Held both in person and online on September 26, 2020, the Public Review drew a total attendance of seventy-six people[574]. During the gathering, the overall outcomes of the Renaming Process were presented, and feedback was provided regarding the various name proposals, particularly in their relationship to the broader process of institutional reconfiguration[575]. The following excerpt from the Public Review Report can be interpreted as a response to the question "What does it [the new name] stand for?"[576], which was presented as input to FKAWdW during the Public Forum #3 entitled 'Naming and Communication'.

> Whereas it might avoid certain risks to select a name that is anonymous and international, the criteria of accountability implies a need for the memory of a process […] 'Melly' is a name connected to local identity, and connected to narrative; both the narrative of the institution's naming case study (from Untitled to MELLY), and the narrative of moving from a patriarchal colonial power to the recognition of a working-class woman. 'Melly' is a name that, by now, signifies not only a person but a process that the institution has undergone, both architecturally and socially, from the 'bottom up'.[577]

On September 30, 2020, the outcomes of the Public Review were presented to the new Director, Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, and the Supervisory Board, who unanimously chose 'Kunstinstituut Melly' as the new name for the institution, which officially took effect on January 27, 2021[578].

Following the ratification of the new name, the so-called 'Renewing' phase of the NCI unfolded (November 2020–February 2021). During this period, the institution laid the groundwork to sustain its transformative journey as an ongoing – i.e. vulnerable – process[579]. Accordingly, in the upcoming section, I move to examine the Renewing phase of the NCI. Special attention is given to the outputs of the Renaming Process, such as the name launch and the release of the long-term policy plan titled *The Politics of Care* (2021). This examination seeks to understand whether and how the institution maintained the transformative process of its institutional culture and public

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574 Ziherl, "Report #9," 119.

575 Ziherl, 121-123.

576 Babayan et al., "Report #3," 87.

577 Ziherl, "Report #9," 123.

578 Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 66.

579 Ziherl, 66.

identity in the long term.

iv.ii.iii **Renewing**.

With the unveiling of the new name on January 27, 2021, the institution entered the crucial final stage of its Renaming Process, especially concerning the future developments of the Name Change Initiative. As discussed in the first section regarding Vázquez's pedagogies of transition, adopting the reciprocal ethic of vulnerability as a core working value involves formulating a plan to persist in the work accomplished thus far on the institutional culture. This entails learning how to maintain "Kunstinstituut Melly […] a work in progress"[580]. This process includes solidifying the systemic changes nurtured in the organisation's infrastructure and modes of instituting through the NCI, while also exploring innovative ways to keep the overall transformation open to further developments and sustainable in the long term.

In this sense, rather than as a conclusive moment, Kunstinstituut Melly approached the name announcement as a privileged public occasion to sow the seeds for the continual unfolding of the NCI. As stated by Vivian Ziherl, the final renaming marked the beginning of a new "process […] of learning and exploration"[581] for the institution. The ethical value of vulnerability seems to drive the pledge of commitment expressed by Director Cuy, such as "The will to change, to experiment, and to adapt is part of our institutional mandate"[582], or the following one pronounced by Curator Collective Learning Koieman: "[T]he institution's goal for collective learning will be an ongoing process and will require keeping up the work"[583]. Given these discursive statements, attention needs to be shifted to the realm of institutional praxis. Accordingly, in what follows I examine some of the forward-looking politics and practices implemented by the organization during its transition toward a new institutional identity based on the principle of collective learning.

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[580] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 70.

[581] Ziherl, 66.

[582] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 23.

[583] Brito Morfe et al., "Collective Learning in Practice," 172.

Officially labelled as a moment of 'renewing', this final phase comprehended not only the name launch but also the implementation of an action plan dedicated to its new public mission of building an open community of learning[584]. As stated by Ziherl:

> Just as the new name was selected as an embodiment of the name-change process, the renaming launch was an occasion for renewal. As such, it was embedded in partnerships, in pedagogy, and in gratitude expressed through celebration.[585]

Consequently, the announcement of the name coincided with the introduction of what could be considered the institutional "maintenance"[586] programme, disclosing several long-term projects and related partnerships: *The Politics of Care* (2021).

Drafted in 2019, the latter is a multi-year policy plan that delineates the goals and strategies central to the institution's newly established ethical commitment to community engagement[587]. The policy, conceived as a work-in-progress over several years, was formulated with "an ecosystem-based framework"[588]. In the "Acknowledgments" section of *Tools for Collective Learning*, Cuy clarifies that the guiding principle behind this instituent policy was to combine 'artistic experimentation' with 'social inclusivity'[589], keeping the philosophy of collective learning at the centre of FKAWdW's course of action. The institution aimed to achieve this by fostering "qualitative public engagements"[590] through the promotion of "activities at the intersection of art and education"[591] and by working with partnerships as a basis. Viewed from this perspective, *The Politics of Care* attest to the institution's commitment to continue the process of nurturing a reciprocal relationship with the local community after the NCI, thus translating the ethical principle of vulnerability into practical application.

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584 Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 66.

585 Ziherl, 66.

586 Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 204.

587 Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, "Acknowledgments," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), 257.

588 Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 24-25.

589 Cuy, "Acknowledgments," 257.

590 Cuy, 257.

591 Cuy, 257.

Another way in which the organisation practised pedagogies of transition was by making permanent some of the instituent structures and practices in its decentralisation project, thereby solidifying collective learning as its new approach to art instituting. Examples include retaining the Name Change Initiative Work Group "as a feature of the management structure"[592] and continuing the CLIP Programme. Simultaneously, the vulnerability of the new working infrastructure was further ensured through "a stimulated time cap on the tenure of directors"[593]. This regulation aimed not only to safeguard "the continual renewal of the institution's vision and networks"[594], but also to preserve the long-term sustainability of the intellectual and emotional labour performed by these leading figures. The underlying idea is that periodically introducing new perspectives within the institution would compel the director to delegate and take breaks from their responsibilities, thus preserving their well-being while maintaining the momentum of change.

While exploring each output of the Renaming Process goes beyond the scope of this paper[595], I will conclude this section by briefly turning to the long-term and slowly-evolving group exhibition *84 STEPS* (April 2021 – November 2023) [Fig. 9]. I selected this project because it directly stems from the implementation of the above-mentioned policy *The Politics of Care*, as well as from the institution's transformative journey more broadly. Additionally, it was specifically inspired by the activities and programmes organised in the ground-floor gallery by CLIP participants.

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[592] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 70.

[593] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 24.

[594] Cuy, 23.

[595] Several were the experimental projects launched in concomitance with the name announcement, each involving intersecting partnerships (Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 66-67). First, the design of a new graphic identity for the institution, which corresponded to the third edition of the CLIP programme. Second, a digital launch campaign guided by the concept line 'New perspectives make me grow' and including 'intergenerational conversations' with notable personalities from Rotterdam. Significantly, this project was developed in partnership with the Rotterdam-based digital marketing and creative company Brand New Guys, whose founder and director Cye Wong-Loi-Sing already actively engaged in the renaming process (for example, as moderator of one of the Public Review sessions), and which operates at the intersection of culture, storytelling and technology. Third, a community television programme entitled *Melly TV*. Conceived as a platform for sharing the learnings of the institutional process of renaming, it was designed by Research and Programs Manager Vivian Ziherl together with Curator of Collective Learning Jessy Koeiman and other members of the institution's education team. It involved partnerships with three local and international agencies: the independent and non-profit Jewish-American feminist periodical Lilith Magazine, the just-mentioned Brand New Guys, and the local TV station Open Rotterdam. *Melly TV* comprised three distinct episodes titled "Vulnerability" (27 January 2021), "Joy" (3 February 2021), and "Learning" (10 February 2021). The programme featured talk shows, local guests, and commissioned art projects. For further details, refer to Report #13 (corresponding to the press release dated 26 January 2021). Finally, the podcast *Name Takes* was launched to carry on and make publicly available the institution's research on "stories and histories of naming, name changes, and name sayings" (Cuy, "Acknowledgments," 258), which, as articulated in the second chapter, started to unfold right from the outset of the NCI.

Fig. 9
Exhibition entrance *84 STEPS*,
Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam, 9 April 2021 – Sunday 24 September 2023.
Retrieved: Kunstinstituut Melly (official website).

The significance of this exhibition is evident in its title, which refers to "the number of steps"[596] connecting the building's ground and top floors [fig.8]. The exhibition itself was arranged to symbolise a gradual evolution or "upscaling"[597] of the space and activities previously organised in the ground-floor gallery. As discussed earlier, this gallery was renamed MELLY during the first edition of the CLIP programme in 2019, eventually becoming an inspiration for the renaming process. Accordingly, 84 STEPS was conceived "as an artistic environment"[598] on the third and last floor of the institution's building and was curated following the institutional principle of collective learning, with its combined approach to both art theory and practice. Over two years, the exhibition

[596] Cuy, "Acknowledgments," 257.

[597] Cuy, 258.

[598] Cuy, 257.

unfolded through a series of art installations and regular trainings open to the general public, focusing on the theme of well-being, particularly mental health[599].

The exhibition's title, setting, and programme underscore a commitment to the ethical value of vulnerability. More precisely, they point to the institutional desire to continue and enhance the systemic transformation of the institutional working culture and hierarchical infrastructure initiated by the NCI. As Cuy articulates, through this exhibition, "we have begun scaling-up; the dynamism and openness experienced in MELLY [...] is being brought upstairs, throughout our building, into the institution as a whole."[600]. In essence, 84 STEPS represents a concrete example of what a non-extractivist approach to social engagement might entail, particularly for what concerns nurturing a reciprocal relationship with the local community of stakeholders in the long run and beyond the specific discursive framework of the NCI. Ultimately, I propose to view this exhibition as an example of best practices in nurturing institutional vulnerability within an art institutional context.

Returning to the broader process of institutional transformation, as I will delve into more thoroughly in the upcoming chapter, the first tangible outcomes of the practice of reciprocal ethics are represented by the selection of 'Melly' as the new institution name. From this perspective, it was the establishment of the Name Change Initiative Work Group that in the first place enabled the enhancement of institutional vulnerability. Throughout the Renaming Process, the NCIWG indeed

> had the capacity to then extend a stance of *vulnerability* and strength further towards external advisors, consultation, and public engagement in such a way as to not only hear critique but to critically comprehend and strategically *transform with* it.[601]

Despite the "[f]rictions"[602] that frequently arose among staff members during their collaboration, the institution of this "novel management and decision-making structure"[603] ultimately "facilitated greater enfranchisement of the staff"[604], and, above all, "provided an internal structure for *institutional reciprocity* and deliberative process."[605].

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[599] Cuy, 257.

[600] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 22.

[601] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 69 (emphasis added).

[602] Ziherl, 68.

[603] Ziherl, 68.

[604] Ziherl, 68.

[605] Ziherl, 69 (emphasis added).

Ultimately, the selection of a new name symbolically sealed an effective, "enduring […] change in the working culture of the institution"[606], for the latter finally learnt how to put into practice the working precept of collective learning – that is, how to enter in a reciprocal relation with its local community. When asked during the interview if they "felt that any of the learning experiences were *reciprocal*"[607], Morfe stated that, on the one side, "a crucial outcome"[608] of the CLIP programme was that "the institution has learned how to learn"[609], "the process was just longer than what initially expected."[610]. Specifically, what the institution eventually learned from the involvement of the local community in its transformative process is how "to be more open to new things […] [d]are to fail […] and to be *vulnerable*"[611]. Conversely, as Morfe continues:

> Something the institution taught me was to be persistent, and if you can get enough people to follow you then you can really bring about change, big or small. […] And now, three years later we can see that things have changed, and we can point to how we contributed to that too. We were part of that. We brought that about.[612]

Hence, a key lesson shared by both sides is that learning "is an ongoing process after all"[613], and, accordingly, that radical change is "a slow process, perhaps slower than the institution was subconsciously willing to admit."[614].

Although this should already serve as an indicator of the FKAWdW's transformative journey unfolding as a radically reciprocal and pedagogically-oriented process, a comprehensive understanding of the achieved reciprocity between the discourse and praxis of institutional transformation at the final stage of the NCI requires further exploration. It is essential to delve into the extent to which the new name is an embodiment of the collective learning process undergone by

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606 Brito Morfe et al., "Collective Learning in Practice," 190.

607 Brito Morfe et al., 184 (emphasis added).

608 Brito Morfe et al., 172.

609 Brito Morfe et al., 184.

610 Brito Morfe et al., 183.

611 Brito Morfe et al., 185-186 (emphasis added).

612 Brito Morfe et al., 186.

613 Brito Morfe et al., 184.

614 Brito Morfe et al., 185.

the organisation through the praxis of reciprocal ethics. In essence, this involves examining whether the renaming, as a symbolic transformation, effectively encapsulates the systemic process of renewing the institution's cultural mandate and social license to operate.

Fig. 10
Building façade detail, details, following the name launch on 27 January 2021,
Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam, 2021.
Retrieved: Kunstinstituut Melly (official website).

IV.III ***Kunstinstituut Melly*** **as a Venue of Mutual Social Learning?**

In mapping out the trajectory of the Name Change Initiative, a crucial consideration that emerged centred around the role the symbolic act of renaming would play within the overarching "transformative initiative"[615]. This consideration, in turn, delves into the intricate relationship between the new name and the broader renewal of the institutional working culture. In this sense, in

[615] Cuy, 13.

the aforementioned interview, CLIP participants raised thought-provoking questions such as: “What does it mean for an institute to change its name? How does that change its tone of voice?”[616].

As mentioned above, the Name Change Initiative was grounded in the early acknowledgement that any real attempt to pursue social inclusivity was to be rooted in a systemic transformation of the institutional infrastructure[617]; as claimed by Director Cuy in “A Name is a Debt”: “[S]ystemic change is needed for a resignification of marks and symbols to endure”[618]. However, its promoters also recognised the significance of visualising these infrastructural changes by making them more tangible[619]; for instance, in the same chapter Cuy also asserts that: “[S]ymbolic changes are required to make visible the ongoing transformations”[620].

What this essentially implies is that, in instituting radical reciprocity, the dichotomy between symbolic change and systemic change needs to be dismantled. Accordingly, the aim is to establish a reciprocal relationship between the systemic and the symbolic, recognising the equal significance of both. The solution involves selecting a name that reflects the collective unlearning-learning process undergone by the institution. This chosen name should embody the three decolonial pedagogies – positionality, relationality, and transitivity – along with the corresponding ethical principles – accountability, mutuality, and vulnerability – that guided Kunstinstituut Melly’s transformative journey. Ziherl encapsulates this concept in the statement: “A new name is significant in as much as it is *reciprocal* to the cultural processes that it symbolises.”[621].

From the specific perspective of pedagogies of transition, the new name should embody the new cultural mandate of “mutual social learning”[622] carried forward throughout the NCI, actively serving as a commitment to the institution’s stakeholder groups. The name selected should be able to situate the new identity of the institution by epitomising the transformations in its working culture, particularly those related to its public mission and social licence to operate. Simultaneously,

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[616] Dean et al., “Process in Process,” 155.

[617] Boston-Mammah et al., “Positionalities, Potentialities,” 213.

[618] Cuy, A Name is a Debt,” 21.

[619] Cuy, 13.

[620] Cuy, 25.

[621] Ziherl, “The Renaming Process” (my emphasis), 64.

[622] Ziherl, 64.

it should become a commitment to "the institutional trajectory"[623] the organisation aims to follow. As stated in the Public Forum #2: "The renaming process should better identify the institution's constituencies: its public, partners, and its own process of accountability, to keep them alive and active."[624]. In this way, institutional discourse and praxis would reciprocally inform one another, with the new name becoming a "promise or pledge"[625] for the future – that is, representing both a statement acknowledging the transformation undertaken thus far and a commitment to continue such a process.

Accordingly, observing the character of the relationship between systemic and symbolic change can be a method for assessing whether reciprocity between institutional discourse and praxis was reached at this concluding stage of Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art's metamorphosis into Kunstinstituut Melly. Indeed, the final point to be addressed in concluding my analysis of the NCI is whether the transition to a new public identity is a symbolic output of a more profound and enduring systemic transformation of the institution's extractivist working culture – that is, whether it seals the collective process of learning how to practice a reciprocal mode of art instituting. This involves evaluating the extent to which the new name symbolically enacts the ethical principles of accountability, mutuality, and vulnerability practised by Kunstinstituut Melly through pedagogies of positionality, relationality, and transitivity. In turn, this is functional to my overarching research purpose of assessing whether and how by learning to practice reciprocal ethics it is possible to develop a non-extractivist approach to art instituting – that is, to establish a reciprocal movement between thinking and organising within a given institutional working culture.

First, and concerning the reciprocal ethic of accountability observed in chapter two, the new name must be reciprocal to the institution's histories and infrastructures – its cultural archive – and the new institutional mandate the institution wishes to be accountable for. During Public Forum #2 (moderated by Vázquez), participants stressed that: "In the criteria for renaming we present the dilemma of revisiting history, and the task of un-silencing and visualizing both the past and the present, and imagining the future."[626]. In this sense, the choice of 'Kunstinstituut Melly' appears to

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[623] Veronika Babayan, Sofía Hernández Chong Cuy, Jeroen Lavén, Rolando Vázquez Melken, and Vivian Ziherl, "Report #2 – Public Forum 2: Legacies and Futures" (August 29, 2020), in "Public Reports & Announcements," in *Tools for Collective Learning*, eds. Cuy et al. (Rotterdam: Jap Sam Books and Kunstinstituut Melly, 2022), 85.

[624] Babayan et al., 85.

[625] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 66.

[626] Babayan et al., "Report #2," 85.

signify a deliberate effort to commemorate or "keep a historical memory"[627] of the renaming process and be accountable for it in the years to come, as the name holds the traces of the institution's collective unlearning-learning journey.

Moreover, the criterion of accountability fundamentally implies that "the name should not fall into a given neutrality and universality […] It should rather move from the abstract to a grounded positionality."[628]. In this context, the name 'Melly', symbolising the figure of an 'anti-hero' as mentioned earlier, leads to a profound transformation in the institution's public identity. It shifts the perception from being "an icon of empire to that of a young immigrant woman"[629], serving as a poignant reminder of its mandate for social inclusivity and its commitment to becoming a cultural platform that embraces all voices. To phrase it differently, the new naming embodies the institutional positionality that the organisation aspires to achieve.

Second, and regarding the criteria of mutuality examined in chapter three, it is necessary to establish reciprocity between the new name and the ecological system where it is situated. From this perspective, given the popularity of the figure of 'Melly' and the familiarity of the Rotterdam community with the artwork installed on the institution's building, the name 'Kunstinstituut Melly' surely prioritises "the institution's relationship to the city"[630], emphasising the desire of establishing a relation of mutual recognition with the local publics before any international audience. Furthermore, it also stands as a pledge to those stakeholders who identify with the name 'Melly,' promising that the institution "will be a space for them"[631]. In other words, the new name embodies the process of renewal of the institution's social licence to operate.

Lastly, and concerning the reciprocal ethic of vulnerability considered in the previous sections of the present chapter, the renaming must be reciprocal to the overall pedagogical process undertaken by the institution. In this respect, former CLIP participants maintain that the transition towards a new institutional identity marked a significant "moment of learning"[632] for the institution. In deciding to send back all the shortlisted names and to support the option the group already suggested three years before, the Advisory Committee asserted its agency over the decision-making

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[627] Ziherl, "Report #9," 121.

[628] Babayan et al., "Report #2," 85.

[629] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 66.

[630] Ziherl, 66.

[631] Ziherl, 66.

[632] Brito Morfe et al., "Collective Learning in Practice," 172.

process, forcing the institution to confront its vulnerability[633]. As stated by Morfe, it was only then that

> [t]he roles had been reversed, and now we were the one making the institution feel uncomfortable. […] That is when the *recognition* came, when the institution said: "You are right, this is indeed the best name." […] I felt so proud to have been part of it, to know that at long last we had finally being heard, knowing […] how hard we had fought.[634]

As highlighted in the preceding chapter, at its core collective learning as a working precept fundamentally requires that "you take a step back so someone else can step forward"[635]. According to Wilson, it is from "the willingness to allow others to try"[636] that "you practice being *vulnerable*"[637]. By eventually choosing to "take a step back from the process"[638] and start to make space for divergent opinions to emerge and be listened to, the institution facilitated the active involvement of other voices in its transformation journey. Consequently, this allowed the new identity of the institution to evolve collaboratively with the local community. In acknowledging its own "mistake"[639] and realising that it does not always have to opt for "the most radical, the newest, or most completely different approach"[640], the institution embraced the inherent "discomfort"[641] embedded in any meaningful process of collective learning.

In conclusion, I maintain that 'Kunstinstituut Melly' is indicative of the process of infrastructural transformation fostered via the NCI, symbolising the institution's accountability, mutuality, and vulnerability to the local community of stakeholders. Specifically, through reciprocal pedagogies, the organisation learned to practice the situated, relational, and processual ethical principles of accountability, mutuality, and vulnerability. Put differently, it managed to establish the

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633 Brito Morfe et al., 172.

634 Brito Morfe et al., 184 (emphasis added).

635 Brito Morfe et al., 189.

636 Brito Morfe et al., 186.

637 Brito Morfe et al., 186 (emphasis added).

638 Brito Morfe et al., 185.

639 Brito Morfe et al., 184.

640 Brito Morfe et al., 185.

641 Brito Morfe et al., 184.

process of renewal of its public identity in a manner that was accountable, mutual and vulnerable – i.e. reciprocal – to its local community of stakeholders. As similarly stated by Ziherl:

> [T]he Renaming Process […] enacted a renewed vision for the institution in its relationships with communities, location, and education; its structures for internal processes and decision-making; and its capacity for both accountability and institutional vulnerability.[642]

In other words, the renaming is grounded in the unlearning-learning process undergone by the institution through the praxis of reciprocal ethics. This symbolic change serves as an embodiment of the transformation nurtured in relation to its extractivist modes of instituting. It marks a more enduring, systemic shift in its working culture and infrastructure, ultimately leading to the establishment of reciprocity between institutional discourse and praxis. As stated by Koeiman, "By embracing its vulnerability and encountering its own blind spots, listening to critiques, and taking feedback seriously, the institution began to learn,"[643], eventually managing to re-imagine itself as a venue of mutual social learning. Ultimately, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art's systemic and symbolic transformation into Kunstinstituut Melly unfolded as radically reciprocal and pedagogically-oriented process.

[642] Ziherl, "The Renaming Process," 59.

[643] Brito Morfe et al., "Collective Learning in Practice," 172.

CONCLUSION:

RADICAL RECIPROCITY AS AN ANTI-EXTRACTIVIST INSTITUENT TOOLBOX

Mistakes produce knowledge.
Failure produces knowledge because engagement in the process
changes the actors embedded in process
and aligns bodies with the implicate order.
The only thing that doesn't produce knowledge
is thinking in and of itself,
because it is data created in dislocation and isolation
and without movement.[644]

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson,
As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance (2017)

In the present thesis, I delved into the transformative journey of Kunstinstituut Melly, formerly Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, as it engaged in the Name Change Initiative (NCI). More precisely, the analysis centred on the institution's efforts to undo its extractivist working culture via the promotion of a multiplicity of pedagogical practices rooted in a set of situated, relational, and process-oriented working principles. The primary objective was to understand how the adoption of radical reciprocity as an ethical and pedagogical framework could pave the way to a non-extractivist mode of instituting. Fundamentally, the key research question guiding this investigation was: *How can pedagogical practices grounded in reciprocal ethics inform a non-extractivist approach to art instituting?* In the following paragraph, I briefly summarise the methodological steps undertaken to address this question.

In Chapter I, I laid out the theoretical foundation of radical reciprocity as an alternative approach to art instituting by contrasting it with extractivism. On the one hand, this was done through the ethical framework provided by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's Radical Resurgence Theory*;* on the other hand, the criticisms raised in the *Open Letter to Witte de With* against the extractivist dynamics driving the art project *Cinema Olanda*: *Platform* served as a practical backdrop as well as a preliminary introduction to the case study. Subsequently, by juxtaposing Simpson's theoretical account with the decolonial model delineated by Rolando Vázquez in *Tools*

[644] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 20.

for Collective Learning, I pinpointed three ethical principles that differentiate a radically reciprocal and pedagogically-oriented approach to institutional transformation from an extractivist one, which formed the analytical framework for my critical examination of the NCI.

Accordingly, the latter unfolded in three chapters, each dedicated to a specific ethical principle and related pedagogy, tracking the transition of FKAWdW from an extractivist to a reciprocal ethos. Chapter II delved into pedagogies of positionality, examining the ethical principle of accountability and its practical manifestation in the preliminary stage of the development of the NCI. Chapter III explored pedagogies of relationality, focusing on the ethical principle of mutuality and its actualisation into the working precept driving the discursive and practical development of this transformative project – namely, 'collective learning'. Lastly, Chapter IV addressed pedagogies of transition, analysing the reciprocal ethic of vulnerability and its tangible expression during the final stage of the initiative.

I concluded the case study analysis by evaluating the quality of the relationship between the symbolic act of renaming and the systemic changes advanced in the working culture of the organisation, with the broader aim of assessing whether there was reciprocity between discourse and praxis in the process of renewal of its public identity. Eventually, I maintained that the transformative journey of 'Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art' into 'Kunstinstituut Melly' was grounded in the progressive cultivation of a non-extractivist, radically reciprocal working culture. Specifically, I contended for the new name to symbolise the institution's accountability, mutuality, and vulnerability to its local community of stakeholders, while becoming the statement of an ongoing commitment to its new cultural mandate of collective social learning.

In essence, I consider the Name Change Initiative as a tangible and ongoing collective effort to dismantle institutionalised extractivist working precepts, one that is receptive and emblematic of a wider decolonial movement currently unfolding within the Western cultural landscape. As I conclude this examination, my aspiration is to have equipped the reader with an anti-extractivist instituent toolbox, in compliance with the ethos of reciprocity as well as in alignment with the pedagogical imperative that subtends *Tools for Collective Learning*. This is to be intended as a preliminary and open-ended set of ethical guidelines to be embraced and practised for cultivating a radically reciprocal institutional culture, as well as an account detailing the "intricacies"[645], setbacks, and failures that engaging in such a transformative journey might entail. Both facets are

[645] Cuy, "A Name is a Debt," 13.

intrinsic components of the collective knowledge generated through conscientious research. In other words, by articulating and sharing the learnings gained from critically scrutinising the NCI, the intention is to offer potential pathways towards radical institutional transformation, while also highlighting common pitfalls to prevent.

Still, while I hope for this thesis to provide meaningful insights to its readers, it is imperative to acknowledge and address its limitations. First of all, the research on radical reciprocity as a non-extractivist mode of art instituting is confined to the situated context of the Kunstinstituut Melly case study. Consequently, the applicability of the findings to other contemporary art institutions undergoing analogous transformations in the Global North remains uncertain. In this sense, a comparative analysis or a broader sampling of cases could enhance the robustness of the conclusions and argumentation presented in future studies. Secondly, the analysis heavily relied on the retrospective documentation provided in *Tools for Collective Learning*, which surely circumscribed my portrait of the Name Change Initiative. This research constraint not only limits the real-time capture of nuanced developments during the transformation process but also offers more possibilities for potential discursive manipulation of the project's narrative by the institution. Lastly, concerning the analytical tools employed, the exploration of the theoretical affordances of reciprocity within the ethical frameworks of feminist and decolonial theory prioritised a mutual and generative understanding of the concept. While the research scope dictated this choice, it represents a specific lens through which reciprocity is examined, which neglects a comprehensive investigation of its potential transactional understandings, hence overlooking some of its conceptual limitations.

Building on the groundwork laid by this thesis, forthcoming research could delve into diverse theoretical interpretations of the concept of reciprocity to enrich its nuanced understanding. Additionally, future research endeavours could enhance the impact of pedagogical practices grounded in reciprocal ethics by exploring alternative case studies and conducting comparative analyses in diverse institutional settings. The concept of reciprocity could be further enriched if brought into conversation with multiple case studies, as these would provide a more nuanced and tangible understanding of its practical affordances and contribute to broadening the applicability of the insights gained from Kunstinstituut Melly to different cultural and geographical contexts.

Moreover, collecting and integrating empirical data through one-to-one or group interviews with diverse local stakeholders – such as team members, external collaborators, and audiences

involved in the Name Change Initiative – could offer a more multifaceted account of extractivist relational dynamics at play within the institutional working culture. In turn, this inclusive approach would yield a more comprehensive view of the conditions necessary for institutional reciprocity.

In exploring future research directions within the realm of anti-extractivist initiatives, a critical area to delve into involves a more thorough investigation of the reproductive dimensions of institutional praxis. For instance, the incorporation of feminist perspectives centred around the notion of 'radical care' could deepen our understanding of radical reciprocity as a mode of art instituting by providing deeper insights into the long-term sustainability of the emotional and intellectual dimensions of the labour performed by cultural workers. As argued by Teana Boston-Mammah in the much-cited "Positionalities, Potentialities", in the present-day context, it is more and more urgent to find effective ways for cultural organisations to "stay fresh"[646]. This imperative extends beyond preventing the institutionalisation of certain practices and procedures, and it involves addressing and limiting the risks of burnout, which are notably high in work environments where personal identity and work identity often intersect.

From this perspective, I believe that evaluating the degree of reciprocity between internal and external care structures within an organisation could serve as a valuable starting point for assessing the need for additional pedagogical practices, especially those related to self- and community care. For example, future research endeavours could focus on proposing practical tools and recommendations for introducing care practices at an intra-institutional level. The implementation of such care pedagogies would significantly contribute to maintaining the well-being of the institutional ecology of relations and emotions over the long term.

Ultimately, this research sought to underscore the importance of persistently questioning extractivist working cultures while striving to instil reciprocal ethics and pedagogies within cultural institutions. Through a critical examination of the transformative endeavour of Kunstinstituut Melly, the intent is to lay a foundation for sustained explorations into radically reciprocal modes of art instituting that prioritise accountability, mutuality, and vulnerability as ethical values in social engagement. I have highlighted the pressing need to move beyond surface engagement characterising institutional responses to structural inequality and discrimination. The call is to start cultivating diverse and

[646] Boston-Mammah et al., "Positionalities, Potentialities," 216.

inclusive cultural spaces by prioritising the valorisation and nourishment of the delicate ecology of relations lying at the foundation of every institutional system. And, significantly, to do so despite the inherent possibility of failing in the process – for, as gleaned from this discourse, "Genuine learning is about exploration, self-understanding, and treading in unfamiliar territory."[647]. My aspiration is that future decolonial projects, both in theory and in practice, will continue to unravel the pedagogical and ethical complexities of generative commitments to social justice and social change, advancing towards truly transformative and equitable – i.e. radically reciprocal – institutional cultures.

[647] Krishnamurthy, "Troika," 139.

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