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Pedagogies of the Senses: Multimodal Strategies for Unsettling Visual Anthropology

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Introduction

In the early 1990s Wilton Martinez (1992) asked “who constructs anthropological knowledge?” in the context of teaching canonical ethnographic films and photographs to undergraduate anthropology students. His critique was straightforward; by unreflexively showing images and films produced and rendered during early 20th century efforts to salvage culture devastated by colonial and imperial genocide and expropriation, contemporary anthropologists reaffirmed students’ already existing understandings of the racial hierarchies we have inherited as a legacy of colonial power. The images, Martinez argued, reproduced these troubling ideas of hierarchical difference *even* when they were accompanied with a critical framing. In effect, students read these moving and still images in ways that reaffirmed the conditions of coloniality that reinforce racial hierarchies, reassert linear notions of progress, and reproduce civilizational discourses that place the so-called West above the rest. Following decolonial theorist Anibal Quijano (2000), we understand these conditions of coloniality as a matrix of power that structures life through biopolitical and discursive formations—in this case, through disciplinary knowledge as it is taught in university classrooms.¹

Drawing from our own experiences teaching visual anthropology, in this article we describe and analyze our multimodal strategies aimed at interrupting anthropology's tendency to reproduce coloniality, particularly its tendency to reinforce racialized ideologies, through its visual archive. In our teaching, each of us has sought to displace the visual in visual anthropology, recognizing how vision is recruited in disciplinary formations to uphold colonial

regimes of power (Mirzoeff 2011). In this context, multimodality refers to our use of multiple media (often in tension with each other) as well as how we foreground the different ways (or “modes”) in which meaning and sense are produced in the classroom and in conversation with visual anthropology’s archive. The strategies of disruption and redirection we unpack in this article—including sonic displacements, figure-background reversals and redactions—begin with a close engagement with modes of perception rather than relying on rational critique. In other words, we are attentive to what our students—who come from diverse backgrounds—might sense and feel when they are put into contact with anthropological visual representations; we recognize that these images interpellate them differently and have developed a teaching practice that centers the affective space generated in these pedagogical encounters.

This kind of proactive attention to the affect of images and to the kinds of listening, sensing, and seeing they discipline us into recognizes what anthropologists Karen Brodtkin, Sandra Morgen, and Janis Hutchinson (2011) have described as the whiteness of anthropological space. While as a discipline, anthropology has come a long way in the last 50 years to address its own historical complicity in the creation and maintenance of colonial and imperial taxonomies of difference, they argue that in terms of departmental praxis, anthropologists often reproduce cultural and discursive practices “that carry racial baggage but also deny racial subtexts and racially unequal outcomes” (2011, 545). As a result, the spaces of inhabitation in an anthropology department—the department meeting, the classroom, the hallways—are socially constructed as white public spaces.

One effect of this social construction of white space Brodtkin et al. found is that it creates “race avoidance” strategies. Questions around the historical production of racialized difference as it shapes contemporary inequality are silenced in favor of liberal post-racial approaches that

imagine students (and faculty) inhabit positions that are already equal in footing. In the classroom, the result is that even when engaged with critically, students receive (visual) anthropology as a reproduction of coloniality. This post-racial approach to teaching visual anthropology—for Black and ethnic minority students in particular—may be experienced as violence. By evoking violence here, we are thinking of the kinds of harm inflicted on minoritized students through a kind of representational *laissez faire* in the classroom—that is, feelings of alienation, objectification, and degradation that students have shared with us, Gabriel in particular, over the years regarding their experiences in the discipline.

The testimonies these students have shared about their experiences with the discipline form what queer theorist Sara Ahmed (2021) calls complaint, “a register through which one can express “grief, pain, or dissatisfaction, something that is a cause of protest or outcry....or a formal allegation” (4). These complaints, as they have been shared with us, foreground the ways harm is felt in the classroom (and expressed elsewhere) when students encounter representations whose affects cannot simply be banished through critique. In this article we focus on the affects that are enabled in teaching and learning encounters when archival materials from the anthropological canon are not passively engaged with but rather, actively displaced, and when other, alternative audio-visual archival materials are mobilized in the classroom with the aim of seeing, hearing, and feeling from a different vantage point.

An attention to affective reception is a crucial starting point for developing new sensorial modes of engagement. These modes unflinchingly take on the pernicious registers of coloniality embedded in the anthropological canon. In so doing, they offer a pedagogical potential for disrupting the discipline as an enduring white space as it is materialized in the classroom. This approach does not discount teaching our students to critically engage with the discipline.

Certainly, as anthropologist Girish Daswani notes, critical reflection should be part of a decolonizing strategy for teaching and learning anthropology (O’Sullivan 2019). Indeed, we consider it an integral part of a pedagogical approach to support students to develop the capacity to rigorously examine the arguments and evidence and to reflexively assess the conclusions they reach based on their experiences alone. However, we submit that it is vital we also engage with the senses as a site where coloniality is remade. This is particularly important for those who teach visual anthropology but is also relevant for anyone who uses audiovisual materials in their teaching—precisely because of how these modes affectively reinscribe colonial forms of relation rooted in fictions of racial hierarchy.

Our pedagogical strategies to simultaneously engage and disrupt affective reception draw from black feminist theorist Tina Campt’s (2017) call to listen to images, black studies scholar Cristina Sharpe’s (2016) and historian and cultural theorist Saidiya Hartman’s (2019) move towards redaction as a form of protection, and from a host of postcolonial and Indigenous artists working against the grain of the colonial archive. They emerge out of a desire to center the seeing eye and listening ear of our Black and ethnic minority students when we engage with audiovisual representations in the classroom, particularly those produced under the banner of anthropology. We argue for a pedagogy of the senses that is committed to engaging with the affective space of the classroom in ways that exceed understandings of knowledge transmission as a universalized, rational exchange between actors on the same footing. Instead, we turn towards an active listening, seeing, feeling engagement with the materials we share.

This move refuses to indulge in reproducing the passivity of the normative viewer/listener. Instead, it recognizes the histories that produce different proximities and attunements to the act of bearing witness as well as the learning opportunities that come from

activating and listening to diverse experiences found in the classroom. Our turn to the senses, those imbricated and cultivated registers of seeing, hearing, tasting, touching that allow us to apprehend and feel the world (Howes 2019), ground our pedagogical moves because it decenters knowing that gives primacy to the presumption of a universal position. A pedagogy of the senses also requires we pay critical attention to our own historically wrought embodiments as they shape how we sense and engage with our students in the classroom. This, of course, suggests that any pedagogical strategy that aims to disrupt coloniality cannot simply be reduced to a set of exchangeable strategies. It must also account for how our positionalities as teachers can and should shape how we actively engage our shared colonial histories that foreground differentially located bodies as the site where learning and unlearning becomes possible.

Our hope is that by developing what we describe as *pedagogies of the senses*—strategies that attend to and unsettle the visual archives of the discipline and its peripheries—we can foster a conversation around how we might teach and learn (visual) anthropology differently. We recognize these conversations extend beyond the classroom experimentations we think through and theorize in this article. We conclude with a brief discussion of the controversy surrounding the cover image of a recent issue of *American Anthropologist* and touch upon current debates around the display of colonial imagery in museums in the global north to point towards the urgent need for generating new viewing/displaying conventions in the discipline and beyond.

Interruptions (or Re-learning to See in New Cross)

We teach in Anthropology at Goldsmiths, University of London and the stories we share in this article take place in this context. Goldsmiths was initially founded as a technical college in New Cross, Southeast London in 1894 and was acquired by the University of London and renamed

Goldsmiths College in 1904 (Hendrich 2008). It became known as an arts and social sciences college in the 1960s and underwent a rapid expansion in the subsequent decades. It was made a full college of the University of London in 1998 and subsequently received its royal charter. Historically, Goldsmiths has served a non-traditional student body. Students categorized as mature (older students who often work while going to school), international (students who obtain student visas from abroad to study in the institution), and BAME (a uniquely British racial category that stands for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic), have, since the late 1980s, made up a significant portion of Goldsmiths' student body.²

Goldsmiths has developed a reputation, since the cultural studies revolution of the 1980s, for being a progressive, even radical, institution in terms of the scholarship its academics produce and the politics it is rooted in. This narrative of radical possibility extends to its Anthropology department. The department was founded in 1986 and in subsequent years claimed a unique position within British social anthropology: one less invested in the disciplinary canon and more orientated towards a critical engagement with the world around it, including its immediate surroundings in South London.³ This critical engagement is deeply embedded in the narrative the department shares in its public discourse about itself. However, both of us have taught in the department for several years and we have come to question, separately and in dialogue, what happens when the critical apparatus we use as teachers to frame anthropology's colonial archive is seen and felt as radically insufficient by our students.

Isaac was confronted with the untenability of his so-called critical engagements with the colonial archive in a series of discussions with students. It was only then that he understood how the act of displaying images such as anthropometric photographs, even wrapped in multiple critical labels ("racist," "exoticizing," "voyeuristic"), could indeed reproduce their original

violence. As some of his Black and ethnic minority students explained, these colonial-era images were not just indexes of the discipline's past wrongdoings, but rather powerful reminders of the continuity of such racist gaze in the present. Providing a stage for these images in the classroom, even critically, was complicit in the perpetuation of racial stereotyping and discrimination. Moreover, it could be triggering for students and destroy the possibility of developing the trust and intimacy that engaged pedagogy aspires to construct (hooks 1994).

These conversations were educational for Isaac; they taught him about his white privilege, about the affective and political limits of critique when it came to the pedagogical space of the classroom, and, finally, about the absence of relevant institutional/pedagogical resources to draw from as a lecturer. For instance, he had to learn to recognize how his emotional disconnection with the colonial archive – the very possibility of seeing it as an object of inquiry and critique – was a function of his privilege. In this context, one obvious answer was the complete removal of any potentially racist image from his teaching materials (and, indeed, he took out from class materials many images he had previously used). But as someone teaching visual anthropology and hoping to work with the archive “against the grain” (Benjamin 2015) to build strategies of resistance that may enable students to reimagine the discipline, he felt he could not simply efface these images. Instead, he decided to experiment with tactically intervening in them via redactions, figure–ground reversals, and extreme under- or over-exposure. The examples that follow emerged in the context of a post-graduate module called *Directions and Diversions in Visual Anthropology*, the core theory component of the Department's MA in Visual Anthropology.

Take for instance the image readily available from the British Museum online catalogue. This is an image Isaac had previously used as an illustration of the overt racism of early 20th

century colonial expeditions. The insertion of a black square covering the bodies of those subject to the measuring gaze (Figure 1), however, interrupts the continuity between the original staging and its redeployment in the classroom. This is a strategy that anthropologist Nicolas Peterson (2003) had used when revisiting the circulation of images depicting restricted aboriginal rituals in Australia. Isaac intended the redaction to offer some kind of protection for these bodies in the present, as well as to displace the analytic center of the image towards the white men at both ends. It is towards them, and the institutions they represent, that he wished to redirect the students' attention.

The strategy certainly worked in terms of opening up a different set of questions for discussion: Why are these (unredacted) images still available today as part of a national archive, for anybody to see and use as they please? What is the responsibility associated to bringing such an image to a classroom? Can the image's original violence be both engaged with and somehow obstructed? What does it mean to care for those portrayed under the colonial gaze, as well as for those who encounter it in the present?

For this gesture to have any meaningful impact it needed to be part of a larger commitment to decolonial pedagogy: from the selection of readings to the teaching and evaluation methods.

Displacing the canon is a multifaceted and, in Isaac's experience, ongoing and unfinished project that requires continuous work especially by those who occupy positions of pedagogical authority and have enjoyed the privilege of a non-racialized existence. In terms of working specifically with visual anthropology's archive, Isaac has experimented with several other strategies that involved the interruption of an image, as well as, crucially, the expectation of an image.

Challenging the entitlement to see, in turn linked to the assumption of the white liberal subject as the unmarked, unexamined producer and audience of these images, became one of the central

concerns of these exercises. In a class about the shifting notions of evidence within anthropology, which included a section on anthropometric photography, Isaac repurposed a strategy he had seen black studies scholar Christina Sharpe use in a different context in her 2016 book *In the Wake*. The images of naked women and men standing against the background of a measuring grid—such as photographer John Lamprey’s, currently held by the Royal Anthropological Institute—are perhaps the ultimate example of racist anthropology: here, people’s bodies are meant to represent a typology, rather than a person. They become so-called specimens of a race.

In the past, Isaac had tended to show these photographs, but not linger on them, in the hope that restrictions in the duration of the encounter would somehow contribute to generating a critical distance. But what if that which the image dismissed, the individuality of that body, was to be re-centered? Could a sense of individual dignity be salvaged from these atrocious images? Isaac proceeded to redact the whole image except a horizontal strip revealing the person’s eyes – a superfluous detail in the search of a type in the original image, the trace of an individual in the redacted version (Figure 2).

Disrupting the expectation of unimpeded visual access to Black life is indeed an important feature of contemporary Black radical aesthetics (Aranke 2017). Artists such as Sadie Barnette, Cameron Rowland, Onyeka Igwe, and John Akomfrah are among those using different forms of obstruction in order to “disturb visibility as a measure of black presence” (Aranke 2017, 3; Igwe, 2021). These practices can be read more widely in relation to two key concepts in Black Studies: *the right to opacity*, that is, a politics of resistance based on interrupting the nexus between transparency, knowledge, and power which is intrinsic to Western Modernity (Glissant 1997); and *refusal*, “the decision to reject the terms of diminished subjecthood with which one is

presented, using negation as a generative and creative source of disorderly power to embrace the possibility of living otherwise” (Campt 2018, 83). At stake here are strategies of not complying with demands for normative visibility and legibility; forms of inscrutability “that mark the ways in which racialized life endures under current regimes of political violence” (Mengesha and Padmanabhan, 2019). In an important article reassessing the anthropologist and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston’s contribution to Black cinema, literary and visual scholar Autumn Womack argues that her short films enact “a particular kind of viewing wherein the gaze is lured, but not rewarded, with the promise of unmitigated racial knowledge, complete narrative, or quantitative documentation” (2015, 115). Womack uses the term “overexposure” to describe an aesthetics of excess (of light, of motion, of bodies) that disrupts the film’s legibility and experience; that breaks the established relationship between transparent access, documentary evidence, and truth. Hurston’s overexposure amounts to a refusal to capture and re-present “Black life as a discrete and consumable ‘object’” (Womack 2015, 125) – it rather remains in motion, un-fixed, opaque to the scientific gaze.

Back in New Cross, Isaac has also experimented with adjustments in an image’s exposure and opacity (in a technical sense) as a strategy to challenge the relationship between visibility, representation and knowledge (Figure 3). Here, the aim was to create a space of absence/presence for the specters of those subject to colonial violence; to create the feeling of an image, or a feeling around it. Isaac encountered a powerful instance of this in historian and cultural theorist Saidiya Hartman’s *Wayward Lives*, when she discusses a 19th century odalisque (a reclining nude) of a Black girl. The photograph is “annotated” with great detail and care, seeking “to make my words into a shield that might protect her, a barricade to deflect the gaze and cloak what had been exposed” (2019, 26). As the violence of the encounter captured in the

image is unpacked, and situated within the afterlives of slavery, the photograph itself remains inaccessible as such. It appears twice in the passage: first as a barely visible, but perceptible, full-bleed background image behind the text; then, in the next page, tightly cropped centering the girl's face.

Historian Chris Moffat (2019) has argued that looking after the ghosts of the past can constitute an “untimely interference” which disturbs the linear time of modernity and brings the past into the present/future. Similarly, Isaac's intention with these classrooms experiments has been to center the afterlives of colonial anthropology and their continuing grip on the discipline, as well as their resonance with contemporary forms of racialization from policing to mainstream documentary. From his position as a lecturer, Isaac experienced a marked change in class dynamics following his change of approach to colonial imagery. Previously, these images had tended to generate a combination of silence and guilt that, in hindsight, effectively re-centered whiteness in the classroom. Wrongdoings were acknowledged, but situated in the past, and narratives of regret tended to dominate the discussion. In contrast, a focus on interruption and afterlives brought with it a new constellation of affect into the classroom with questions around responsibility, care, and agency taking center stage.

To unpack the effects of these pedagogical experiments from a student's point of view, Isaac contacted two cohorts of postgraduates outlining the arguments of this article and inviting them to engage in a conversation.⁴ Several of them remarked how the images had *set the tone* and turned the classroom into *a site of intervention*. When asked to elaborate, they discussed experiencing the burden of responsibility associated to working with the colonial archive, but also a sense of possibility and agency. It made these engagements difficult, riddled with *hesitation*, but also *exciting and important*. One student described the realization that you have

the opportunity to do something with [the colonial archive]: *to inscribe your own ideas; to put questions to it; to refuse parts of it.* Another student put it thusly: *it was an important reminder that refusal is possible; that not showing those images is a decision you can make.*

Students agreed that the power of these gestures and discussions was amplified by the way images were being used elsewhere on campus:

It was such a stark contrast with other courses which had a completely different tone... That had a far more severe effect on me than just your class. The contrast between the two. Because the violence was made absent [with the interrupted images], but thus highlighted. And being forced to watch certain things elsewhere became nearly impossible. I couldn't do it anymore.

Another student spoke about how she had challenged another teacher's practices with images of violence and publicly questioned the Royal Anthropological Institute's Instagram feed where colonial photographs are routinely displayed.

Isaac also asked his former students whether their own work had been transformed by these engagements. None of them established a direct relationship with their filmic practice, but instead spoke about something that *stays with you* and *changes the way you look at images*. They appreciated the fact that a *how-to-manual* had not been provided, but rather, an ethics/politics of engagement and very specific examples. So, the question was never how to bring redaction or overexposure into their work, but how to find a suitable strategy for whatever material with which they were working. Students agreed that it was hard and that sometimes they felt *paralyzed*, but that they were ultimately empowered to try: *there are ways. I may not know them now. But I can talk about difficult things and find ways that neither replicate the violence nor exploit the subject.*

Listening

Visual theorist and historian Tina Campt opens her 2017 book *Listening to Images* with a close engagement with her personal archive. Reflecting on a photograph of her father, she beckons us to listen to the image, to pay attention to the frequencies that often go undetected in our engagements with photographs. Listening, as a methodological recovery of meaning, becomes a powerful metaphor for working with archival images. For Gabriel, these multimodal approaches to thinking with and feeling through photographs have been productive as a research method. He drew on Campt's idea of listening as method to engage with his own family's archive (Dattatreyan, 2018). He found that opening up the realm of the sonic in relationship to what can be seen in an image also afforded opportunities to engage with the tactile and olfactory remembering these images evoke, both as individual photos and as a collective performance of the slide show. Initially, Gabriel intuitively felt the method that Campt laid out worked best when dealing with an intimate archive. In other words, listening, seeing, feeling, and sensing the frequencies of images felt a brilliantly instinctive and powerfully explanatory way of working when the resonances of the images were, quite literally, close to home.

While teaching an anthropology of the visual course to third year undergraduate and Masters' students, the thought occurred to Gabriel that perhaps Campt's method could offer a different approach to teaching and learning about the colonial and imperial archive of images and produce an alternative encounter with shared histories. In years past, Gabriel eschewed showing films and photographs that reproduced the horror of a historical (and contemporary) colonial encounter when teaching visual anthropology. As a diasporic subject, culturally, socially, and politically connected to the Indian nation-state and the USA, most of the images and films linked to anthropology as a disciplinary body of knowledge felt too painful and fraught to teach for him. The images caused unease because Gabriel felt at once alienated and viscerally implicated in the

colonial legacy of the discipline through them. This feeling of alienation, of course, is not his alone and has been recorded in recent discussions around the anthropological canon as a difficult reckoning with anthropology's legacy.

As anthropologist John Jackson, Jr., describes in his recollection of graduate school training in the US in the 1990s, there was a deep desire among graduate school students to “unlearn some of the ways of seeing that replicated ethnocentric assumptions despite the discipline's most lauded goal of punctiliously defying them” (2017, ##) One way of doing that is, as anthropologist Adia Benton (2017) suggests, to find other anthropological kin and construct an alternative canon from their work to teach the history of the discipline; for instance, by teaching Zora Neale Hurston instead of Franz Boas or Bronislaw Malinowski; or by teaching Katherine Dunham instead of Margaret Mead. Others have productively suggested reading the normative canon through a critical lens as “anthropological problems” (Myers 2017) as a way to work through the encounters these texts offer by situating the writers in a historical moment in ways which unsettle the analytical certainty of their findings and the disciplinary certainty of anthropology (Bonilla 2017).

Gabriel, having taught visual anthropology courses in the US and the UK, has only more recently decided to take the plunge and teach the visual canon as an “anthropological problem.” During graduate school and in the years since, he, instead, embraced other anthropological kin and was encouraged by his mentors to do so, to teach visual anthropology. Over the years he has idiosyncratically created an alternative collection of films and photographs from the 19th century and 20th century to think with and, ultimately, to teach with. These films and photos produced by the formerly colonized, such as Malick Sidibe's photos of Bamako, Mali and Kidlat Tahamik's (1977) film *The Perfumed Nightmare*, offer an alternative engagement with meaning

making through the image, one that centered the representational impulses and theoretical sophistication of those who have been seen as the subjects of anthropology rather than its authors. In so doing he joins anthropologist Harjant Gill (2021) who, in a recent article, pushed for a recovery of Marlon Riggs, Pratibha Parmar, Frances Negrón-Muntaner, and Richard Fung as a way to expand the history of visual anthropology by offering a different set of makers to engage with and unsettle the coloniality (and whiteness) of the discipline.

The pedagogical move to listen to this “alternative” canon with students, to pay critical attention to what frequencies emerge in the images, both moving and still, only emerged later in Gabriel’s pedagogical engagements. It came about quite organically. In one session exploring the aesthetics and politics of 20th century photography, snapshots of Sidibe’s photos of still life in postcolonial Bamako were projected onto a screen in front of the class. Gabriel describes them in writing and the classroom as images that *still* life because they have captured a frame in time/space and of being. They are still because they have been orchestrated as such, a spectral, haunting portal: a way to see the past in the present and encounter those that are alive despite not being present. They are still because they have been imprinted in the play of light that gives appearance to motionlessness, a photo-chemical trace of what once was.⁵ But vitality courses through them. One just has to listen.

Engaging with Sidibe’s photography sonically in the classroom opened up the opportunity to live with that which that which has passed on in ways that are more than metaphoric. In early experimentations with a pedagogy of listening Gabriel invited students to listen carefully to the image, to locate a soundscape, to borrow from anthropologist Murray Schafer (1977), that allowed them to experience Bamako of the 1950s as more than just a mere representation but as an immersion into the experience of 20th century postcolonial urbanity.

What are the sounds of the city? What does the city feel like? Tuning in to the frequencies of Bamako's urban metropolis facilitated a conversation about the relationship between sound and image in London. How do these sensate imaginaries we glean in Sidibe's images relate to the sonic imagery of contemporary London? How does social location shift how and from what vantage point we might experience the city? Listening to (Sidibe's) images very quickly led to discussions that thought through postcolonial urbanity across geographical, social, and historical locations.

Recently, Gabriel has taken to asking their students to listen carefully to the people in Sidibe's images, to hear what they are trying to say. In response, a few white British middle-class students, when Gabriel asked them to listen to Sidibe's protagonists, have immediately said, almost as an outburst, *but I don't understand the language that they are speaking*.

Untranslatability became a feeling, a way of recognizing the frequency of the image might not be tuned to one's ear. In the moments after the outburst nervous giggles are followed by silence. A silence that signals an attempt to hear beyond what is otherwise unheard or misapprehended. In one instance, another student, British-Nigerian and otherwise quiet in class, spoke. She saw Sidibe's images on the projector screen and started to talk about the conversations she had had with her grandmother recently, conversations that conjured Lagos in the 1950s. She remembered with the class the vivid images her grandmother painted in her descriptions of Victoria Island and the sunshine that glistened on the waterways of the city. Her grandmother's voice felt almost present in the telling. The sound of the encounter in a kitchen in Peckham, South London with her grandmother melded with the lapping waterways of Lagos. The classroom was intently silent and Gabriel could, for a moment, hear both simultaneously.

By providing a different image in the classroom, one that renders the postcolonial gaze of the formerly colonized, the diasporic student finds themselves centered. By centering this student/these students, different orientations to the image (and to images) emerge. Our exercise becomes one of listening, not just to the image but to each other. Voices that are otherwise rendered silent are invited to speak. As a result, Lagos joins Bamako and London as a node in a series of urban locations and historical contexts linked during the colonial and imperial period that we can think with and orient ourselves around.

Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed notes “orientations involve directions towards objects that affect what we do, and how we inhabit space” (2006, 28). A pedagogy of the senses intuitively tracks these directional lines and attempts to activate them, thereby changing how those in the classroom are able to inhabit it. Listening collectively to Sidibe’s image invites an enunciation of orientations that make visible (post)colonial proximities, affinities, and distances. The image, as it (re)orients and reconfigures the classroom space through sonic invitation, renders visible our historical positions in relation to what is depicted. The image, one retrieved from an alternate canon, thus becomes a site from which to evoke the colonial and the postcolonial as a condition of the present.

The harder conversations, the ones more directly implicated in ways of seeing that shape how we come to normalize conditions of superiority/inferiority, only come when the accepted visual anthropological canon comes into multimodal attention. Recently, Gabriel began to bring the visual anthropological canon and its adjacent formations slowly and carefully into sonic and somatic engagement with his students. Here anthropologist Chris Wright (2013) and his work in the Solomon Islands is of interest. Wright uses a similar aural analogy to Camp to describe his project and method. Wright asks his readers to commit their attention to the “echo of things.” In

his case, he means the photos he recovered in the colonial archive and repatriated to the Solomon Islands as they come into contact with the present inhabitants of the Islands in multiple photo elicitation encounters.

In these encounters, Wright carefully attends to how Solomon Islanders engage with these images of their ancestors in the present and the kinds of affectively charged stories that emerge in this encounter. What attunements to the echo of things must be taken when these very same kinds of images taken during colonial expeditions in the late 19th century are shown, instead, to British and American college students? Gabriel has stayed away from colonial photography for this sort of engagement. Isaac's engagement with opacity and redaction, we submit, are more appropriate for the task of sifting through the colonial record of still images and reengaging with them in the present as pedagogical devices in classrooms in Euro-Western worlds.

Instead, Gabriel turned to films. By returning to the films that he saw during his training in graduate school, he sought to directly engage with the ripples of affect that they generate in the classroom as a site to think and feel through the racialized present. Listening to films seems redundant. Films, since the introduction of soundtracks and sound design to the silent films of the early 20th century, are a complex of sound and vision. Listening to a film, as opposed to a still image, requires a different attention. Rather than working through the frequencies one recalls, conjures, and imposes on an image, one needs to listen to what is offered as a sonic companion to the (moving) image with and against the intentions of the filmmaker. This requires a decoupling of sound and image. As an example, Gabriel has used the filmmaker Robert Gardner's film *Forest of Bliss* (1986) several times as a site to disrupt colonial ways of seeing.

Technically, Robert Gardner is not an anthropologist. Yet, his films have been long accepted as part of what one could call a canon of ethnographic cinema.

Forest of Bliss is a document of Gardner's encounter with the city of Benares, India. Benares and the River Ganges that flows through it have long been a pilgrimage site for devout Hindus. It is also a privileged site for upper caste Hindus to cremate their dead. Visually, *Forest of Bliss* offers its viewers Gardner's vision of the city as a first-time visitor. It is observational in its intent. We see, seemingly, what Gardner sees as he makes his way through the city over the course of twenty-four hours. Sonically, the film depicts what Gardner hears, the cacophony of public space that is vibrant and alive. The film, even taking into account the cuts that allow Gardner to make a twenty-four-hour day compress into one hour and thirty-minute run time, gives the viewer a sense of unmediated presence. In a few classes where Gabriel turned off the sound and his undergraduate students were left with the image, the question that was immediately voiced was, does this filmmaker know the place he is in? Students immediately recognized *Forest of Bliss* as an act of seeing from the outside enacted by someone who sees without a relationship to what is being seen.

When Gabriel turned off the image and all the students could hear was the soundtrack of the film (and the low hum of the lights in the classroom), they wanted to know what people were saying. For these students the many voices Gardner had captured but decided not to subtitle demanded to be heard and understood. Gabriel began to translate the Hindi that he could decipher given that the recording equipment chosen for this project clearly did not prioritize voice but, rather soundscape. It was a live translation. Gabriel's voice mingled with the voices in the film. The students, taking in these translated excerpts, then asked questions about what it means to listen in on other peoples' lives and whether having an interest in finding out what they

were saying was more ethical than just keeping their voices as sound. Gabriel responded with a question. When we listen in with interest does that not mean that we must then find ways to interact and engage?

By separating the visual and sonic elements of *Forest of Bliss* and intervening through translation, students were refused unmediated access to the film. Through interruption, the distance between the time-space of the film and the classroom space collapsed. The coloniality of the film was rendered present in ways which were palpable, felt. As Gill (2020) explains in his recent critique of *Forest of Bliss*: “Gardner's refusal to offer context personifies the “theological problem of white supremacy” (Rana 2020: 101) within anthropology, which renders non-Christian religious practices, and by extension its practitioners, as racial objects to be salvaged and gawked at but not be contextualized and understood.” What we suggest in this article is that it is not enough to say this to our students, to offer critique, but to direct their senses to what (some) already feel as uncomfortable, awkward, and unsettling in the film through active intervention.

As one of the reviewers of this article astutely noted, Gabriel is a Hindi speaker and more proximal, or related to those depicted in the film. This diasporic connection offers a unique opportunity to deconstruct and make visceral the coloniality of the film, one where translation and context can be provided in the deliberate absence of both. As we argued in the introduction, this opportunity suggests that a pedagogy of the senses that aims to disrupt cannot simply be reduced to a set of exchangeable strategies but must also account for how our embodied histories as teachers can and should shape how we actively engage our shared colonial histories in the classroom.

Final Thoughts

In this article, we have shared some of the strategies we have experimented with in our attempts to disrupt anthropology's visual canon. These interventions relied on a *multimodal* engagement with the archive: one constituted in the space between images, sounds, redactions, accompanying commentary, and the bundle of affect triggered by them. We think of these interventions as pedagogically generative; they open up the possibility of *unsettling* the colonial archive's white gaze and the *centering* of the kind of affects it often sidelines. In so doing we have embraced a decolonizing impulse that, following cultural theorist and philosopher Sylvia Wynter (2003), seeks to disrupt whiteness as a universal position by which to experience, imagine, and narrate the world. By focusing on canonized images and films, we take aim at their ways of seeing, not simply through critique but by attempting to disrupt the sensorial presumptions that are located in the archives themselves. Moreover, we have offered a way to think about alternate visual canons. By briefly discussing Malik Sidibe's photography, for instance, we offer a different attention to historical pasts in the present with the pedagogical goal to produce opportunities for different voices to emerge in the classroom.

We have both taken up multimodal strategies as ways to reconfigure pedagogical exchanges in the classroom, recognizing the classroom space is one of the key sites for the production and reproduction of anthropological knowledge. But the questions we raise go beyond it. To conclude, we widen the discussion and put our pedagogical practice in dialogue with other disciplinary spaces of debate and intervention. The controversy that surrounded the cover image for the March 2020 issue of *American Anthropologist* is a case in point. The volume was dedicated to white supremacy and the cover originally featured a photograph of Margaret Mead handling human skulls she had brought to the United States from New Guinea. The image

was chosen, according to the editors, in relation to the issue's aim of underlining "the kind of white supremacy anthropology has reproduced, even as its most notable practitioners proclaimed anti-racism," or put differently "to indict the racist practice depicted within it" (Thomas 2020). But the image, in its circulations, caused significant backlash, not least from Indigenous collectives that denounced the use of images depicting human remains, a colonial practice with a long history and something they have consistently fought against for decades. The critical, or ironic, lens with which the editors had approached the image did not necessarily travel with it; the image was experienced as violent, racist, colonial. The controversy around *American Anthropologist's* cover resonated with our own experience of the insufficiency of critique when working with colonial imaginaries. More importantly, it foregrounded the powerful afterlives of these images and their ability to re-enact colonial violence *in the present*. This case offers a clear a lesson regarding the tremendous responsibility associated with publishing and distributing these historical archival images and the need to rethink our practices/conventions around it.

The questions we have raised in this article are also key questions for those working in the context of museums. Ethnographic and national museums in the global north are particularly potent inscriptions of coloniality, not only in relation to the conditions under which artefacts were acquired or seized (and still seldom returned) but also with regards to contemporary exhibition practices, hiring policies, and public engagement. Under increasing pressure to recognise and dismantle their implication with "hierarchies of power that replicate colonial structures" (Giblin, Ramos and Grout 2019, 472), some of these institutions have started "decolonizing" processes that directly speak to some of the strategies we discuss in this article.

Art historian and curator Temi Odumosu's intervention at the National Gallery of Denmark, *What Lies Unspoken: Sounding the Colonial Archive* (2017), is a good example. The

project consisted in a series of sound compositions that accompanied a selection of colonial artworks from the collection. The sound pieces were the result of a series of workshops curated by the artist, in which participants responded to and discussed these artworks. The resulting compositions “augment[ed] traditional labelling practices with the sound of multiple voices who spoke in support of silenced subjects, but also ‘for the sake of the viewer’. The voices inhabited exhibition spaces, spoke to willing ears, and changed the quality of encounter with artworks and objects” (Odumusu 2019, 627). Foregrounding and centering affective responses to these colonial artworks unsettled traditional modes of display and spectatorship constructed around multiple silences: institutional silence, the silence of visitors, and the silence of those portrayed by the colonial gaze. In her account of the project, Odumusu is, however, skeptical with regards to the capacity that these temporary interventions have to transform the institutions at large: their value systems, collecting practices, governance structure, and so on.

Similarly, we are often confronted with the smallness of our pedagogical experiments in the face of the overwhelming recalcitrance of the institutions we inhabit (the University, Anthropology). An anti-racist anthropology yet to come requires much more than individuals challenging the canon in the classroom. The curriculum needs to change, hiring practices need to change, what counts as acceptable forms of knowledge production need to change, baseline understandings of the power and affect of colonial imagery, and its broader imaginary as it shapes disciplinary uptake need to change. There is certainly movement on these fronts, but the work remains significant.

To be clear, this is not to say that the strategies outlined above cannot produce important pedagogical after-effects or that these strategies are limited to what we do in the classroom, as is exemplified in Odumusu’s creative interventions with the colonial archive. We believe these

strategies can potentially serve as models for developing new viewing/displaying conventions in publications and in museums/galleries. In addition, as we center and focus on in this article, they can provide ways to think about teaching and learning (visual) anthropology. Conceiving the colonial archive and, in this case, the discipline's canon as a site of *intervention*, as opposed to critique or reproduction, can be empowering; it situates teachers and students alike in a position of active engagement, it highlights the responsibility as well as the affordances of generating a pedagogical encounter through them. However insufficient in the face of the colossal task of dismantling the discipline's racism, in our experience the results can be transformative: the untold, unmarked whiteness of the classroom may be foregrounded, a space may open for voices that are not usually heard.

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Notes

¹ In anthropology, coloniality has been most recently explored through the concept of whiteness and white supremacy. As Aisha Beliso-De Jesús and Jemima Pierre note, “even as mainstream anthropology has acknowledged the significance of race, it has yet to thoroughly engage the role of white supremacy, especially global white supremacy, as part and parcel of the baseline understanding and functioning of the modern world” (2020, 65).

² For up-to-date statistics on Goldsmiths’ diversity, see its latest equality and diversity report. <https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/documents-by-section/about-us/governance/governance---general/Equality-and-Diversity-Annual-Report-2016-17- Version2.pdf>. For a historical account of its demographic composition and its development, see Firth, Anthony E. 1991. *Goldsmiths College: A Centenary Report*. London: Athlone Press.

³ The founding members were Brian Morris, Pat Caplan, and Olivia Harris. They were joined shortly after by Nici Nelson, Steve Nugent, and Victoria Goddard.

⁴ Six students (all female international students) attended an online live conversation; others provided feedback over email. Quotes included in the text were shared with students in advance and they gave consent.

⁵ Gabriel’s thinking around the still image/stillness was shaped by Christina Sharpe’s lecture at Goldsmiths, University of London in 2018 titled *Black.Still.Life*. <https://www.gold.ac.uk/calendar/?id=11581>

Figure Captions

1. Lady Vera Delves Broughton, *Aiome Pygmies with Europeans*, 1936. This photograph is part of the British Museum Online Collection and comes accompanied by the following text: “Mr. Wauchope and Lord Moyne wearing western-style clothes, with group of Aiome men, out of doors; some Aiome wearing necklaces, armbands, head coverings, belts, nose ornaments, loin cloths, carrying bows and arrows; Atemble, Papua New Guinea.” Redacted by Isaac Marrero-Guillamón.
2. John Lamprey, *Front View of a Malayan Male*, c. 1868-69. Redacted by Isaac Marrero-Guillamón.
3. Unknown author, two photographs of Ota Benga at the Bronx Zoo, 1906. Exposure (left) and opacity (right) adjusted to the edge of invisibility by Isaac Marrero-Guillamón.

Figure Alt Text

1. Two white men dressed in white colonial outfits stand either side of a black square
2. Black image with a horizontal sliver through which part of a man's face, notably his eyes, are visible
3. An image divided vertically into a white rectangle and a grey one, both featuring very light shadows