

**Invest in Love: Decolonial, Feminist, and Queer Curatorial Approaches
in *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory***

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Declaration

I, Katherine 'Kate' M. Wilcox, hereby certify that this dissertation, which is 15,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is a record of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Date: 13 August 2022

Signature of candidate Katherine 'Kate' M. Wilcox

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This dissertation is dedicated to my first teacher and mother, Teresa. Thank you for going above and beyond to foster a love of learning in your children. Thank you to my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Ana Gonzalez Rueda, and to all who contributed their time and insights by participating in the interview process. I would also like to extend gratitude to artist-curator Alberta Whittle, who amid these tumultuous times continues to create pockets of hope and healing.

Content Warning

Please be aware that this research refers openly to distressing topics such as racism, violence, police brutality, and grief.

Abstract

Commissioned by the Scotland + Venice consortium to produce a multimedia installation for the 59th International Art Exhibition, artist-curator Alberta Whittle employs her signature wayward curatorial approach in the creation of *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory*, which is envisioned as a 'space built on black love, care, queerness, community and healing.' Divided into three chapters, this research begins by providing context as to why wayward curation is necessary to combat the exclusionary mandates of hegemonic institutions and acknowledges the political interests of those institutions the installation was commissioned by and for. This is followed by an analysis of how modes of resistance are conceptualised within the critical theories Whittle has identified as influential to her practice. Wayward curation is further deconstructed with a final assessment of how the content, design, and production of the installation resists racist, patriarchal, and heteronormative paradigms embedded within the art world. Central to this is Whittle's network of accomplices – composed of institutions, curators, performers, technicians, and invigilators – who forge a mutually supportive mode of operating through an additive production process. Interviews from those involved in the production of *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory* are utilised to illustrate how this network's ethos envisions a practical framework for decolonial curatorial care work.

Table of Contents	3
List of Figures	4
Introduction	5
Chapter 1: Institutional Context	6
World Fairs	7
La Biennale di Venezia	8
The 59th International Art Exhibition	11
The Paradox of Scottish Identity	14
Scotland + Venice Consortium	16
Chapter 2: Wayward Curating	19
Wynter’s Decolonial Scienta	23
Sharpe and Brand’s Metaphysical Spaces	26
Hartman’s Wayward Methodology	29
Petrešin-Bachelez’s New Ecologies of Care	31
Chapter 3: Resistance Through Care	32
Remembrance & Entanglement	33
Dialogic Aesthetics	40
Communities of Care	45
Invigilators	46
Art Technicians	49
Institutional Change	51
Conclusion	54
Bibliography	56
Interviews Conducted by Author	64

List of Figures

Figure 1: Docks Cantieri Cucchini.....	5
Figure 2: <i>Feeling Her Way</i> installation at the British Pavilion.....	12
Figure 3: <i>Lagareh – The Last Born</i> , film still from <i>Friday</i>	27
Figure 4: <i>The choir is waiting at the threshold</i> , sculptural work.....	28
Figure 5: <i>Lagareh – The Last Born</i> , film still from <i>Tuesday</i>	29
Figure 6: Gallery seating.....	36
Figure 7: African headrest.....	38
Figure 8: <i>Entanglement is more than blood</i> , tapestry.....	39
Figure 9: Portrait of the artist by Janice Whittle.....	43
Figure 10: Acknowledgements panel in <i>deep dive (pause) uncoiling memory</i>	46
Figure 11: Scotland + Venice training session at Dovecot Studios.....	47

Introduction

Nestled between the titanic *La Biennale di Venezia* venues of the Giardini and Arsenale but obscured from the well-trodden pathways, a singular wooden bridge stretches over the canal to connect with the miniature island of San Pietro di Castello. This island is home to a picturesque boatyard turned events venue, the Docks Cantieri Cucchini. It is within these two rooms that Scotland + Venice – a 20-year-old organisation supported by the Scottish government and governed by a partnership of three national-level art institutions – hosts their collateral event.



Figure #1: *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory* at the Docks Cantieri Cucchini. Image taken on 26 April 2022 by author.

Their commissioned installation for the 59th International Art Exhibition is *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory*, an multimedia installation produced by artist-curator Alberta Whittle. Within these rich purple walls, Whittle uses her platform to call upon visitors to ‘...slow down, in order that we may collectively consider the historic legacies and contemporary expressions of racism, colonialism and migration, and begin to think outside of these damaging

frameworks.¹ The message is emotive and unwavering, delivered through an anachronistic narrative drawing upon Scotland's overlooked complicity in the transatlantic slave trade and demonstrating how anti-blackness lingers in contemporary Scotland through police brutality. The perspective shifts- on the wall hangs a portrait of a sleeping child, painted by Whittle's mother. The soundscape echoes with the names of those who have been killed in police custody in the UK, Whittle's own voice laden with grief. Earlier in the same film a black queer couple joyfully speak about their excitement for raising a family together and imagine a future for their unborn child. Across the space, metal sculptures fitted with rose-tinted diamond paned glass look out onto the water. On the dark green interpretation panels dotted throughout the space, dozens of names of those who helped with the production of the installation are included, with an intimate message from the artist herself that reads: 'with love and admiration our growing family of loved ones and accomplices- I would not be here without you.'²

How does Whittle's signature 'wayward' curatorial approach use both the themes explored in her installation and the process in which the installation was created to embody decolonial, feminist, and queer theories that resist institutionalised legacies of colonialism? Through an analysis of the institutional landscape Whittle is operating within, a reading of the black scholarship she draws upon, and by speaking directly with her network of accomplices to understand how these conceptual frameworks manifest into collaborative practices, this research aims to deconstruct how thoughtful curation can become a decolonial process.

Chapter 1: Institutional Context

To understand Whittle's wayward curatorial approach as an act of resistance, it is vital to first embed this research within the tension created as the arts sector, mired in the legacies of colonialism, seeks relevance in the post-2016 socio-political landscape. By analysing the historic

¹ Eddie Chambers et al. *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory*, 5.

² Interpretation Panel "Acknowledgements," *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory*.

origins and current climate of both the Venice Biennale and Scottish national institutions, we begin by acknowledging the complex conditions that galvanised the production of *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory*.

World Fairs

Known as the ‘Olympics of the art world’, the *La Biennale di Venezia* international art exhibition originated from the 19th century fascination with world fairs and expositions, wherein different cultures were didactically displayed to create a narrative of capitalist progress.³ Early models of such world fairs include the *Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* hosted in London in 1851, the *Exposition Universelle* hosted in Paris in 1889, and the *World's Columbian Exposition* hosted in Chicago in 1893. These festivals, each fashioned to support their own state-sanctioned nationalistic agendas, conceptualised the Industrial Revolution into a new world order dominated by commercialism, commodification, and manufacturing power. This was done through the organisation of a myriad of industrial, anthropological, architectural, and agricultural exhibits.⁴ The curation of these exhibits was governed by Enlightenment ideals of classification and rationalisation, leading to the emergence of a new process of exhibiting wherein displays were used to create mechanisms of hegemonic order onto the complex processes of industrialised life.⁵ This ‘exhibitionary complex’, as termed by cultural sociologist Tony Bennet, used a rhetoric of power to instruct visitors ‘...by its ability to organize and co-ordinate an order of things and to produce a place for the people in relation to that order.’⁶ These displays served both prescriptive and descriptive purposes in their depiction of an idealised world economy, and glamorised the imperialist exploitation of the Global South for the

³ Joanne Shurvell, “Venice Biennale 2022,” *Forbes*, 26 April 2022.

⁴ Robert W. Rydell. “World Fairs and Museums,” in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, edited by Sharon Macdonald. (John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 135-136.

⁵ Timothy Mitchell. “The World as Exhibition,” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, no. 2 (1989): 218.

⁶ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, (1995), 67.

consumption of the industrialised Global North.⁷ Legacies of colonisation are deeply embedded into the historical foundation of such ‘globalised’ fairs, which were utilised to justify colonisation by representing non-European cultures as primitive through degrading and exotifying narratives. These exhibits were made to reinforce 19th century theories of racial hierarchy and aimed to reduce colonised peoples into anthropological specimens.⁸ This process of utilising world fairs for measuring and reinforcing geopolitical power can be seen in Italy’s creation of the Venice Biennale.

La Biennale di Venezia

Opened in 1895, the originally titled *International Art Exhibition of the City of Venice* displayed a collection of Euro-American paintings and sculptures within a central ‘Palace of Exhibitions’.⁹ The original site of the Venice Biennale is of historic significance, as the spacious Giardini in Castello was built under Napoleon Bonaparte’s rule to commemorate his imperial regime’s victory over the Republic of Venice.¹⁰ This politically-charged site was once again used to signify changing political authority to the Kingdom of Italy by the introduction of the Venice Biennale, which was founded to commemorate the anniversary of King Umberto and Margherita of Savoy.¹¹ Like its predecessors, the Venice Biennale also reinforced a narrative of high civilization measured against the primitive, with art from colonised regions only being recognised as “crafts” compared to the “fine arts” produced by Western nation-states. According to art historian Beat Wyss, the Venice Biennale represented ‘...a world *en miniature*, a political map of alliances, animosities, and idiosyncrasies among states that underwent dramatic developments during the last 119 years.’¹² One of these key developments was the addition of

⁷ Paul Young, *Globalization and the Great Exhibition: the Victorian New World Order*, (Springer, 2009), 11.

⁸ Rydell, 146.

⁹ “Giardini della Biennale,” *La Biennale di Venezia*.

¹⁰ John Dixon Hunt, “The Garden in the City of Venice: Epitome of State and Site,” in *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes* 19, no. 1 (1999): 58.

¹¹ “Biennale Arte - History,” *La Biennale di Venezia*.

¹² Beat Wyss, “Globalization of the Periphery: The Venice Biennale Project,” *OnCurating*, Issue 46, (June 2020), n.p.

national pavilions in 1907 surrounding the central exhibition in the Giardini. This competitive format of housing artworks in separate temple-like pavilions, the architecture of which were made to reflect the characteristics of their national identities, was a system adopted from Charles Garnier's design of the Paris *Exposition Universelle* of 1889.¹³

As the geopolitical landscape changed in the new millenia, so did the Venice Biennale's approach. Throughout the early 20th century the Venice Biennale was fraught with ideological competition, instrumentalized for party political purposes of fascism and racial ideology in Mussolini's Italy.¹⁴ After a string of hiatuses caused by the World Wars, the Venice Biennale eventually expanded in the 1950s to include non-Western nations. This sudden demand for the inclusion of non-Western nations is largely due to the Biennale's prestige being utilised as a legitimising force, a way for newly formed nations to have their sovereignty recognised on the global stage. As art critic Sabine B. Vogel has described this phenomena: '...by participating in the Biennale the young nations confidently presented their "own" culture in a self-assured way, while entering international art history – even if Western art hardly took note of this.'¹⁵ As political tensions flared throughout the Cold War and postcommunist eras, the Biennale in the late 20th century often acted as a medium through which nations communicated their allegiances and thus transformed the Biennale into a: 'strategic theater of diplomatic operations and political alliances, protests and generational clashes and upheavals of custom and culture.'¹⁶

In the 1980s, criticism of the universal exhibitions for their overtly colonial power structures led to a paradigm shift for the Biennale. This postmodern understanding of 'biennialization', through which the institution recognised its own troubled history, has since striven to reclaim this format for cultural and social subversion. As Carlos Basualdo articulates in *The Unstable Institution*: 'Biennialization can offer profound, critical insights into art's nexus

¹³ Wyss, n.p.

¹⁴ Sabine B. Vogel, "La Biennale di Venezia," in *Biennials—Art on a Global Scale*, (Springer, 2010), 22-32.

¹⁵ Vogel, n.p.

¹⁶ Imma Garofalo. "The Disquieted Muses: when La Biennale meets history." *Visit Venezia*.

with globalised commerce and political interests.’¹⁷ Curators for the Biennale and other international art festivals, such as documenta, have aimed to decolonise their festivals. New biennials located in the Global South such as the San Paulo and Johannesburg festivals emerged to redefine our notions of the ‘periphery’ in the contemporary art world and present themselves as new centres of cultural and knowledge production.¹⁸ However, while the focus of the Biennale has turned away from the nation-building projects of its past, its new iteration is based upon what Penelope Harvey characterises as the ‘...harnessing of national identities to corporate ends.’¹⁹ Art critic Peter Schjeldahl condemns this new understanding of the Biennale as simply a gilded veneer that attempts to disingenuously disguise its real purpose in ‘...replicating and reinforcing the neocolonial flows of international commerce, politics and power.’²⁰ This often-repeated critique has led newly installed President of the Biennale, Roberto Cicutto, to voice his stance to let audiences discern the artists’ intentions: ‘When you present yourself through art, the world has the tools to understand whether the choice of an artist is made for propaganda reasons or is even an instrument of oppression.’²¹

How can the Biennale, whose foundational structure is rooted in supporting imperialism, be reclaimed in a postcolonial context? Artist Monica Narula articulates her scepticism that the Biennale’s embodied nationalistic spirit can be overcome: ‘It’s a very late-19th-century, early-20th-century, fin-de-siècle structure — it’s not of this time...different people try to express the present moment in that past moment. Sometimes they succeed, sometimes they don’t.’²² Social theorist Eric Otieno Sumba further teases out the nuances of the conflicting interests between governmental commissioning bodies and the practitioners’ critical integrity: ‘Generally, countries benefit from the soft power signified by having a pavilion. For artists and curators,

¹⁷ Carlos Basualdo, “The Unstable Institution,” *Zentrum für Kunst und Medien Karlsruhe*, (July 2008).

¹⁸ Rebecca Coates, “From the margins to the center,” *Museum Worlds 2* (2014): 113-132.

¹⁹ Penelope Harvey, *Hybrids of Modernity*, (Routledge, July 1996), 103.

²⁰ Peter Schjeldahl, “The Global Salon.” *New Yorker* 78, no. 17 (2002).

²¹ Amy Kazim and Davide Ghiglione, “Venice Biennale: how do countries get a pavilion?” *Financial Times*, (April 2022).

²² Kazim and Ghiglione, n.p.

however, explicit national affiliation can be an unwieldy burden, as many feel compelled to deconstruct nationalisms in Venice.’ To maintain relevance in the current socio-political landscape, the arts sector must be able to demonstrate self-critique. However, inviting critique can also reveal hypocrisy if institutions are unable to envision new modes of operating outside of their past colonial paradigms. With the heightened attention placed on systematic corruption, the 2022 edition of the Biennale must rise to a whole new challenge as globally we navigate the post-pandemic paradigm shift.

The 59th International Art Exhibition

Critical consciousness has manifested in several new ways for the 59th International Art Exhibition, which was postponed a year when the COVID-19 pandemic caused social and economic upheaval globally. Now following the cautious lifting of international travel bans, this year’s Biennale, titled ‘The Milk of Dreams,’ sets itself apart from its predecessors by having a majority of women and gender non-conforming artists. Other notable milestones include the appointment of the first Italian woman curator, Cecilia Alemani, and several national pavilions commissioning black women artists for the first time in their long histories, such as sculptor Simone Leigh for the United States and Sonia Boyce for Great Britain.²³ Indeed the Biennale’s prestigious Golden Lion awards were bestowed upon these two women, whose deeply personal explorations of multicultural identities aligned with Alemani’s curatorial vision for the Biennale by: ‘imagining a posthuman condition that challenges the modern Western vision of the human being – and especially the presumed universal ideal of the white, male “Man of Reason” – as fixed centre of the universe and measure of all things.’²⁴ It is crucial to note that contrary to the press coverage emerging from the Biennale, these black female artists are not ‘rising’ or ‘in dialogue with each other’, but have established successful careers that have out of necessity

²³ Charlotte Higgins, “Venice Biennale: Women Outnumber Male Artists,” *The Guardian*, (22 April 2022).

²⁴ Cecilia Alemani, “Statement by Cecilia Alemani.” *La Biennale di Venezia*.

operated outside of traditional spaces like the Biennale due to exclusionary tactics.²⁵ In response to Alemani's curatorial statement, they have created installations that uniquely articulate their anxieties and desires for expressing multicultural identities. Ironically these artists all strive to condemn nationalism from within their insular national pavilions- a paradox that *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory* is also inextricably embedded. Before analysing Whittle's installation, it is worth examining how other artists at the Biennale are navigating the treacherous waters of this uncomfortable paradox.



Figure #2: Sonia Boyce's *Feeling Her Way* at the British Pavilion. Image taken on 25 April 2022 by author.

In the British Pavilion, tremulous strains of interweaving voices hint at Sonia Boyce's powerful *Feeling Her Way*, where a video installation of five Black female musicians sing in joyful improvisation.²⁶ These musicians sing together and apart, responding with their voices to Boyce's question: 'What might you need to feel free to express yourself, when not constricted by what others feel you should be, or could be?'²⁷ Liberation, imagination, and connectivity are central themes in Boyce's installation. *Feeling Her Way* addresses Alemani's curatorial statement

²⁵ Amanda Catto (Chair of Scotland + Venice), interview conducted on 6 July 2022 by author.

²⁶ David Connett, "British artist Sonia Boyce wins Golden Lion at Venice Biennale," *The Guardian*, (23 April 2022).

²⁷ Interpretation panel, *Feeling Her Way*, 2022.

by recognising the systemic erasure of black voices within British culture, but mostly focussing its efforts on inventing a new space built to radiate black joy and self-expression.

Simone Leigh's installation *Sovereignty* has reinvented both the interior and exterior of the imposing United States Pavilion. The facade has been transformed by thatch and wooden beams to reimagine the African buildings at the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition, and monumental bronze sculptures of abstracted black female bodies tower above the visitors.²⁸ With a combination of magic realism and African tribal imagery, Leigh's work aims to reaffirm the presence of women of colour erased from the historical record. Perhaps the spirit of Leigh's installation is best captured in her response to the question of how she felt to be the artist representing the United States: '...we need to get rid of the idea of nationalism if we're going to move forward.'²⁹

Another notable example of this shift in conceptual themes is the French Pavilion curator Zineb Sedira's immersive installation *Les rêves n'ont pas de titre / Dreams have no titles*, which grapples with the duality of her French-Algerian-British heritage and the lasting psychological harm of colonisation. The exhibition's conception is succinctly summarised by Sedira's curatorial team member Sam Bardaouil as: 'The notion of a nation begs to be critiqued and challenged. What is a nation at the end of the day? It is a big fiction to believe that when you draw a certain line, everyone who happens to be behind this line is of the same mentality and culture.'³⁰

Prompted by Alemani's curatorial statement, the artistic pursuit for readdressing legacies of colonialism and challenging the concept of nationalism permeates the 59th International Art Exhibition. How this is done varies: Sonia Boyce's interpretation dazzles with voices of black female solidarity in the British Pavilion, Simone Leigh radically reclaims a colonial space in the

²⁸ Ilana Herzig, "Simone Leigh's 'Sovereignty' Explores Colonial Histories at the Venice Biennale." *Architectural Record*, (25 May 2022).

²⁹ Nancy Princenthal, "Simone Leigh's Sovereign Territory," *Art in America*, (4 May 2022).

³⁰ Gareth Harris, "Zineb Sedira," *The Art Newspaper*, (22 February 2022).

United States' Pavilion, and Zineb Sedira explores the complex and often contradictory legacy of multiculturalism in the French Pavilion. The Scotland + Venice commission is amongst these national exhibitions within a globalised context, amongst fellow artists using their platform to navigate a socio-political landscape altered by a turrent of invasions, recessions, corrupted violence sparking the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo social justice movements, Brexit, Trumpian politics, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Amidst this fraught context, Whittle's *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory* emerges to consider legacies of colonialism present within a uniquely Scottish context.

The Paradox of Scottish Identity

While the Great Britain Pavilion dominates a central area of the Giardini venue, elsewhere *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory* highlights Scotland's contribution to the Biennale. One might wonder why there are separate installations when Great Britain encompasses England, Scotland, and Wales. This is a question with no straightforward answer. Chair of Scotland + Venice Amanda Catto addresses this in terms of recognising Scotland's own distinct identity which it does not share with English, Welsh, and Irish identities.³¹

How Scotland has defined its own identity has evolved over time. Its current popularised self-image – invoking visions of tartan kilts, a strong linguistic tradition, the escapism of the natural environment, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burn's lyrical prose, and an attitude of rustic self-sufficiency – is one that has been long perpetuated through its political and cultural institutions. As historian Alima Bucciantini explains in her work *Exhibiting Scotland: Objects, Identity, and the National Museum*':

‘After the trauma of the Jacobite wars, proponents of Scottish nationhood had moved slowly and carefully in order to establish their claims of Scottish national character

³¹ Catto, interview.

without too overtly challenging British power structures. They first worked through culture and history.’³²

In this way, heritage work in Scotland has been embroiled in the shifting socio-political landscape through time in response to changing perceptions of national and cultural identity. This often contradictory history of discrimination, suppression and idolization to the perceived Scottish identity led to the construction of a self-image rooted in resisting England’s homogenising anglication. However this popularised consciousness of Scotland reflects a distinctly Highlander cultural tradition, which does not reflect its own complicity in British imperialism or its own role within the Clearances. As historian John Prebble articulated this flawed legacy: ‘...while the rest of Scotland was permitting the expulsion of its Highland people it was also forming that romantic attachment to kilt and tartan that scarcely compensates for the disappearance of a race to whom such things were once a commonplace reality.’³³ This national identity, curated in part by the rise of Victorian tourism and the royal blessing of ‘balmoralisation’ onto Scotland, created an identity which ‘...conspicuously reflects that of the white settler colonies of Canada, Australia and New Zealand, who now likewise find themselves in a double-bind situation of being at once erstwhile coloniser and contemporary (post-) colonised.’³⁴ While most of Scotland’s political and cultural institutions continue to promote an ahistorical, romanticised view of their national identity, in the last 20 years Scotland + Venice’s commissions for the 59th International Art Exhibition have led a decolonial reexamination of Scottish identity.

³² Alima Bucciantini, *Exhibiting Scotland: Objects, Identity, and the National Museum*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018), 195.

³³ John Prebble, *The Highland Clearances*, (Penguin UK, 1963), 8.

³⁴ Berthold Schoene-Harwood, “Emerging As the Others of Our Selves'-Scottish Multiculturalism and the Challenge of the Body in Postcolonial Representation,” *Scottish Studies Review* 25, no. 1 (1998): 54.

Scotland + Venice Consortium

Scotland + Venice is a partnership between three main arts organisations: the British Council, Creative Scotland, and National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) for the purpose of commissioning a new curatorial partner to represent Scotland's contributions to contemporary art at the Biennale.³⁵ Founded in 2003 with the support of the Scottish government, Scotland + Venice aims to raise the profile of Scotland's contributions to creative and cultural production.³⁶ This mission has recently intensified as the ramifications of the UK's exit from the EU in January 2020 has led the Scottish arts sector to openly reaffirm their international commitments: 'In the context of Brexit, we believe it is ever more urgent that we continue to forge international connections and exchanges.'³⁷ This is further complicated by the fact that the majority of Scots voted in favour of remaining within the EU while the winning majority of the UK voted to leave.³⁸ As a governmentally-funded consortium, Scotland + Venice is inextricably linked to Scottish political interests and demonstrates soft power through cultural production. This political facet is further illustrated by the Scotland + Venice installation's status and physical location within Venice, as these factors are interwoven into the Biennale's narratives of geo-political power. As art historian Federica Martini describes this phenomena:

'...the pavilions' proximity to one another in the Giardini emphasize a sharp geopolitical design: the prominent position of the Italian Pavilion; the triangulation of France, Great Britain, and Germany; the close vicinity of Holland and Belgium, or Denmark and Iceland; the gathering of Sweden, Norway, and Finland into the North Pavilion. The edges of the Giardini delimit an inside-outside dialectic: the pavilions located within the historical perimeter of the

³⁵ "Scotland + Venice," *British Council Scotland*.

³⁶ "About," *Scotland + Venice*.

³⁷ "Strategic Plan 2019-2023," *National Galleries Scotland*, 12.

³⁸ "EU referendum results by region: Scotland," *The Electoral Commission*, last updated 25 September 2019.

Venice Biennale are set apart from other national pavilions located in the city's historical buildings and from the "unofficial" participations.³⁹

Scotland + Venice installations are designated as 'collateral events', which are officially part of the Biennale even though they do not reside within the main venues. Becoming officially classified as a 'collateral event', involves a lengthy documentation process, costly admission fees, and is reliant on approval by the Curator of the Exhibition and the Board of La Biennale.⁴⁰ It is vital to note the nuances of Scotland + Venice's status, as it straddles the intentionally crafted insider-outsider division that the Biennale's legitimising geo-political power is founded upon.

Over the past twenty years, Scotland + Venice has commissioned ten artists. These artists, affiliated with an endorsing institution, work alongside the Scotland + Venice Production Manager to present installations as nomadic, collateral events outside of the Biennale's main venues. Past Scottish entries to the Biennale intensely examined the complexity of Scottish identity. Past examples include Glasgow-based artist Graham Fagen's 2015 multimedia installation *Come into the Garden, and forget about the War*, through a range of mediums from sculptures, sketches, and audio-visual installations that reimagines Robert Burns' poem 'The Slave's Lament', which famously condemned slavery, into an emotive soundscape sung by Jamaican reggae singer Ghetto Priest.⁴¹ In 2017, Rachel McLean's *Spite Your Face* video installation reacted to the upheaval within the international political environment caused by Brexit and the United State's presidential election. As described by curator Richard Ashrowan, in McLean's film she has: '...turned her penetrating gaze to the nebulous question of truth, its relationship to current political discourse, greed and the will to power...while reflecting Scotland's own energised spirit of political reinvention.'⁴² The immediate predecessor to the

³⁹ Federica Martini, "One Biennale, Many Biennials," *OnCurating*, Issue 46, (June 2020).

⁴⁰ "59th International Art Exhibition - Procedure for Collateral Events," *La Biennale di Venezia*.

⁴¹ Moira Jeffrey, "Scotland brings Burns and reggae to Venice Biennale," *BBC News*, (May 2015).

⁴² "Scotland + Venice unveils Rachel Maclean's *Spite Your Face*," *Scotland + Venice*, (9 May 2017).

2022 commission, Charlotte Prodger's 2019 installation *SaF05* intimately examines themes of queerness, the passage of time, and land use through showcasing video footage from a variety of geographical locations such as the Scottish Highlands, the Great Basin Desert, the Okavango Delta and the Ionian Islands.⁴³ Alberta Whittle's 2022 commission, *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory*, also looks at Scotland's relationship to slavery, critically contemplates its political power, and uses multiple geographic locations to stitch together a narrative that transcends national borders.

In December 2019, Scotland + Venice announced its open call for proposals for artists to represent Scotland at the Venice Biennale in 2021 (the Biennale was later rescheduled for 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic).⁴⁴ The selection committee was made from representatives of the Scotland + Venice partnering organisations, with two external advisers included to offer their expert opinion in contemporary art.⁴⁵ After two rounds of shortlisting candidates and conducting interviews, Whittle's proposal was chosen in Spring 2020. As Production Manager Louise Briggs describes Whittle's proposed installation for the Venice Biennale: 'There were certainly some key elements that were noted in the proposal, so it was very much about Alberta continuing her exploration of anti-blackness, looking at historic legacies of slavery and colonialism, and about her trying to connect Scotland, Barbados, and Africa to Venice, to try and connect the dots between those parts of the world and of movement and migration.'⁴⁶ Whittle is known for an emotive artistic practice that dramatically confronts the legacies of the British empire, while deftly addressing the pervasive social inequalities and asymmetrical power structures that remain and continuously do harm in our contemporary society. Reflecting upon Scotland + Venice's previous commissions and the thematic content outlined in Alemani's curatorial statement for the

⁴³ "Charlotte Prodger," *Scotland + Venice*.

⁴⁴ "Open call for proposals for Scotland + Venice 2021," *Scotland + Venice*, (16 December 2019).

⁴⁵ "Alberta Whittle," *Scotland + Venice*, (7 April 2022).

⁴⁶ Louise Briggs (Production Manager of Scotland + Venice), interview conducted on 13 June 2022 by author.

Biennale, Whittle's commission was envisioned to be a compelling addition to this ongoing dialogue.

Chapter 2: Wayward Curating

In her 2019 autoethnographic publication '*Biting the Hand That Feeds You: A Strategy of Wayward Curating*', Whittle vulnerably reflects on how she developed her own method of decolonial curatorial care work that responds to institutional limitations, resists the anxiety induced by respectability politics, and builds upon a theoretical foundation from '...black, People of Colour (PoC) and queer Trans Intersex People of Colour (QTIPoC) artist-curators [who] are working towards political and collective practices based on mutual care, friendship, rest and empathy.'⁴⁷ In responding to her central question: 'What curatorial strategies would be mutually beneficial to support self-critique and lead to structural change in museums, galleries and artist-run initiatives?', Whittle's artistic practice draws upon her own experience, a long history of diasporic writings and aesthetics, and specific critical theories formed by five women of colour writers: Christina Sharpe, Dionne Brand, Sadiya Hartman, Sylvia Wynter, and Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez.⁴⁸

Before embarking on this analysis of the substantial body of decolonial, feminist, and queer critical theories that Whittle cites as influencing the formation of her 'wayward' curatorial strategy, I begin by acknowledging my own positionality as author. This imperative follows: '...a suggestion proposed by an earlier generation of feminists and queers of colour: that one should always situate oneself in relation to the topic of one's discourse.'⁴⁹ I am a white, American, queer woman from a middle-class family, and I have sought higher education in the United States, Scotland, and France. I have not experienced the systemic racism that is examined in Whittle's artistic practice. My intentions are to decenter, listen, and support critical scholarship

⁴⁷ Alberta Whittle, "Biting the Hand That Feeds You: A Strategy of Wayward Curating," *Critical Arts*, 33:6, 110-123, (2019): 10.

⁴⁸ Whittle, 16.

⁴⁹ Paola Bacchetta, "Interview with Paola Bacchetta," *PARAGRAPH* 41, no. 3 (2018): 380.

to become a more informed ally and advocate for institutional change within my own future curatorial practice.

I also must explain that these distinctive critical theories – decolonial, feminist, and queer – intersect in their pursuit to challenge the universal.⁵⁰ Intersectionality is an unwieldy analytical framework that has multiple interpretations and applications, but it can be helpful in dissecting the nuances of control inflicted upon overlapping marginalised groups.⁵¹ For instance, theorist bell hooks argues for the usefulness of intersectionality by highlighting a distinctive experience: ‘black women’s experience has been obscured by a political movement and theoretical discourse that tend to focus on blacks and women as separate groups [...] black women’s experience differs in critical ways from white women’s experience.’⁵² While it must be recognised that these theories are distinct, in Whittle’s case, all these critical theories vitally inform her methodology.

Lastly, it is necessary to note here that this research will continue in Whittle’s established linguistic tradition of using ‘PoC’ and ‘QTIPoC’ instead of ‘BAME’, ‘ethnic minority’, or ‘non-white’, in order to avoid the negative connotations of using terminology that ‘defines people in terms of what they are not (white).’⁵³

Artist-Curator

Whittle’s choice to self-identify as artist-curator, a term with a loaded political history, indicates her intentions to operate outside the bounds set forth by the field of contemporary art. As explored in *Radicalizing Care: Feminist and Queer Activism in Curating*, since the 1970s in the wake of rapid globalisation, there has been a marked shift in the role of curator, which was ‘fast promoted to a mobile and flexible hero embodying the “new spirit of capitalism,” which has

⁵⁰ Sara Ahmed, “FEMINISM IS SENSATIONAL,” in *Living a Feminist Life*, (Duke University Press, 2016), 29.

⁵¹ S. Laurel Weldon, “Intersectionality,” in *Politics, Gender, and Concepts: Theory and Methodology*, (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 193.

⁵² S. Laurel Weldon, “Intersectionality,” 194.

⁵³ Whittle, 111.

given rise to hyper-individualism, stardom, accelerated innovation, and large-scale spectacularization.⁵⁴ During the same period, a counter-movement arose through the emergence of the artist-run initiatives. Frustrated by the politics and impenetrability of the contemporary art world, a new community of artist-curators made space outside the confines of commercial art production.⁵⁵ Of particular interest is the Caribbean Arts Movement, a multidisciplinary collective of largely first-generation British-Caribbean artists who used their various mediums to respond to changing identities, colonial histories, and political unrest. Characteristic of this movement's development of a modern Caribbean aesthetic was the use of non-Western epistemologies, allowing for artistic mediation which would '...typically cross the disciplinary borders inherited in European culture from the Enlightenment, whose epistemological order coincided with, and often enabled, empire.'⁵⁶ British-Caribbean artists grappled with immigration laws, race riots, and racist rhetoric such as Enoch Powell's 1968 'rivers of blood' speech, organising out of necessity to produce their work without the support of an arts sector resistant to their presence.⁵⁷ As described within the Tate Modern's 2021 exhibition '*Life Between Islands*' (an exhibition to which Whittle contributed), the art that emerged from this tumultuous period formed the foundation of an aesthetic tradition that has carried into the contemporary moment:

'Works such as these can be seen as aesthetic descendents of the magic realist tradition in Caribbean and Latin American literature, in which the everyday and the visionary superimpose and coexist; where the fantastic is located not solely and in isolation in the individual subconscious, but experienced collectively, as a

⁵⁴ Elke Krasny, Sophie Lingg, and Lena Fritsch, "An Introduction," in *Radicalizing Care: Feminist and Queer Activism in Curating*, (Sternberg Press, 2021), 16.

⁵⁵ "Art Term: Artist-Curator," *Tate*.

⁵⁶ Alex Farquharson, "Anew: To the Future, Via the Past," in *Life Between Islands: Caribbean-British Art 1950s-Now*, (Tate Publishing 2021), 13.

⁵⁷ David A. Bailey, "Caribbean Movements in Britain," in *Life Between Islands: Caribbean-British Art 1950s-Now*, (Tate Publishing 2021), 25.

resurfacing, in culture, of the consequences of the extraordinary and violent collision of the Atlantic peoples and histories in the New World archipelago.’⁵⁸

Whittle’s artistic portfolio draws upon this aesthetic tradition, and her assumption of the role ‘artist-curator’ does ‘...stem from scarcity of opportunities to exhibit and an intention to practice in solidarity with others.’⁵⁹ Like those predecessors Whittle’s work emulates, the precarity of her position as a woman of colour who practises institutional critique shapes how she chooses to engage with her artistic practice. This precarity is further exacerbated by our post-2016 current moment, which is described in *Radicalising Care* as characterised by: ‘...the political crisis of ethno-nationalist and white supremacist populism, the economic crisis of neoliberal flexibilization, the social crisis of hyper-individualism and competition defining all human relations, and the environmental crisis of climate change...[a] crisis of care.’⁶⁰ As artists respond to the inequities highlighted by the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements and further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, new ways of working in this political landscape recall the artist-curators of the past. In the case of *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory*, Whittle draws upon her astute understanding of critical theory to condemn Scotland’s systemic racism and mourn Sheku Bayoh, a victim of police brutality in Kirkcaldy in 2015. While Whittle places Bayoh’s murder into a wider context, she does so with the refusal to become numb to the many victims of police brutality, which she reminds the viewer they were all once ‘someone’s baby, someone’s cherished darling’.⁶¹

This balance between resistance and care is how Whittle aims to create a space ‘...built on black love, care, queerness, community and healing [...] which offers greater freedom for contestations and critique.’⁶² This inclusion of curatorial care work established in feminism and

⁵⁸ Farquharson, “Anew,” 14.

⁵⁹ Whittle, “Biting the Hand,” 110.

⁶⁰ Elke Krasny et al, “An Introduction,” 14.

⁶¹ *Lagareh - The Last Born*, film directed by Alberta Whittle, (Forma Arts & Media, 2022), commissioned by Scotland + Venice.

⁶² Whittle, “Biting,” 122.

queer theories and then integrated into the existing body of black scholarship and aesthetic traditions sets Whittle's practice apart.

Wynter's *Decolonial Scientia*

Whittle's self-described 'decolonial curatorial care work' is rooted in a long tradition of black scholarship, but she gives particular attention to the conceptual frameworks introduced by prominent afro-Caribbean theorist Sylvia Wynter. Wynter's vast oeuvre corpus spans themes that resist the Western epistemology of siloed disciplines, and thus she engages critically within an interconnected network of knowledge- history, neurology, biology, sociology, art, philosophy- in order to expose and dismantle coloniality. Gender studies scholar Katherine McKittrick's analysis of Wynter's innovative intellectual projects tracks how they reject systems of knowledge that have supported and rationalised racialised exploitation, which: '...draws attention to a counter exertion of a new science of being human and the emancipatory breach Wynter's work offers.'⁶³ While Whittle applies numerous modes of Wynter's 'epistemic disobedience' to her own work, this research focuses particularly on how Whittle's wayward curatorial strategy utilises Wynter's decolonial scientia in '...articulating anxiety can be prohibitive for black people, PoC and QTIPoC because of the lack of humanity coding these subjective positions'.⁶⁴ Through Wynter's theory, Whittle shows how despite well-intentioned inclusion policies, the arts sector continues to uncritically reproduce colonial conditions that create a hostile environment.⁶⁵

It is imperative to note that both Wynter and Whittle utilise the contested term 'decolonial' rather than similar conceptual frameworks such as 'postcolonial' or 'anticolonial'. Argentinian writer Walter D'Mignolo clarifies that Wynter's work: 'has consistently called into question whether the "post"—in poststructural, postmodernity, postcolonial—is a useful conceptual frame, thus putting it aside in order to understand, instead, how particular

⁶³ McKittrick, "Yours in the Intellectual Struggle," 3.

⁶⁴ Whittle, 115.

⁶⁵ Whittle, 121.

epistemologies are unthinkable and / or unarticulated within hegemonic Western categories of knowledge and philosophy of knowing.⁶⁶ The useful exactness rendered by the term ‘decolonial’ is explained by interdisciplinary Hōkūlani K. Aikau as follows: ‘The grammar of decolonization, as a word, also suggests processes that must be engaged with on a continuous basis; decolonization is not a one-off event or act...[The Latin prefix] De- also signifies separation, cessation, or contraction.’⁶⁷ Wynter thus employs a uniquely decolonial methodology through a process of precisely delinking of concepts and practices that are ‘...naturalized and normalized but are colonial imposition.’⁶⁸

The racialised subject-positioning Whittle describes as epidemic within the arts sector can be understood through Wynter’s decolonial scientia, which itself is based on French West Indian psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon’s affective sociogeny.⁶⁹ In his seminal work *Black Skins/White Masks*, Fanon employs third-person and first-person narration to articulate his own lived experience of being perceived as a non-human by the imperial Other.⁷⁰ This anxiety produced by understanding that your personhood is being reduced by the colonial gaze produces what Sylvia Wynter describes as:

‘Two quite different *senses of the self* [italicised in original], yet functioning to the same end, enables us to recognise that the qualitative mental states which correlate with aversive sensations, or fear of behaving, in the one case, in such an antisocial way as to make the threat of zombification real, and, in the other as to make the threat of “negrification” real, are of the same objectively instituted and subjective

⁶⁶ Walter Mignolo, “Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?” in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human As Praxis*, (Duke University Press, 2015), 106.

⁶⁷ Hōkūlani K. Aikau, “Decolonization,” in *Keywords for Gender and Sexuality Studies*, (New York University Press, 2021), 59.

⁶⁸ Hōkūlani K. Aikau, “Decolonization,” 60.

⁶⁹ Walter Mignolo, “Sylvia Wynter,” 116.

⁷⁰ Walter Mignolo, “Sylvia Wynter,” 116.

experienced modality, even where the cultural conception of identity, or of what it is like to be human, is different.’⁷¹

In this way, Fanon’s sociogeny works to acknowledge the psychological harm caused in relation to the social imaginary built upon racial hierarchies, and that ‘...becoming black is bound up with being perceived as black by a white person.’⁷² Fanon’s sociogeny aligns with W.E.B. Du Bois’ ‘double consciousness’, and both explore the consequences of the unreconciled double-self upon the black consciousness. Du Bois expresses the desire ‘...to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.’⁷³ This precarity of identities is echoed throughout the fundamental writings of Wynter and in Whittle’s practice. When asked in a New York Times interview whether she felt she had reached the ‘peak of the British art establishment’ by contributing to the *Life Between Islands* show at the Tate Britain, Whittle replied: ‘Especially with the world being what it is right now, which is so disturbed and uncertain, it feels like every day I wonder when that time will come to just sit in a moment and enjoy, without worrying about how much longer one will have a seat at the table, even if you do have a seat at the table.’⁷⁴ The uncertainty of opportunities stems from an understanding that ‘...galleries, museums and the academy may interpret institutional critique as an act of ingratitude or a betrayal to upholding the status quo in particular for black, PoC and QTIPoC artist-curators.’⁷⁵ This acknowledgement and refusal of the anxiety created by ‘biting the hand that feeds you’ is central to both Whittle’s curatorial methodology and appears as a thematic thread interwoven throughout her artistic portfolio.⁷⁶ Like much of Whittle’s previous work, *deep*

⁷¹ Sylvia Wynter, “Towards the Sociogenic Principle,” in *National identities and Socio-Political Changes in Latin America* (Routledge, 2001), 34.

⁷² Walter Dignolo, “Sylvia Wynter,” 116.

⁷³ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” in *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, (A. C. McClurg and Co., 1903), 9.

⁷⁴ Desiree Ibekwe, “Navigating Worlds an Ocean Apart, Through Art,” *The New York Times*, (7 January 2022).

⁷⁵ Whittle, 112.

⁷⁶ Whittle, 113.

dive (pause): uncoiling memory conveys an institutional critique delivered via storytelling that transcends time and place to highlight relationships between the legacies of slavery and the racialised state-sanctioned violence that permeates throughout Scottish society. To convey complex philosophical conceptions of the black experience, Whittle draws on metaphysical spaces such as Christina Sharpe's 'The Wake' and 'The Hold', as well as Dionne Brand's 'The Door of No Return' and the 'Dark Continent'.

Legacies of colonialism coded into institutions through the appearance of respectability politics demonstrate how subjective experiences can reveal reality, a sociogenic principle which lies outside of Western epistemologies. For this reason Whittle employs Wynter's *decolonial scienta*, which expands on Fanon's sociogeny to address the limitations of empirical data in understanding the human experience, wherein both biological and cultural elements shape reality.

Sharpe and Brand's Metaphysical Spaces

Both Christina Sharpe and Dionne Brand have used lyrical prose to illustrate the psychological effects of the African Diaspora upon the black consciousness. By creating metaphysical landscapes and thus a new lexicon through imagery, artists such as Whittle have been able to expand upon these concepts by translating them into a visual medium. Examples of this include how Whittle maps actual geographic locations through her installation's central film, *Lagareh - The Last Born*. Filmed across multiple locations in Scotland, England, Barbados, Italy and Sierra Leone, *Lagareh* traces the triangular route of the Transatlantic Slave Trade from Africa, to the West Indies, to imperial seats of power in both England and Scotland.⁷⁷ At each of these sites of memory, black female performers connect us with the ancestral dimension: from priestess Solariss offering libations on the steps of Somerset House, to performer Divine wielding dual machetes at Oswald's Temple in Scotland, to Gambian griot singer Kumba

⁷⁷ "Lagareh - The Last Born Research Document," *Scotland + Venice and Forma Arts & Media*, 2022.

Kuyateh's praise song sung in Mandikan language in an empty courtroom. Through their spiritual evocations, they fuse real and imagined locations to accompany the viewer through the afterlife of slavery.



Figure #3: Alberta Whittle, *Lagareh – The Last Born*, (film still – single channel video), *Friday* chapter, 2022, Photographer Matthew Arthur Williams, © Alberta Whittle. Courtesy the artist, Scotland+Venice, and Forma.

Whittle's anachronistic juxtapositions between sites of 'memory and conscience' as seen in the figure above captures the imagery conveyed in Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return*:⁷⁸

'There is a sense in the mind of not being here or there, of no way out or in... Caught between the two we live in the Diaspora, in the sea in between. Imagining our ancestors stepping through these portals one senses people stepping out into nothing; one senses a surreal space, an inexplicable space.'⁷⁹

⁷⁸ *Lagareh - The Last Born*, (Forma Arts & Media, 2022).

⁷⁹ Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, (Vintage 2011), 20.

This Door is again made visual in Whittle’s sculptural work, the aptly named *The choir is waiting at the threshold*. With the work ‘Remember’ integrated into its metalwork, this gate-like structure and its teasing title evokes an imaginary wherein ancestors stand waiting on the other side of the Door, directing us to remember them. The sculpture in figure 4 below also frames a view of Venice, which in the *Lagareh* film is further explored as a site where the legacies of slavery remain in plain sight but unacknowledged.



Figure #4: *The choir is waiting at the threshold*, deep dive (pause) uncoiling memory, 2022 Installation Shot. Image taken 26 April 2022 by author.

Flashes of footage of disturbed water reflecting light is interspersed throughout the film, and is used to frame different narrative sequences. We see this motif appear in Christina Sharpe’s diasporic writings as well, as she adapts the word ‘wake,’ which traditionally means ‘the track left on the water’s surface by a ship,’⁸⁰ and uses it ‘...to mourn and to illustrate the ways our individual lives are always swept up in the wake produced and determined, though not absolutely, by the afterlives of slavery.’⁸¹ Thus Sharpe’s ‘Wake’ becomes an active methodology

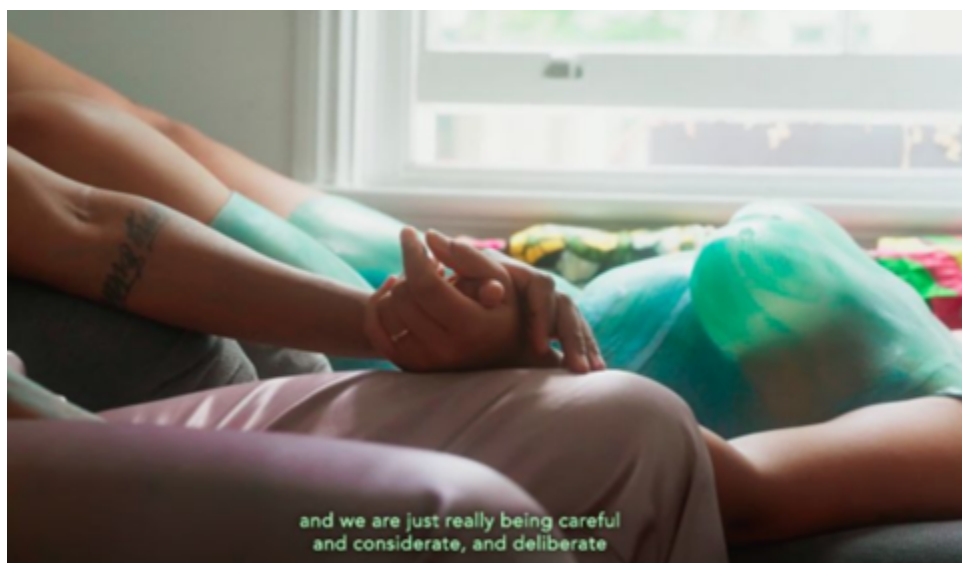
⁸⁰ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, (Duke University Press, 2016), 3.

⁸¹ Sharpe, “In the Wake,” 8.

to map how the past and present influence each other. This methodology is vital for uncovering how systems of oppression are reproduced in our modern society. Building upon the existing body of black scholarship, Sharpe constructs the ‘Wake’ and expands it by ‘...plotting, mapping, and collecting the archives of the everyday of Black immanent and imminent death, and in tracking the ways we resist, rupture, and disrupt that immanence and imminence aesthetically and materially.’⁸² Whittle employs this methodology doubly in her work: within the artistic content of her installation she condemns the prison industrial complex as ‘new plantations’, and in her curatorial practice she creates unique modes of collaboration that make space outside of institutional approval.⁸³

Hartman’s Wayward Methodology

The second chapter of Whittle’s film *Lagareh - The Last Born* scales down to focus on a moment of intimacy and honesty between a black queer couple. The couple, Ama and Angela, speak openly about their excitement and uncertainty of becoming parents, as well as their hopes for their unborn child. Through hazy cinematography punctuated with laughter and touch, the viewers witness the couple dream a new future together.



⁸² Sharpe, “In the Wake,” 14.

⁸³ *Lagareh - The Last Born*, (Forma Arts & Media, 2022).

Figure #5: Alberta Whittle, *Lagareh – The Last Born*, (film still – single channel video), *Tuesday* chapter, 2022, Photographer Matthew Arthur Williams, © Alberta Whittle. Courtesy the artist, Scotland+Venice, and Forma.

This evocative vignette echoes the storytelling style captured in Sadiya Hartman’s 2019 book: ‘*Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals*’. This book- from which Whittle borrows the titular concept to name her own curatorial strategy- is broken into a series of disconnected intimate moments chronicling the everyday lives of black and queer women at the turn of the twentieth century. By drawing upon moments of self-determination exercised in the mundane, Hartman challenges readers to see how black women retain their autonomy while under duress from racist, patriarchal, and heteronormative systems. As these systems work to pathologize black women, so too must readers exercise compassion to avoid reducing these women into spectacle. In the framing of these stories, Hartman utilises Black feminist care to illustrate the spirit of these women ‘...in the wake of the failed promises of emancipation and in the intervals of freedom.’⁸⁴ This style of compassionate storytelling becomes a form of alternative knowledge production that reveals a reality not documented in official historical records. This tension created by living freely despite systemic racism creates ‘linkages between the endurance of black radicality to self-define and augment life’ and is what Sadiya Hartman has termed ‘waywardness’.⁸⁵ Waywardness focuses on the capacity for energetic, rebellious movement against constraints, an ‘untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive.’⁸⁶ Whittle uses this philosophy of waywardness to guide her curatorial strategy, which is ‘...structured around methodologies based on collective dreaming, refusal, empathy, and radical softness [...] to move away from from traditional exhibition-making which largely follows a top-down approach, instead focusing on variegated entities embedded with solidarity and care.’⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Patrice D. Douglass, “Review of *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*,” *Lateral: Journal of the Cultural Studies Association*, Issue 8.2, (Fall 2019).

⁸⁵ Whittle, 114.

⁸⁶ Sadiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, (WW Norton & Company, 2019): 228.

⁸⁷ Whittle, 111.

Through waywardness Whittle critically engages with the UK arts sector and models a methodology of collective care work that insists upon institutional change.

Petrešin-Bachelez's *New Ecologies of Care*

How can wayward methodologies resist the apathetic productivity mandates of an arts sector that continuously reproduces a colonial top-down approach?⁸⁸ Whittle uses Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez's publication '*For Slow Institutions*' to reimagine how the UK art sector could be mobilised as a civic resource to 'counter the imperatives of late-capitalist and neoliberal progress-driven modes of living and thinking.'⁸⁹ Petrešin-Bachelez, herself an independent curator based in Paris, calls for fellow curators and institutions to re-evaluate their fundamental operating models.⁹⁰ The harm done by institutions perpetuating colonial ideologies fuelled by capitalist drives for accumulation and excessive consumption can only be addressed by acknowledging that such ideologies of growth are outmoded, and that '...nothing could be more myopic or dangerous in the 21st century.'⁹¹ Our conceptions of progress, based on the exploitation of labour and natural resources, create a hostile environment that cannot be sustained.⁹² Built upon this uncomfortable confrontation, Petrešin-Bachelez's proposed 'ecologies of care' is a methodology through which institutions practise self-critique through collective action in order to work towards more equitable ways of operating. This methodology picks apart institutional operations at differing scales to reveal both the most blatant and subtle inhabitations of our existing ideologies. In their essay *Detoxing and Decolonising Museums*, Sara Wajid and Rachael Minott examine the microaggressions enacted in museum spaces:

⁸⁸ Whittle, 121.

⁸⁹ Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, "For Slow Institutions," *e-flux: Journal* 85 (2017): 1.

⁹⁰ Petrešin-Bachelez, "For Slow Institutions," 1.

⁹¹ Robert R Janes and Richard Sandell, "Posterity has Arrived," in *Museum Activism*, (Routledge 2019), 5.

⁹² Petrešin-Bachelez, "For Slow Institutions," 6.

‘These mostly took the form of self-imposed limitations and policing of language for fear of offending an imagined, ‘traditional visitor’ who made up the ‘existing core audience.’ This led the museum team to ask whether we had internalised ideas of the traditional visitor as white, and whether we gave equal weight to offending People of Colour who visited the museum or, more importantly, who did not visit.’⁹³

Harkening back to the beginning of this chapter wherein Whittle positions herself as artist-curator, we can understand her formation of a ‘network of accomplices’ made of institutions and individuals to be a strategy for creating a non-hierarchical system of support. Whittle is selective about this process of building a network: she communicates the clarity of her vision, and shares authority with those who share that vision. While how Whittle shares authority will be further explored in the next chapter, it is important to understand that she is only able to do so through the strength of her vision, enriched and emboldened by a foundation of critical theory. Her intentionality transforms curation into decolonial curatorial care work through a process of ‘...more careful engagements, methodical thinking, equitable relationships, and collaborations among institutions and organizations or with independent curators and artists.’⁹⁴ While decolonial curatorial care work is a never-ending journey, Whittle’s practice aims to create a map.

Chapter 3: Resistance Through Care

In this chapter, I return to Whittle’s central question that underpins her decolonial curatorial care work: ‘What curatorial strategies would be mutually beneficial to support self-critique and lead to structural change in museums, galleries and artist-run initiatives?’⁹⁵ To

⁹³ Sara Wajid and Rachael Minott, “Detoxing and Decolonising Museums.” in *Museum Activism*, (Routledge 2019), 31.

⁹⁴ Annalee Davis et al, “Art as a Caribbean Feminist Practice,” *Small Axe* 21, no. 1, 52, (2017), 41.

⁹⁵ Whittle, 116.

further understand how Whittle’s methodology manifested in the production of the *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory*, I interviewed four leading voices in the Scottish cultural sector. Having worked closely with Whittle (often over the span of many years and projects), their multiple first-hand perspectives integrated together illustrate the complexities of Whittle’s undertaking. These forementioned accomplices within Whittle’s network include the following participants: Louise Briggs, Production Manager for Scotland + Venice; Dr. Emma Bond, academic lead for the *Re-Collecting Empire* exhibition; Amanda Catto, Head of Visual Arts at Creative Scotland and Chair of Scotland + Venice; and Lucy Askew, Chief Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the National Galleries of Scotland. It is from their insights that I will explore how Whittle balances communication between her audiences, accomplices, and institutions.

Remembrance & Entanglement

‘[D]ecolonial museum practice has to really be informed by the existing decades and decades of black scholarship and the way that black scholars have theorized the legacies of inequality, of racism, of slavery, of all these traumatic histories that centuries of white supremacy have inflicted on black communities.’⁹⁶

The quotation above comes from my conversation with Dr. Emma Bond, wherein we discussed the precarity of the term ‘decolonial’, and how often it is appropriated by art institutions. Bond speculates this challenge is further heightened for institutions as they are a colonial project, and the process of decolonisation challenges their standard mode of operating. Sceptical of a future wherein any museum could be considered fully ‘decolonised’, Bond echoes the sentiment of theorists from the previous chapter by emphasising decolonisation is a

⁹⁶ Dr. Emma Bond (academic lead for *Re-Collecting Empire* exhibition), interview conducted on 24 June 2022 by author.

continuous process of institutional self-critique, and should never be conceptualised as a fixed end point. One defining characteristic of decolonial work is its foundation in black scholarship. This foundation of understanding is necessary for reparative work to be done outside of institutionalised boundaries, because as black feminist Audre Lorde articulates: ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’.⁹⁷ In order to deconstruct the harmful colonial structures embedded within our institutions, we must position ourselves outside Western epistemologies in order to meditate outside the boundaries set forth by imperialism, capitalism, and heteronormativity.

As discussed in the last chapter, Whittle is well-versed in many critical theories and actively cites them within her work. However, it is worth noting that Whittle crucially also pulls from another source of inspiration: that of a long tradition of Caribbean hauntology. The ethos of Caribbean hauntology can perhaps be best captured by Jamaican-British cultural theorist Stuart Hall when he wrote: ‘We always knew that the dismantling of the colonial paradigm would release strange demons from the deep, and that these monsters might come trailing all sorts of subterranean material.’⁹⁸ Hauntedness is used as a device to express the psychic trauma caused by slavery. It articulates the way in which collective memories of alienation, displacement, and the loss of kinship cannot be suppressed, especially as we continue to operate within neo-colonial paradigms.⁹⁹ These anxieties have influenced postcolonial writings, and can be tracked through their usage of conventions such as: ‘the undermining of binary oppositions through an engagement of hybridity; the doubling and splitting of schizophrenic subjectivities; the desire for the impossible recovery of lost origins; the re-inscription of hidden, or fragmented histories; the ethics of memory and forgetting; the uncovering of contradictions in the colonising project; the challenge to the hegemony of western thought; and the foregrounding of the notion

⁹⁷ Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007), 110.

⁹⁸ Stuart Hall, “When was ‘the post-colonial’?” *Reading the Periphery*, n.d.

⁹⁹ Alison Rudd, “Demons from the Deep,” (PhD diss., The University of Northampton, 2006): 36.

that past systems of oppression continue into the present.’¹⁰⁰ While specific authors have championed postcolonial writings, such as Caribbean female writers Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid, and Shani Mootoo, Caribbean Hauntology is rooted within folk and spiritual traditions, thus residing in the collective memory that transcends a specific authorship.¹⁰¹ This is distinctly different from previously examined metaphysical spaces such as the ‘wake’ and ‘The Door of No Return’, which can be traced to an original author. Examples of this include the emergence of supernatural entities of Caribbean diasporic folklore such as *zombie* and *soucouyant*, which are adaptations of West African religiosity reconstituted to personify the grief and anger caused by the Transatlantic Slave Trade.¹⁰²

It should be noted that any enslaved peoples found practising African religion, spirituality, or folklore in the British-Caribbean during the colonial period were heavily persecuted. The term ‘obeah’ was invented by the British as a catch-all negative term for a myriad of diverse African practices and beliefs in the Caribbean. This term was then used to create anti-obeah legislation that suppressed ideologies considered by the British as ‘savage, depraved, or debased.’¹⁰³ The artistic reclamation of culture is an act of decolonisation, and has been termed the ‘aesthetics of decolonisation’ by curators of the *Life Between Islands: British-Caribbean Artists 1950s-Now* exhibition at the Tate.¹⁰⁴ Director of the Tate Alex Farquharson further defined this decolonising methodology, citing its complex origin through the fusion of African and Caribbean indigenous peoples belief systems: ‘Cultural decolonisation took the form of resurfacing and revalorising the repressed and fragmented African foundations of Caribbean identity which had survived with the folk culture of the Caribbean poor, alongside the evocation of the cosmology of the region’s indigenous peoples (the Caribs, Arawaks and

¹⁰⁰ Rudd, “Demons from the Deep,” 4.

¹⁰¹ S. A. Franchi, “(Mad)Women in the West Indies,” (Thesis, Wesleyan University, 2015), 2.

¹⁰² Rudd, “Demons from the Deep,” 56.

¹⁰³ Jerome S. Handler & Kenneth M. Bilby, *Enacting Power: The Criminalization of Obeah*, (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2013), 2.

¹⁰⁴ Farquharson, “Anew,” 10.

Taínos) who had been virtually exterminated under the first colonisers, the Spanish.¹⁰⁵ By integrating this rich history of Afro-Caribbean spirituality throughout *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory*, Whittle grounds her artistic practice in the reclamation of language and calls upon ancestral knowledge to subvert the imperialistic agenda.

Our relationship to language appears as a recurring theme within Whittle’s practice, as seen most prominently in her previous works *How Flexible Can We Make the Mouth* multimedia installation and *A Study in Vocal Intonation* film.¹⁰⁶ This thematic meditation also appears throughout *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory*, perhaps appearing most pointedly through the medium of the gallery seating.



Figure #6: Gallery seating in *deep dive (pause) uncoiling memory*, 2022, Installation Shot. Image taken on 26 April 2022 by author.

The gallery seating is fabricated into brightly coloured parentheses, commas, periods, and exclamations to remind visitors of the centrality of language in our ability to express (or repress)

¹⁰⁵ Farquharson, “Anew,” 11.

¹⁰⁶ “Installation,” *Alberta Whittle*.

concepts outside the establishment. In an interview conducted by *Dazed* magazine, Whittle explains the primacy of language in her installation as being key to a process of ‘unlearning’:

‘The title of this work [the *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory* installation], it’s got that very deliberate pause, and that pause is there to encourage us to settle... to settle into this state where we can really think, what have we forgotten? And so, by looking at memory, and actually almost using memory studies as a way to encourage this process of unlearning, I think we can really start to band together and think about change and encouraging different voices, intervening into what we understand of as history.’¹⁰⁷

This focus on language and the tension that arises between dialogues once repressed now reemerging grounds Whittle’s work as a decolonial curatorial practice. This act of remembrance is what queer theorist Eve Sedgwick articulates as a method in which we might reimagine a new future outside colonial structures, which allows us: ‘to open horizons beyond social patterns, rational decisions, and institutionally approved emotion’.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Emily Dinsdale, “Why artist Alberta Whittle is imploring us to ‘invest in love’,” *Dazed Media*, 26 April 2022.

¹⁰⁸ Eve K. Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, (New York: Methuen, 1986), 5.



Figure #7: African headrest in deep dive (pause) uncoiling memory, 2022, Installation Shot. Image taken on 26 April 2022 by author.

Connecting with a lost spirituality in order to commune with ancestors is another theme found throughout the installation's multimedia works. One such example is a wooden African headrest that sits upon the gallery floor, decorated with a carved serpent motif. Seven cowrie shells- like those used as currency within African trade networks- are haphazardly left atop the headrest. This carved piece evokes a history wherein dreams were believed to be journeys to a spiritual plane of existence, and messages from ancestors could be divinely interpreted to reveal hidden truths. Interestingly, this is one element of Whittle's work that has been repeatedly misidentified in press reviews as a prayer kneeler, such as that used in a Christian tradition.¹⁰⁹ The sad irony of this piece being misinterpreted as a ritualistic object of a religion that was forced upon the colonised as part of an imperial ideological conquest is worth consideration.

¹⁰⁹ Adam Benmakhlouf, "Invest in Love: Alberta Whittle @ Venice Biennale," *The Skinny*, 9 May 2022.



Figure #8: *Entanglement is more than blood - deep dive (pause) uncoiling memory*, 2022, Installation Shot. Image taken on 26 April 2022 by author.

This theme of forming ancestral connections is perhaps best explored through the tapestry titled *Entanglement is more than blood* (depicted in figure 8). This tapestry is unusual for several reasons, but perhaps most notably for its departure from traditional weaving technique. Whereas a grid of plain ‘warp’ threads on a loom serve as a canvas for colourful ‘weft’ threads to interweave a pattern, on this tapestry the ‘warp’ threads are vibrantly dyed and left exposed in an unfinished manner.¹¹⁰ Quite literally the background upholding this artwork is revealed, and the unfinished process in which it was created becomes transparent to the viewer. Additional visual cues invite a decolonial reading of this work. The centre of the tapestry explodes with a brightly-coloured harlequin amorphous hands that end in serpent-like tails, which interlock and reach outward. In dialogue with the other invocations of ancestors throughout the gallery space, these hands could be understood as inviting ancestral connections. Looking closely at the tapestry reveals that it is embedded with cowrie shells, glass beads, and other trinkets of maritime trade. Threads made from deconstructed whaling rope are also intermittently used

¹¹⁰ “What is Tapestry?” *V&A Online*.

within the warp background, creating a variety of textures. Perhaps the most obvious message is captured within the tapestry's title: *Entanglement is more than blood*.

The term 'entanglement' is significant in critical theory, as narratives of entanglement are used to conceptualise the relational dynamics that shape our lived reality and sources of knowledge production. In her book *What Comes After Entanglement*, critical theorist Eva Haifa Giraud explains how 'entanglement' as a conceptual framework is necessary to examine our relationality to the natural world and the complexity of systems and epistemologies through which humanity had inflicted harm: 'The purpose of emphasizing these histories of entanglement is to move beyond discourses of human exceptionalism, which can be used to justify practices that are damaging to those deemed nonhuman, other-than-human, or less-than-human.'¹¹¹

Through the medium of her artwork Whittle communicates narratives of entanglement which are built through self-critique and contestation. The next section will examine two processes through which these narratives are further enriched in their entanglement. Firstly will focus on how Whittle's artworks are created through a participatory production process which creates art infused with polyvocal narratives. Secondly will focus on how the juxtaposition of artworks situated within the gallery space fleshes out a more complex dialogue through their relationality.

Dialogic Aesthetics

'[Whittle's artistic] process is almost like a kind of opening out, a massive opening out to let everything flow. And then there's this process of pulling everything back in very, very carefully. And in that kind of growth out and then coming back in something happens, something in it crystallises. And that's the quality she has as an artist. I think she's honing that, as she's developing and working more in that collaborative way really directly with performers and others.'

¹¹¹ Eva H. Giraud, *What Comes After Entanglement?*, (Duke University Press, 2019), 7.

She's developing a confidence, she knows how she can push, and she knows that she's got to draw it back.'¹¹²

This quotation is from my interview with Amanda Catto, Chair of Scotland + Venice and member of the selection committee who chose Whittle as the representing artist for the Biennale commission. When asked why Whittle had been selected and what set her artistic practice apart from her contemporaries, Catto reflected on Whittle's ability to share authority while also retaining a clarity of vision that is reliant upon her skillset as a confident and patient communicator. Through years of cultivating relationships with institutions, performers, artists, and others in her 'network of accomplices', Whittle has invested herself into building community with fellow practitioners. Catto calls this a 'mutually supportive way of being', wherein Whittle welcomes some trusted people into the fold, from which she invites their 'constant addition' to her work. This need for relationships built on trust is an important dimension, as the multitude of voices could easily become chaotic if a level of understanding is not reached. Catto articulates this point reached among collaborators, when the clarity of vision is realised and protected: '[T]here's no need to overly communicate with those people that you're collaborating with what it is that you need or want of them. You've worked with people before, you've done work for them and now they're working for you...and so there's a sense of building up an alliance of understanding.'¹¹³ This helps to move forward an informed dialogue that is shaped by a plurality of perspectives, an experience which is described by Catto as enriching for both the artist and her network of accomplices.

Whittle's participatory methodology is an inherently decolonial process, and can be understood through Bakhtin's theory of dialogic discourse as encouraging polyvocal dialogues wherein friction can produce a more nuanced narrative:

¹¹² Catto, interview.

¹¹³ Catto, interview.

‘Bakhtin argues that dialogic discourse – any cultural expression built on multiple, even conflicting voices in conversation with each other – can reveal deeper social truths and contradictions precisely because it rejects a single, absolute authoritative voice. Bakhtin proposes that the meanings of words, objects and images are dependent on the words, objects, and meanings around them.’¹¹⁴

Bakhtin’s dialogic discourse theory can be further teased out by incorporating Kester’s theory of dialogical aesthetics. Kester’s theory contends that the evaluative framework for contemporary art does not need to centre on the physical object, but could alternatively be judged by the art’s exchange of ideas- in other words, its dialogical aesthetics.¹¹⁵ Taken together, these theories propose a framework in which the polyvocal narrative on socio-cultural issues exposed through contemporary artwork becomes the ultimate focus. This positions contemporary art-making as a socially engaged practice, which then in turn invites the viewer to critically explore these narratives. This dialogue built between artists, collaborators, institutions and viewers is what Marsden conceptualises as a desperately-needed service for promoting critical thinking and civic engagement.¹¹⁶

Additionally, it must be stated that meanings are lost if the artworks within *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory* are analysed separately. Returning to the conceptual framework provided by Bakhtin, the meanings of objects are dependent on the objects around them. As individual artworks within the gallery space address narratives on different scales, their juxtaposition creates a further depth to the narratives at play, drawing previously invisible linkages and entangling their narratives together. Whittle’s use of juxtaposition has become a

¹¹⁴ Scott Marsden, “An Insurgent Curatorial Strategy,” *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 37, no. 1 (2018): 135.

¹¹⁵ Grant Kester, “Dialogical Aesthetics: A Critical Framework For Littoral Art,” *Variant* 9, (1999).

¹¹⁶ Marsden, “Insurgent,” 141.

defining signature of her artistic practice, and is most revealed through elements interwoven through the gallery space outside of the commissioned pieces. Perhaps most striking is Whittle's inclusion of a portrait painted by her own mother, which depicts Whittle herself as a sleeping toddler.



Figure #9: Portrait of the artist by Janice Whittle, 1987 in *deep dive (pause) uncoiling memory*, 2022 Installation Shot. Image taken on 26 April 2022 by author.

As elaborated on in my interview with Louise Briggs, the curatorial choice to include this portrait was a risky departure from the status quo for a number of reasons: Whittle had not been involved in the painting's production, the painting had been lost in a family storage unit for decades, and it had not been made for the purpose of exhibiting.¹¹⁷ However when hung on an imperial purple wall above the African headrest, the painting becomes entangled within a wider narrative. Looking at this painting of a resting black child, viewers are reminded of the content of the Lagareh film. We reflect on Ama and Angela's unborn child, the children left fatherless by the murder of Sheku Bayoh, the maternal protectiveness conveyed through the movements of silent performers, the loss of 'someone's baby, someone's cherished darling' as the names of

¹¹⁷ Briggs, interview.

victims of police brutality in the UK are read aloud by Whittle at the end of the film. Dialogues created through juxtaposition can open new avenues towards empathy. In my interview with Louise Briggs, she outlined this special quality of Whittle's to create new juxtaposed dialogues that heterogeneous audiences can understand through multiple narrative entry points:

'I've never experienced racism and so there are a lot of experiences within the whole project, within the film [...] I have never experienced. Yet, there are still things that Alberta is bringing in that everybody can on some level, kind of empathize and understand, because it's talking about family, it's talking about friendship, it's talking about care, love maybe, grief- and so there's all these elements that have been brought in that are very personal to Alberta. But yet at the same time, everybody in some way has experience, some of these personal intimate moments of their lives. And I think that's a really powerful thing because it draws an audience in and it makes the work feel quite real and very much grounded in personal experience and life, which is really good.'¹¹⁸

Multiple artworks created by multiple people then intentionally juxtaposed not only allows for multiple narratives to be told, but it also creates greater access to those narratives to heterogeneous audiences that may be unfamiliar with some of the concepts or issues examined. This is one of the ultimate strengths of Whittle's artistic practice- her ability to take complex critical theories and make them visible. Visibility is one of the main tenets of decolonial practice, and another way Whittle furthers this is by using her platform to make visible her behind-the-scenes accomplices in a radical departure of the status quo.

¹¹⁸ Briggs, interview.

Communities of Care

'I think that is what has kept a lot of people from not being seen or not being heard [in the contemporary art field], is that they're in the background. I can see from working with Alberta how much she brings everybody in. I've worked with a lot of artists before, and I've worked with teams of highly skilled makers and technicians who would never get acknowledged or even known. But Alberta isn't interested in that, she will be very clear and say "They made that with me," and that's how it should be. [...] And so, she acknowledges that there are Weavers, who have been weaving for 30 years, who made that tapestry. Why deny that? That's what makes it work and then everybody feels a part of it and everybody's invested in it and everybody wants to make it work.'¹¹⁹

When speaking to Louise Briggs, Production Manager for Scotland + Venice, Briggs reflected on her own experience collaborating with artists and how Whittle's approach is a departure from the established norm. Absolutely key to this is Whittle's public-facing acknowledgement of others' contributions to her work. Her network of accomplices are recognised throughout the gallery space, at the end of her film, and within collateral publications. Figure 10 below shows the acknowledgements panel, which is one of several interpretation panels in the installation that names individual collaborators.

¹¹⁹ Briggs, interview.

theorist Wenger-Trayner’s ‘communities of practice’ conceptual framework, the structure of the programme can be understood as cultivating a social learning environment wherein through sustained interactions a ‘shared repertoire of resources’ is created. These resources reflect dynamic modes of knowing such as lived experiences, stories, skills, and tools to create an collectively informed practice.¹²¹ In *Cultivating Communities of Practice*, Wenger-Trayner elaborates that this shared knowledge production is necessary for addressing complex issues: ‘today’s complex problem solving requires multiple perspectives...we need others to complement and develop our own expertise.’¹²² When considering the entangled sociocultural issues brought to the forefront in *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory*, this collective approach creates space for participants to engage critically with the themes of Whittle’s work. This ‘communities of practice’ approach is best exemplified in the structure of the training sessions.



Figure #11: Scotland + Venice professional development training session at Dovecot Studios, the tapestry *Entanglement is more than blood* in mid-production. Image taken on 5 February 2022 by author.

¹²¹ Etienne & Beverly Wenger-Trayner, “Introduction to Communities of Practice,” (Wenger-Trayner 2015).
¹²² Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge*, (Harvard Business Press, 2002): 10.

As illustrated in figure 11, training sessions were structured as intimate studio visits to Dovecot Studios, Glasgow Sculpture Studios, and the Centre of Contemporary Arts to speak with Whittle and her collaborators during the production of the pieces that would later be showcased in *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory*.

While traditionally invigilators are prepared for their positions through instructional lecture-based trainings, the structure of the programme broke from this norm to create a non-hierarchical network of communication between artists, curators, administrators, and invigilators. Through these conversations, it was understood that not only would invigilators be attending to the gallery space, but that their on-site contributions were part of the creative process that influenced the visitor's holistic experience of the installation. This is further realised by the invigilator's active role in offering visitors handmade quilts to sit with and 'teas of magical resistance' to drink within the installation. Through this performance of care and encouraging rest within the space, invigilators become and are recognised as part of the experience of the installation. This is a radically different conceptualisation of the role of invigilators than is typical within the UK arts sector, but is one that is absolutely vital as a counter-hegemonic strategy. Following an unfortunate series of high-profile reports of mistreatment to front of house staff throughout the arts sector, the Museums Association published a *Charter for Change*, a campaign which outlines the need for reorienting organisational hierarchies: 'We need to commit to recognising talent and contribution across all functions and teams in museums, especially front-of-house colleagues, as these roles may have previously been 'side-lined' or diminished as a result of organisational hierarchy and bias. [...] There is often greater diversity within front-of-house teams than other areas

of the museum workforce.’¹²³ By including invigilators as accomplices in Whittle’s network they become part of this cycle of ‘constant addition’.

Art Technicians

‘Increasingly, successful artists are working with teams of technicians who contribute precious amounts of skill, time and experience to the final work. What of these assistants? Their names never appear in the list of government grants or biennale participants.’¹²⁴

The quotation above comes from the essay ‘The Art of Outsourcing,’ which examines the long-lasting tradition of only extending credit to a singular artist and disregarding contributions made by others involved in the art-making process, especially in the case of ‘fine art’ institutions such as biennales. This illustrates perhaps the most radical of Whittle’s acknowledgements: that she pays to contributing artists, performers, and technicians. This is exceedingly unusual in the contemporary art field, as crediting others has been seen as undermining the authority of the artist as a lone visionary. To underscore how remarkable Whittle’s departure from the norm is, it is vital to scrutinise how value is placed upon contemporary art.

The lack of objective criteria for the aesthetic judgement of contemporary art creates a heightened reliance on the artist’s own ‘creative vision’ as a metric for evaluation. I borrow Hannah Wohl’s definition of creative vision for this analysis, which she defines as a: ‘bundle of recognizable and enduring consistencies within a body of work, with a body of work being the oeuvre or corpus of an individual.’¹²⁵ Whittle’s creative vision spans a prolific oeuvre, wherein works build upon each other and continue

¹²³ “Recognition,” *Museums Association*, 2022.

¹²⁴ Nicola Harvey, “The Art of Outsourcing,” *Artlink* 25, no. 1 (2005): 15.

¹²⁵ Hannah Wohl, *Bound by Creativity: How Contemporary Art is Created and Judged*, (University of Chicago Press, 2021), 4.

to expand on formal and conceptual elements. However central to this creative vision is how the artists themselves are perceived. The cult of celebrity and the contemporary art market are inextricably linked, with a long history resulting in a favoured characterisation of the ‘true artist’ as eccentric, individualistic, aesthetic obsessed, and economically disinterested.¹²⁶ This image of the lone genius tormented by their own creative energy has become a sign of authenticity, as a necessary expression of the artist’s unbridled aesthetic autonomy. When that romanticised, patriarchal image of absolute autonomy is threatened – such as through crediting art technicians, performers, and artists – this can be seen as delegitimizing the artist and thus consequently devaluing the work. This ‘culture of secrecy’ made in response to commercial pressures is difficult but not impossible to resist, and is described by an anonymous art technician in the *Independent*’s exposé as follows: ‘The more positive the relationship [between artist and art technician] is, the more chance there is of them recognising the fact that they didn’t make it themselves – but that’s a rare occasion.’¹²⁷

Through Whittle’s accreditation of the highly-skilled technicians who worked for and with her, Whittle subverts the pressures of a romanticised industry to stand by her stated mission ‘to practice in solidarity with others.’¹²⁸ This is waywardness incarnate: Whittle’s refusal to meet best practice industry standards that have hidden the contributions of others to the art-making process puts her reputation as an artist in a precarious position. It is only by breaking away from harmful methodologies that can we collectively build a supportive space to ‘shape-shift our gallery into a new incarnation.’¹²⁹ This is the last component of Whittle’s decolonial care work that I will examine – how she uses her platform to encourage institutional change.

¹²⁶ Wohl, “Bound by Creativity,” 42.

¹²⁷ Lindsey Johnstone, “Art Technicians: The Industry’s Dirty Secret,” *The Independent*, July 2018.

¹²⁸ Whittle, 110.

¹²⁹ Whittle, 122.

Institutional Change

‘Some people will be very happy to say, "let's have someone in to write a label," or [host] a guest curator show, but you're not really sharing the space with that person. I mean the rest [of the authority] is still yours. How much are you [museums] prepared to give up? How much are you prepared to change? Having those really honest conversations and involving as much as possible your visitors and your communities in those conversations so it's not something you're doing for yourself, it's collective action. Which is going to also benefit people coming to the museum and make a space that everyone feels is safe and welcoming.’¹³⁰

The scepticism expressed by Dr. Emma Bond above is well warranted as the arts sector shakily navigates its way into the 21st century while still wrestling with its inherent colonial paradigm. As Whittle herself has highlighted, many of the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives introduced throughout the UK simply reproduce colonial top-down approaches to labour that result in tokenization and burn out.¹³¹ To genuinely work towards dismantling the harmful structures art institutions are built upon, there must be an investment made into the creation of a new system of operations that supports communities outside the majority. This creates a site of contestation as a multitude of political interests vie for the institution’s legitimising authority. An analysis of wayward curation would not be complete without acknowledging this contradictory entanglement produced as socially engaged artist collectives work within and beyond dominant hegemonic institutions. In Whittle’s case, as an artist commissioned by Scotland + Venice, she has been invited into a consortium of national-level institutions to share what can be described as her transformative para-sitic agenda.

¹³⁰ Bond, interview.

¹³¹ Whittle, 122.

Theorist Janna Graham's para-sitic agenda conceptualises how a symbiotic relationship may be expressed between a contested parasite (the artist) and the resource-rich host (the institution). Their relationship is typically galvanised by struggle: the host seeks relevance while the parasite seeks resources. While this is a gross oversimplification, this framework is useful for its ability to illustrate the primary importance of how this relationship is negotiated. As Graham warns, the commissioned para-site must traverse upon a thin line between competing interests and their own capacity, with their artistic integrity often at risk:

‘While such cracks [in the institution’s ideological composition] are a consistent feature of neoliberalism and have enabled workers of and communities involved with cultural institutions to articulate their own agency vis-à-vis the issues of social justice, they have equally opened the doors to private interests and privatized modes of subjectivation. Invited para-sites can, for this reason, just as easily replicate hegemonic hierarchies and values—and therefore not be para-sites at all—as they can break with them.’

This is the risk that commissioned artists face when they are invited to practise critique from within the existing structures of an institution. Does the invitation come with the funding, time, and organisational support necessary to enact genuine change? As a temporary installation at the Venice Biennale representing Scotland, does *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory* impact end with its subverting critique of colonialism within a hypernationalistic space, or does it also act as a catalyst for institutional transformation? Gathered from interviews with Whittle's accomplices at Scotland + Venice, Creative Scotland, and National Galleries Scotland explored in this chapter, it is clear a continuous effort is being made to internalise Whittle's ethos of care into their own respective

institutional operations. Each interview participant voiced their desire to emulate Whittle's curatorial strategies in forming a mode of operating that invests in partnerships, invites critique, and advocates for social justice. This can be perhaps best exemplified in her upcoming collaboration with the National Galleries Scotland for the curation of a temporary exhibition (tentatively scheduled for April-November 2023) showcasing a survey of her artistic portfolio. Chief curator Lucy Askew details Whittle's involvement within the production of this exhibition as follows:

'We're not going away and just making an exhibition of her work in isolation, because this absolutely has to be in the spirit of her generous and collaborative way of working. In a way, that's one of the joys of working with her, because she kind of models this incredible approach to openness and giving space [...] as an organisation on a journey of change ourselves, I think it is very interesting for us to kind of work out how we as a sort of quite monolithic institution can provide that space as well.'¹³²

Askew goes on to detail how the National Galleries Scotland is taking a long-term view to widening access to their institutions through forming strategic policies based on ongoing community consultation, and how Whittle's exhibition has been key to that process. While this process of widening access should be the focus of its own research, it does demonstrate a symbiotic relationship between artist and host institution wherein a long-term investment of both funding and of trust can create a platform wherein both parties influence each other.

¹³² Lucy Askew (Chief Curator at National Galleries of Scotland), interview conducted on 7 July 2022 by author.

Conclusion

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Brigg's analysis of *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory* drives at the heart of Whittle's wayward curatorial strategy: through its thematic content and its mode of production, it imagines new ways of being outside of our entrenched systems. What can Whittle's waywardness reveal to practitioners hoping to replicate her decolonial curatorial care work to transform their own institutions? The first chapter sought to answer this through illustrating the complex and often contradictory nature of operating within institutions embedded in colonial paradigms. Whittle's response to this hostile environment is explored in both the second and third chapter. The second chapter focused on Whittle's astute ability to embed counter-hegemonic theory into multiple facets of her practice, and how this has equipped her with the conceptual tools necessary to critically occupy the institutions she works for and with. The third chapter utilised first-hand accounts from Whittle's accomplices to present how her communities of care methodology creates a practice wherein individuals and institutions are invited to become active agents of change.

There are many points for further study in *deep dive (pause): uncoiling memory* that could not be captured within the limitations of this research, such as the role of abolitionist art during ongoing police brutality investigations or an analysis of institutional strategic policies for structural change. This research's narrow focus has striven to map affinities leading towards a decolonial process, and how the conceptual frameworks constructed in decolonial, feminist, and queer theories can manifest into practices outside the confines of our current systemic modes of being. Whittle has utilised

the high visibility of the Biennale to dignify her content and collaborators. Her work shows what it means to have an artistic practice invested in love.

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Emma Bond, academic lead for Re-Collecting Empire exhibition. Interview conducted on 24 June 2022.

Louise Briggs, Production Manager of Scotland + Venice. Interview conducted on 13 June 2022.

Lucy Askew, Chief Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the National Galleries of Scotland. Interview conducted on 7 July 2022.