

Museums in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity

Fred Wilson's Mining the Museum (1992)

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I will argue here that museums in the modern/colonial world (that is, the way of life, economic principles, political structures, and models of subjectivities that originated in the sixteenth century with the emergence of the Atlantic commercial circuits) had and still have a particular role to play in the colonization of knowledge and of beings. The questions then are (1) how to decolonize the museum and (2) how to assess what a decolonial option reorienting the work museums can do (e.g., in a nutshell, reproducing the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality or entering in a spirit of *epistemic and aesthetic disobedience* undoing what museums did in modern/imperial history: learning to unlearn and to enact museums for decolonization of being and of knowledge).

Epistemic and Aesthetic Disobedience: On Modernity/ Coloniality and the Decolonial Option

Regarding the colonization of knowledge, just remember that at the same time that Europe accumulated money through the extraction of gold and silver in the sixteenth century, and through the exploitation of the Caribbean plantations and the massive slave trade in the seventeenth century, Europe also accumulated *meaning*. Museums and universities were and continue to be two crucial institutions for the accumulation of meaning and the reproduction of the coloniality of knowledge and of beings. By this I mean a certain ideal of the subject of subjectivity that, in its extreme manifestations, you can see today in television, the marketing and advertising in the *New York Times* or in any equivalent magazine or major newspaper in the world. There is a horizon of expectations driven by the will to possess (cars, watches, brand-name clothing, you name it) and be thin, have a certain figure, lose weight, not to think about yourself except in terms of being successful; and being successful means to

buy a certain kind of watch and car, certain clothing and respond to a certain look. In a nutshell, to be, according to how you would like to be seen in a market-driven society. That is what I mean by colonization of being. Slavery in the sixteenth century was another form of colonizing beings, and is still in force today on a global scale.

One of the tasks before us is to engage in decolonial projects, learning to unlearn the principles that justified museums and universities, and to formulate a new horizon of understanding and of human living conditions beyond the sacred belief that accumulation is the secret for a decent life. Now, once we analytically unveil the colonizing roles of the museum, what is next? Decolonization, of course, and decolonization of the museum should take place both in scholarship and in museum exhibits and performances. How can museums contribute to the decolonization of knowledge, being as they are in a milieu where the media is in full colonizing mode (with the exception of independent media), and where universities are becoming more and more corporate, losing the space for critical and decolonizing thinking?

I will flesh out some of these ideas by looking at Fred Wilson's 1992 installation *Mining the Museum* as an exemplary case of a decolonizing perspective, and my own argument will, on the one hand, support the exhibit and, on the other, continue its work in the domain of scholarship. *Mining the Museum* is indeed an exemplar of epistemic and aesthetic disobedience.

I want to foreground the parallels and complicities between the accumulation of money and the accumulation of meaning in the modern/colonial world. The museum, as a western institution, is a paradigmatic example of such a confluence. "Accumulation of money" is a metaphor for capitalism, and "accumulation of meaning" is a metaphor for western cosmology since the Renaissance, built upon Greek and Latin languages and categories of thoughts.

Please keep in mind these three expressions: coloniality of power; coloniality of knowledge; and coloniality of being. I will go through some specific cases first and return thereafter to these three expressions and to the main thrust of my argument.

Museums, Accumulation of Meaning and Accumulation of Money

Let's start with the definition of the word "museum." Consider this account:

Museum: 1615, "the university building in Alexandria," from L. *museum* "library, study," from Gk. *mouseion* "place of study, library or museum," originally "a seat or shrine of the Muses." Earliest use in ref. to Eng. institutions was of libraries (e.g. the British Museum); sense of "building to display objects" first recorded 1683 (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). *Museum* in the Western world is closed related to University.¹

The institution we call today the university began to take shape in Bologna at the end of the eleventh century, when masters of Grammar, Rhetoric and Logic began to devote themselves to the law.

But, as everything else, museums and universities, as institutions of learning, were caught up in the radical changes of the sixteenth century. What changes were those? Simply put, the reorganization of Western Europe (from Italy to the Iberian Peninsula and from France and Germany to Britain and Holland). These are the places where the idea of Europe as western civilization was invented. Museums and universities quickly entered into the sphere of capitalism – as we know it today. The rhetoric of modernity (the triumphal march of history toward a better future for humanity) conceived of museums as an accumulation of meaning, very much like encyclopedias. However, because museums emerged during the Renaissance, they have also been linked to the logic of coloniality (the need to convert and civilize the inhabitants of the planet that were still outside history, the barbarians and primitives). Consequently, museums followed two complementary directions in the accumulation of meaning: one type of museum documented and consolidated the genealogy of European history. Art museums were and still are the epitome of this direction. The second type was the ethnographic and natural museum, which documented “other cultures,” including their art. As for the university, let’s just mention that the European University that saw its beginnings in Bologna was followed by similar institutions in Salamanca and then in Coimbra; and, in the sixteenth century, the Universidad de Santo Domingo, the Universidad de Mexico, the Universidad de Lima, and the Universidad de Córdoba, Argentina were created. In 1636, Harvard University was founded. All of these universities were at once modern and colonial – modern because they were the pillars in the very self-definition of modernity; and colonial because they became a crucial institution for the coloniality of knowledge and of being. Sophisticated learning institutions among the Aztecs, Maya, and Incas were disavowed and eroded and replaced by a western system of education. In Santo Domingo, with the indigenous population wiped out, the university became an institution for the education of Creoles of Spanish descent and, occasionally, of Mestizos. The museum was not an institution in the colonies but, rather, in the metropolis.

It was in the metropolis that a new kind of museum emerged. Frantz Boaz described it as the ethnographic museum. That is, museums began to be divided largely into two types: the museums that contributed to building the internal history and identity of Europe (from Greek and Roman antiquities to painting and other artefacts); and those that focused on the external history of Europe: that of the colonies and that of the strangers, like the Chinese, who were never colonized but whose history was not part of the history of Europe. Boaz’s ethnographic museum is indeed the most striking example of the radical changes in the accumulation of meaning of the sixteenth century as Europe capitalized on both: the meaning of its internal history and the meaning of the histories of the Other(s). There is an interesting overlap between ethnographic and natural history museums. Consider the example of the Field Museum in Chicago.

The Field Museum was incorporated on September 16, 1893 – one year after the four hundred-year celebration of the discovery of America – as “The Columbian Museum of Chicago.” Its purpose, the literature of the museum tells us, was “the accumulation and dissemination of knowledge and the preservation and exhibit of

objects illustrating art, archaeology, science and history.” In 1905, the name was changed to the “Field Museum of Natural History.” The reason for the change, also stated in the literature of the museum, was “to honor the Museum’s first major benefactor, Marshall Field, and to better reflect its focus on the natural sciences.” In 1921, the museum moved from its original location in Jackson Park to its present site on Chicago Park District property downtown, where it is part of a lakefront museum campus that includes the John G. Shedd Aquarium and the Adler Planetarium.

These three institutions are regarded as among the finest of their kind in the world and together attract more visitors annually than any comparable site in Chicago. And the Field Museum is also a place of observation, where ethnographic and natural history objects go under the microscope and where one can find exhibits on non-western civilizations “naturally” considered within natural history. Thus, in a very “natural” narrative, the reader has been taken from a museum that celebrated Columbus’s discovery with art, archeology, science, and history, to natural history where the victims of Hernán Cortés’s ambitions were demoted from the exhibits of Ancient Civilizations. Furthermore, the museum was moved next to the lakefront to be in good natural history company: the Aquarium and the Planetarium.

When, instead, we look at the web site and the literature of the Art Institute of Chicago, we find images like Gustave Caillebotte’s *Paris Street, Rainy Day* (1876–7). That is, nothing to do with ethnography and natural history but, instead, with art and civilization.

The Role of Museums in a Corporate Oriented World and the Decolonial Option

When Fred Wilson did an installation at the Maryland Historical Society in 1992, he shook up the museum world. Co-sponsored by the historical society and the Contemporary Museum, *Mining the Museum* did not involve artwork made by the artist; rather, it involved reinstalling items from the historical society’s collection in such a way as to make us reconsider them.²

In *Cabinetmaking*, he exhibited a set of four wonderful antique chairs, most likely from the nineteenth century, belonging to wealthy Baltimore families. He arranged them as one can imagine they might have been arranged for a piano soirée during an evening in the spring. The imaginary guests of that soirée are elegantly seated on the chairs, as if they were facing an accomplished pianist, or perhaps a poet, from the distinguished elite of Washington, DC. Instead, for their entertainment, Fred Wilson placed a whipping post, a gift to the Baltimore Historical Society, from the Baltimore City Jail Board.

Some of the most striking and most commented on scenarios along the lines of *Cabinetmaking* were in the vitrine labeled *Metalwork 1793–1880*. In this exhibit, he placed ornate silver goblets and pitchers alongside a pair of iron slave shackles.



figure 4.1 Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum: Cabinetmaking*, 1992



figure 4.2 Fred Wilson, *Mining the Museum, Metalwork*, 1793-1880

One particular room of the exhibit was titled *Modes of Transport, 1770-1910*. Walking about in the room, looking at the details, you would have probably shivered (as I did) when you suddenly realized that the baby carriage was carrying a fabric mask of the Ku Klux Klan.

In fact, the world started turning around as soon as visitors walked out of the elevator onto the third floor where the exhibit was located. The impact was like a slap in the face. Three short pedestals supported the busts of prominent figures of western civilization. Next to them, three high pedestals, twice as tall, did not carry any busts. You may or may not recognize the faces at first glance, depending on your particular education, but the busts carry in themselves the air of prominence, of distinguished



Figure 4.3 Fred Wilson, *Modes of Transportation, 1770-1910*, from *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, The Contemporary Museum and Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1992-3



(male) figures in history. However, even if one does not recognize them (as I did not recognize Henry Clay and Andrew Jackson), what one sees is the larger picture, the horizon behind the pedestal and the "torsos": The horizon was the Renaissance and the reconstruction of Greek and Roman prominent founders of western civilization. And I knew without thinking that that horizon came to me from all the museums I have seen, from my university years (I lived in a small town of 10,000 people until I went to university and began to travel and visit museums). As you can see from the picture, the pedestals on the right with the "torsos" are much shorter than the pedestal on the left, which are empty. The effect is shocking: to see Napoleon so low so that, instead of viewing him at eye level, it is necessary to look down on him, producing some strange sensations in your body and in your brain.

Approaching the empty pedestals on the left, which were probably at a height of around 5 ft 10 in., the viewer had to make an effort to read the inscription of the name on the top of the pedestal. I recognized the name in the middle, Frederick Douglass, as I had recognized the face on the middle bust on the right-hand side, that of Napoleon. I did not recognize the other two names, Harriet Tubman and Benjamin Banniker, but, once again the horizon was immediately heating my body and my brain: the silences, the absences – both created by the white men on the right – and the discourses that justified and glorified the right men on the right and made invisible the invisible "torsos" of the pedestal on the left.

Most of the articles I read (with the exception of Jennifer A. González's chapter devoted to Wilson's installations) that justly praised Fred Wilson's achievements in this exhibit, as well as his previous work, were enthusiastic but glossed over what, for me, is its most astute and powerful element: a decolonial statement in the heart of the museum which is an imperial/colonial (and of course nationally) institution.

Let me explain what I have in mind here, and let me soften the statement that museums are a

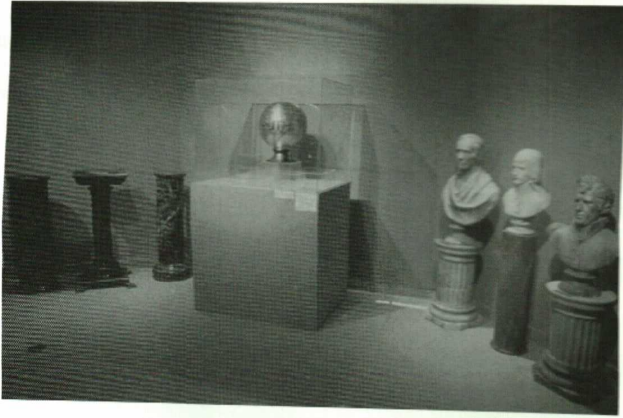


Figure 4.5 Fred Wilson, Installation view, *Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*, The Temporary Museum and Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1992–3

material/colonial institution by adding that they are not only that. There are, of course, other functions that museums, as houses of learning, have performed and perform. The future is open.

What is Fred Wilson up to?

Wilson did it again in his installation for the inauguration of the Museum of World Culture, in Goteborg, Sweden. The title of the exhibit was “Site Unseen: Offerings of the Demons.” In a press release announcing the exhibit, a comment by the Sandahl, the first director of the Museum, recognized that, because of her background in psychology, she had asked Fred Wilson to bring up what lay beneath the surface. And she added:

Therefore asked Fred Wilson to help us bringing our own specific demons out into the open since he is very skilled at demonstrating in an interesting and subtle way the pillar of colonial power, evolutionary assumptions, racism and sexism, built-in foundations that have faded into oblivion over the years. Not least the museums themselves. (www.worldculture.se/smvk/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=7&a=4543&l=en_US)

Demons that Fred Wilson brought to the surface were the museum collections of indigenous artefacts that had been “brought” from South America to the Museum of World History. In other words, what Wilson did with the hidden black history in the United States, he also did with the hidden appropriation of Indian

the center of the picture, but over there somewhere, among the many others over there.

[...]

They made sense to the artist Fred Wilson ... who played a significant role in defining a fresh critical perspective on art and its institutions.⁴

Well, you tell me: is postmodernism a frame that explains what Wilson is up to? When was modernism attentive to coloniality and racism? Never, as far as I know or can imagine, because postmodernism, as its name indicates, is restricted to the histories and experiences of Western Europe and the United States, as is its very foundation, modernity. I will claim that Fred Wilson makes a radical contribution to decolonial (not even postcolonial) thinking, but decolonial thinking through and by way of the museum. Let me unpack this.

On decolonialism and postcolonialism first. Postcolonialism or postcoloniality was a consequence of postmodernism or postmodernity – the other, or complementary, side of postmodernity. It emerged in the North Atlantic, Paris, London, and the United States. And it emerged bringing together post-structuralism (Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida) in conversation with Orientalism and post-partition India. Basically, then, postcoloniality emerged at the crossroads at the end of English colonialism in India and, in Egypt, the emergence of a powerful group of “third world intellectuals” who were able to articulate their experience in ex-colonial countries and their mastery of continental philosophy, literary theory, and comparative literature. And that of course was very important, though of course it was not global, less still universal.

Decoloniality is something else in many respects. First of all, as a concept it has decolonization as its ancestor during the Cold War years, with the decolonization of Asian and African countries. Frantz Fanon managed to put on the table a wide range of decolonial issues, from the Caribbean experience (and the decolonial tradition in Caribbean thoughts) to his critical dialogue with continental thoughts (Marx, Freud, and Sartre), to his decolonial dialogue with Arabs and Berbers in Algeria. In South America, the concerns were expressed through political economy (dependency theory), sociology (claims for “our own science” was voiced in the seventies), and of course, theology and philosophy of liberation.

Mining the Museum (as well as “Site Unseen ...”) is just that – a move toward the decoloniality of being and of knowledge that, on the one hand, reveals the underlying assumptions in the institution itself and, on the other hand, uses the institution to reveal what has been hidden in colonial histories of slavery and also the consequences of racism. An act of epistemic and aesthetic disobedience at its best. Let me quote you a few statements made by Fred Wilson in a conversation with Leslie King-Hammond. Wilson made several very revealing observations, critical (statements about museums and artistic performances), as well as autobiographical. King-Hammond asked him what was the difference “between feeling like an outsider in Europe as opposed to your experiences as an outsider here in this country ...”

There I was feeling bad about myself because of how I was being treated, and meanwhile everybody's acting like there's no problem. In the museum, you're in this environment you're supposed to understand and you're supposed to feel good about. All of these "supposed to's" – and the artwork's all there, but there's all this stuff that's not being talked about as it relates to the real world.⁵

The "the supposed to" is, as I have been arguing here and elsewhere, the rhetoric of modernity, the rhetoric of progress, of well-being, of salvation, of democracy, of the beautiful and the sublime. It is a faith that allows for arguments such as "moving forward" and hiding the reality of "being left behind and outside." Behind "the supposed to," there is the logic of coloniality, "the way it is" (the disavowal of the silence, the refusal, racialization as a structure of supremacy-subalternity, exploitation and oppression at all levels). Keep in mind that the first step of decolonization is precisely to unveil and then undo the rhetoric of modernity assimilated as the "supposed to" hiding the logic of coloniality, the way it is. "Denial" is the word used by Wilson:

All this denial, all this history of America, all this history of Europe, and the relationship between people is not being talked about. Museums just pretend that we can overlook it, that we can experience "culture" without having those feelings of oppression. This compounds those feelings. That's why I like working in museums, because they're so much of America to me, unconsciously. (p. 29)

Oppression and denial are just two of the aspects of the logic of coloniality that operates at the level of being, of the coloniality of being – precisely what Wilson is expressing here. Decolonization of being is the direct consequence of the awareness, of the consciousness of being colonized. One of the enormous contributions of *Mining the Museum* is the contribution to the decolonization of being. The other is to the decolonization of knowledge. Let's see how the decolonization of being and of knowledge go hand in hand.

Then comes, for Wilson, the experience of Africa (after growing up in the Bronx and visiting Europe). He was in Ghana, Nigeria, Gogo, and Benin, in 1975. "It was the perfect time, it was *the* time. It was totally different from everything I knew. Remember, he was talking about the United States and Europe, about what he knew about how his knowledge was naturalized, or colonized. In Africa, he realized that he was not seen as black: "They looked at me and said, 'you are not white, but you are not black either.' And I was thinking," Wilson continues, "I have been suffering all this time and now you are telling me I am not black?" (p. 29). Both situations unveil the logic of coloniality of knowledge and of being. The first sentence makes visible a classification that is not natural, of course, but which has been implanted by the hegemonic imperial knowledge. That is, the classification of people is not a natural outcome of the people themselves – neither a classification invented by blacks or Indians – but is invented by those who had the power to classify and control knowledge. The second sentence by Wilson asserts a rejection of that classification.

and, in the act of rejection, an epistemology grounded on the geo- and bio-location of the "knower" is at work. But Africa, Wilson recognizes, re-centered him: he knew there was another space that was not Europe and not the United States, and blacks (as well as other denied and racialized people) lived in both of those places, particularly in the United States. It was Africa in this case, but it could have been any other place for any other non-white (as Wilson mentions in the paragraph below: Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans) heterosexuals, males and dissenting females. It is that difference, the difference of "Afro-America," the awareness of the coloniality of knowledge and being that all came together in *Mining the Museum*:

I was beginning to see a lot of African-American, Native American, Hispanic, and Asian artists dealing with their history and their cultural identity in their work. At the time there were a lot of European Americans that were doing work that referred to the Renaissance and to Western art history. I thought, well, wouldn't it be interesting to put this artwork in these different museum environments to see how they might be affected by the different settings? ... You could put them in the American Museum of Natural History and they would blend in. I said to myself, "What does that mean about what's happening in that museum? How can we think about the work of contemporary artists of color in the same way we think about an African's work, considering the way it's being presented?" (p. 31)

There are a couple of points in this paragraph I would like to highlight. First, the success of his exhibits alerted the establishment, and Wilson was quickly accepted and recognized within the main circuits of art and museums. Then the MacArthur Foundation selected him as one of its fellows in 1999. Which of course I think is excellent. When Wilson was invited to exhibit his work at the Venice Biennale, in 2003, Judith E. Stein stated with appropriate emotion that:

It is a rare honor to represent one's country at the Venice Biennale, one of the most prestigious venues in the world for showing contemporary art. This year the United States gave the nod to Fred Wilson, who addressed the visual history of Africans in Venice by assembling a group of old master Italian paintings and wooden figurines of blackamoors. The artist even hired a Senegalese tourist to dress up as a street vendor and stand in front of the US Pavilion, flogging knock-off "Prada" bags that Wilson designed.⁶

It is indeed absolutely wonderful that Wilson received all this recognition. The problem, however, is that at this point there is no other alternative or another paradigm in which to cast Wilson's splendid achievements: the MacArthur Foundation and the Venice Biennale. So the decolonial paradigm to which Wilson's work contributes is erased and his work is integrated into the imperial paradigm that he not only contests, but also delinks from. The problem we face is that the decolonial paradigm is a practice without institutions. The institutions still belong to the imperial/colonial paradigm. Thus, recognition is great at this point since it is better to be recognized than reduced to silence. But

recognition should not make us forget that it is recognition in and from the imperial/colonial paradigm. We all know Lampedusa's well-known dictum that things have to change in order to remain the same.⁷ Decolonial thinking and practices (from philosophy to political theory, from performances and art exhibits to social movements) work toward another frame of mind, a frame of mind in which Wilson's main contribution is not his 'artistic achievements' according to *modern standards*, but his decolonial thinking, revealing the imperial underpinning of artistic modern standards and the imperial foundations of museums and the Venice Biennale.

Let's go back to Wilson's previous statement when he was thinking of organizing the same exhibit in different museums, specifically the Frick, the Metropolitan, and the American Museum of Natural History (which return us back to the beginning of this chapter). Let me remind you of Wilson's question: how would European art look if you placed it in the American Museum of Natural History? "How can we think," Wilson asked, "about the work of contemporary artists of color in the same way we think about an African's work, considering the way it's being presented?" (p. 31).

So, imagine Tintoretto and Raphael, El Greco and Picasso in the Museum of Natural History. There is a long history of the colonization of being and of knowledge that generated the illusion that African art looks very "natural" in a Natural History Museum; and the same would be the case for Native American art. Imagine a Navajo sandpainting in the permanent collection of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Chicago, or any of the examples analyzed by Lucy Lippard in her *Mixed Blessing: New Art in a Multicultural America* (2000).⁸ There is a strict correlation in the modern/colonial world between race and epistemology that extends from the color of human beings, to their supposed "original" location on the planet (this notion of location comes together with certain languages and systems of beliefs that are controlled by the concept of "religion" in the imperial West). That illusion, which is naturalized through education, is precisely the colonization of knowledge and of being.

Wilson responds that, in Europe, he did not feel bad for feeling like an outsider because he was supposed to be an outsider. But in the United States, he said, "You are supposed to be part of this place and everyone is pretending that you are." This feeling of disavowal and, at the same time, awareness of the bad faith (feeling and knowing among the white community that you are not the same but pretending you are) is better expressed in the following paragraph: "The museum is like American society at large. I grew up in an environment where I was alienated, and yet perhaps better placed in the Museum of Natural History than in between Tintoretto and Rafael, mixed with El Greco and Picasso, even if these last two were 'Hispanics'" (p. 28).

Hispanics, but marginal Castilians – El Greco was from Greece as the name indicates, and Picasso was from Malaga: Spanish but not Castilian. In a nutshell, Wilson is being recognized for something else, not for his dismantling of the imperial logic that is recognizing him. Thus, the need to construct narratives and

conceptual frames that, while acknowledging Wilson's official recognition, brings him back to the terrain of his struggle: decolonial thinking.

Fred Wilson and the Decolonial Option

Decolonial shift is not just a change in content, but in the logic of conversation. It is epistemic and aesthetic disobedience that opens up and puts on the table the decolonial option. Wilson has been recognized for his "revolutionary" content, while the recognition (by the MacArthur Foundation, by Venice Biennale, and by progressive art critics) contributes to hide its really revolutionary motive. Wilson's *Pachakuti* – to use the Aymara expression⁹ – could be correlated with the invasion of Spanish troops and missionaries of the Andean region of the Inca Empire. From the perspective of the inhabitants of Tawantinsuyu, the world was suddenly turned around (turned upside down, to use Waman Puma de Ayala's expression). Wilson's work is contributing to a *Pachakuti* in reverse in the modern/colonial world, undermining the very principles of knowledge and beliefs on which modernity has been built since the initial *Pachakuti*. He uses the museum as a point of articulation. Some choose music; others scholarly research and arguments; still others articulate change through social movements, like *Evo Morales in Bolivia*. Thus, Wilson's work read in the decolonial shift cannot be restricted to art histories and museums (where he is recognized and co-opted) but, enjoying his official recognition, it should be supported and re-mapped in the decolonial turn: unveiling the logic of coloniality (at all levels, knowledge and subjectivity, and not only authority and economy) and opening up the gates to imagine possible futures detached from the mono-topic cosmology of the modern world.

Hugh H. Genoways edited a book titled *Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century*.¹⁰ In his contribution to the book, Donald Preziosi recounts a major international conference held at the Tate Museum (now Tate Britain) on the future of Art Museums. The attendance reflected the interest and the scope of the conference. The organizers of the conference restricted the topic and confined questions asked by the packed audience to strict managerial issues related to budget and excellence in what the museum exhibits. In his words:

The philosophy of the museum in the twenty-first century articulated so poignantly at the Tate by the directors of world's major museums was being written, quite literally, in stone – a content-free and ethically vacuous philosophy of "excellence." Yet the end of the last century was not a new jargon but a very old one – a politics of hyper-commodification and super-hyped consumption, written in an upgraded and "globalized" (that is, neofeudalist) fantasy language of corporate accountancy. The language at a cursory glance seems new, but the underlying syntax replicates existing hegemonic relations of power.¹¹

Indeed, "an underlying syntax replicates existing hegemonic relations of power." Let's call that syntax the colonial matrix of power or, for short, coloniality.

investigations, accompanied by exhibits and installations. What are the possibilities, then, for making decolonial interventions? I see two roads into the future: one continues to make decolonial interventions in existing museums and scholarship, as illustrated in the examples of Fred Wilson and the book by Jennifer A. González. The other links with decolonial projects in the sphere of museums with similar projects going on in other areas of the socioeconomic spectrum and in the decolonia- lity of being and subjectivity (e.g., education). So again the question is: how can museums contribute in the twenty-first century to moving toward decolonial hori- zons leading to democratic transformations toward the communal democracies rather than to democracies based on voting to preserve, specifically, the status quo.

Notes

This chapter is based on a keynote address delivered at the Annual CIMAM Conference (International Association of Museums of Modern Art), Sao Pablo: Brazil, 2004. Proceedings edited by CIMAM, 2006.

- 1 Online Etymology Dictionary, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/museum>.
- 2 Jennifer A González devoted a superb chapter and overall view of Fred Wilson's installations very much in tune with the argument I am developing here. See Part V below. *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008, pp. 64-119.
- 3 From Fred Wilson's exhibit, "Site Unseen. Dwelling of the Demons." Most of the photos of the exhibit can be seen on this site, www.worldculture.se/smvk/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=984&a=3702&m=3&p=0.
- 4 "Pumping Air into the Museum, so It's as Big as the World Outside," *The New York Times*, Art Review, April 30, 2004, accessed at www.nytimes.com/2004/04/30/arts/art-review-pumping-air-into-the-museum-so-it-s-as-big-as-the-world-outside.html
- 5 *In Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson*. A catalogue edited by Lisa G. Corrin with contributions by Lesli King-Hammond and Ira Berlin. Baltimore: The Contemporary, in cooperation with The News Press, New York, 1994, p. 29.
- 6 <http://Slought.org>, p. 1.
- 7 Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gatopardo*, 1958. English translation, *The Leopard*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1991.
- 8 California: New Press, 2000.
- 9 *Pachakuti* is a complex word but, basically, *Pacha* captures what in the West is space and time, but it captures it as space/time. And *kuti* means a sudden and violent change. Andean people describe Spanish colonization as a *Pachakuti*.
- 10 H. H. Genoways, *Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century*. Lanham: AltaMira Press (a division of Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.), 2006.
- 11 "Philosophy and the ends of the museum," in Hugh H. Genoways (ed.), *Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century*, p. 71.
- 12 González, *Subject to Display*, p. 68.