

Alfredo Jaar

DECOLONIAL  
TIME  
AND  
THE  
AESTHETICS  
OF  
THE  
UNFINISHED

FLORENCIA SAN MARTÍN

With a Foreword by Wolfgang Kaleck

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**DUKE**

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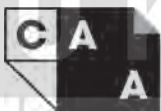
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To my parents, Eduardo and Verónica

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## FOREWORD

### Vivimos adentro, pero en contra

Wolfgang Kaleck

A life without art would be unlivable. Art is life.

—Alfredo Jaar

In her inspiring new monograph, art historian Florencia San Martín addresses two of the most critical topics in Jaar's work: his decolonial spirit and his aesthetics of resistance, which, as she argues, will always remain an aesthetics of the unfinished and of failure. Failure, alongside mourning and the fight for accountability, shapes the three chapters in this book.

Since the beginning of President Donald Trump's second term in office, there has been considerable discussion that his measures and announcements would mean the downfall of the Western liberal, rules-based order. What an unbelievable ignorance of history! Alfredo Jaar's work exemplifies the contrary, as San Martín's book shows, recalling the history of the post-World War II record of US foreign policy, with the September 11, 1973, US-backed military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet in Chile as the point of departure. Jaar presents in his typical manner—subtle and persistent at the same time—the content of a conversation between then President Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger that goes far beyond Trump's current boastful announcements about the takeover of Greenland and the Panama Canal:

P: Hi, Henry.

K: Mr. President.

P: Where are you. In New York?

K: No. I am in Washington. I am working. I may go to a football game this afternoon if I get through.

P: Good. Good. Well it is the opener. It is better than television. Nothing new of any importance . . . ?

K: Nothing of very great consequence. The Chilean thing is getting consolidated and of course the newspapers are bleeding because a pro-Communist government has been overthrown.

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P: Isn't that something. Isn't that something.

K: I mean instead of celebrating—in the Eisenhower period we would be heros [*sic*].<sup>1</sup>

All three politicians are united by their cynicism and their complete lack of human empathy—except that Nixon and Kissinger, beyond a mere declaration of intent, went into action and supported the military coup of September 11, 1973, which cost the lives of multiple leftist oppositionists. Thousands were tortured, disappeared, and driven into exile. To acknowledge the ongoing struggles of victims of human rights violations in Chile and beyond is San Martín's primary purpose in chapter 1, "Mourning." And, as she offers in the next chapter, "Accountability," for the global left, Kissinger and the 1973 putsch in Chile marked a historical turning point: Even when a democratic socialist like Salvador Allende, the overthrown Chilean president, came to power by election, Kissinger reiterates, "I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people."

Kissinger's contribution to this and other crimes against humanity was never prosecuted, as San Martín further elaborates in chapter 2. Instead, the politician was honored all over the world until his last days; he died on November 20, 2023, and to this day, his conception and practice of Realpolitik are considered exemplary. Alfredo Jaar, on the other hand, works against this lack of historical memory and the ongoing impunity. It becomes his obsession, as Florencia San Martín meticulously elaborates. In multiple museums around the world, Jaar has borne witness to the monstrosity of the crimes of the military dictatorship and their impunity and mourns the victims of society. San Martín's monograph is about such mourning and unfinished actions for justice, which, as Jaar's art proposes, can take place in cultural and public spaces.

One of his many stops took Jaar to Berlin, where, in 2012, together with the author of this foreword, he placed advertisements in Berlin's daily newspapers calling for Kissinger's arrest in the various languages of the countries in which he had wreaked havoc: "Arrest Kissinger" was the message. It was meant as a wakeup call for the German leftist, social democratic, and liberal majority to apply the same standards of international criminal law to a powerful actor like the former US foreign secretary as to the war criminals of Serbia and Rwanda who were prosecuted at the time in UN tribunals in The Hague but also in German, French, and Spanish courts. This cooperation between an artist and a human rights lawyer in a common artistic and legal intervention presented an opportunity to think and practice justice as

a shared goal and a common task, together with lawyers, but not only within and directed to the legal community, in transdisciplinary efforts to overcome legal and political boundaries. The idea of concrete utopian interventions, which this book applies from a transdisciplinary approach to art history, connects to existing legal frameworks and possibilities but at the same time provides an overarching vision of absolute justice as a destination that will never be achieved. And that, too, is part of the story: this demand was favorably received in museums by a culturally minded, progressive public who, after visiting the exhibition, returned to everyday life, whatever that meant.

The legal regulations for an investigation into Kissinger's war crimes of the 1960s and 1970s and his prosecution were not yet in place. After all, today's legal norms allow for the prosecution of powerful violators of the law, but there is still a long way to go from the norm to its application to the crimes of former President George Bush and others in establishing a system of extraterritorial prisons and systematic torture in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, for example. To think ahead along this path, to undertake artistic and legal interventions in this direction, connects the author with the artist. And failure also connects the two—the mentality to deal with and overcome failures as part of our lives and our political and professional engagement is somehow lacking in these dystopian times. Weren't the times dark in other decades as well? Probably not for most US citizens and Western Europeans. But for many people, the world has been in disorder for most of the past decades, and this disorder was called “order” by the profiteers of the unjust world order.

Florencia San Martín's assessment of Alfredo's artistic work as decolonial, and more specifically as a transdisciplinary project that exposes together the tropes of mourning, accountability, and failure, is needed and urgent in any case. Even more than that, it's the seemingly minor details that Alfredo points out.

Putting the huge country called Chile, which extends over several different vegetation zones, on the map, Alfredo Jaar, in his 1982 installation, *Stars*, says: “Well, I know it looks like the flag of Texas, but it is not. It is the flag of Chile. Yes, Chile, in South South America.”<sup>2</sup> The blatant expropriation of the emblematic date of September 11, 1973, for all eternity and globally, 9/11 means, even for the progressive left and liberals in the Global North, September 11, 2001. There is no consciousness of what the date means for South America. And, of course, as San Martín demonstrates in chapter 3, “Failure,” this shows us a progressive US American who says “America” and actually means the entire Americas, not just the United States.

Alfredo Jaar's art denounces blatant and subtle violence all over the world. Mourning, accountability, and failure are relevant in too many places of the world, as San Martín's monograph shows. Jaar works on famine in Sudan, the genocide in Rwanda, violence against migrants and refugees, and right extremist violence in Germany. *Aesthetics of Resistance*—the magnum opus of the German writer Peter Weiss—presents a political, historical, and art-historical view of struggles on the side of the world's marginalized. Alfredo Jaar, as San Martín elaborates in the conclusion, thinks and creates within this tradition. As such, for his public intervention in 2012, he chose one of the novel's settings, the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. Inside the museum, the Pergamonfries can be seen, and Weiss interprets them in his own way as a human uprising against the oppression of the gods. In Alfredo Jaar's work, several panels are displayed on the steps of the museum, with neon signs showing the right-wing extremist bombings and murders in the old and new Federal Republic of Germany. Consistently taking a stance and engaging with the context of his surroundings, Jaar explores both historical and contemporary events across his work; these are public artistic interventions in the best sense of the word, not merely in name. Through Jaar's unwavering intention to expose systems of oppression, they reveal the underlying structures of oppression and actively confront them. In his own words: "I select wrongs within the very system and create works departing from those wrongs."<sup>3</sup>

But will it change anything? We don't know. As San Martín's book offers, Alfredo is aware of the failure and incompleteness of his and our work. But not a little despondent, he sets to work. Doubting, yes, but doubting in the sense of rational thinking and philosophizing. Jaar leaves no doubt about his own intentions: knowing that we often fail but that we have no other option but to fight against it, in the spirit of Antonio Gramsci, an intellectual pessimist and an optimist of the will. As one of his works spells out, using Samuel Beckett's words—and which San Martín signals repeatedly in this monograph—"I can't go on. I'll go on." Or, as San Martín also quotes Aníbal Quijano throughout this book, "Vivimos adentro, pero en contra."

In *Alfredo Jaar: Decolonial Time and the Aesthetics of the Unfinished*, Florencia San Martín reconstructs all of this through a wealth of stories, shaped by many conversations. With a firework of references to history, philosophy, decolonial thinking, art history, and activism, she explores the intellectual depth of Alfredo Jaar's work, further offering a transdisciplinary paradigm for thinking about art and justice from the perspective of decolonial time and the aesthetics of the unfinished. She hereby demonstrates that the impact of Alfredo Jaar's work is not restricted to the places and museums where

the work is presented—in fact, mourning and accountability are collective actions of societies, and justice can only be achieved by broader transdisciplinary alliances. The work of artists and legal experts can spark ideas, trigger dynamics, and contribute to justice, but to communicate, they would need readers and interpreters like art historian Florencia San Martín, who translates and communicates and hereby democratizes their specific knowledge. And her book also means an important milestone in building historical memory, which, as both the artist and his interpreter show, shall not freeze the past but help tackle the challenges of today's injustices in so many places in the world. It seems that historical progress came to a halt; it seems that we cannot go on, but the message of Jaar and San Martín is that we should go on.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Decolonial Time and the Aesthetics of the Unfinished

Linear time is a Western invention; time is not linear, it is a marvellous entanglement.  
—Lina Bo Bardi

October 12, 1992, New York City. The sky is hazy; the streets are crowded. A parade moves uptown from Forty-Second Street and Fifth Avenue to Eighty-Sixth Street and Third Avenue. Two beauty queens in sparkling blue and pink dresses greet the masses from a sixteenth-century carriage replica, Christopher Columbus between them. A re-creation of the three sailing ships that brought Columbus and the Spanish *conquistadores* to the other side of the Atlantic joins the spectacle. So does Uncle Sam, the US Army's orchestra, and a pop-like hackney carriage drawn by eight horses promoting the US American pale lager Budweiser.<sup>1</sup> Providing information about that day, the *New York Times* states that federal offices and schools will be closed, while financial markets will remain open. No, the market never closes. In our colonial capitalist system instituted five hundred years ago, it is structurally understood that the market generates and infuses joy. As such, it must stay operational as an allegory of Columbus Day.

A few blocks south, in the Spring Street Subway Station, a public innervation turns the aboveground celebratory narrative about the quincentenary into a question about freedom, race, migration, and capitalism (plate 1). Made by Alfredo Jaar, the work is a photograph in an advertising billboard showing the barbed-wire entrance of the Whitehead refugee detention center in Hong Kong, where thousands of Vietnamese awaited the beginning of a new life.<sup>2</sup> Rendered in blue and earthy tones, the image is symmetrically composed. Adopting the regime of vision and representation developed

during the Renaissance, a historical moment in global culture and politics that championed humanism and expansionism towards the “backward” lands of the so-called New World, the image shows two identical fences forming four diagonal lines that lead the viewer’s gaze toward a vanishing point that converges on the fenced entrance in the lower quadrant. Beyond is a hilltop and in the distance, slightly covered by fog, a larger hill. At the center is a text. Printed with a thin, vintage-style font reminiscent of imperial lettering, the text, just as the title of Jaar’s work, reads “1992.” As Jaar affirms in his proposal for this work: “1992 will mark the 500th anniversary of the first ‘encounter’ in history and the beginning of a Common Market structure in a Europe without borders. [Yet] the gap continues to widen between the so-called Third World and the so-called First World. . . . My proposal [is to] depict that reality.”<sup>3</sup>

Three main aspects of Jaar’s art and thinking are revealed in this statement: First, the recognition of the origins of capitalism with the conquest in 1492 and the global expansion five hundred years later of its current phase—neoliberalism, a market-driven system that dismisses the welfare state through policies of deregulation, commodification, privatization, and corporate success. Second, the continuity of the colonial binary logic of life under free-market rule—conqueror and conquered, civilized and barbaric, savior settler and backward ignorant, developed and underdeveloped, nationalist and terrorist, citizen and refugee, human and alien, and so on. And third, the fact that Jaar’s main aim as an artist is to make visible the catastrophic consequences of colonialism not only in the Americas but also in the world, as we deduct in 1992 through the representation of a date celebrating the conquest and a photograph showing the refugee crisis five hundred years later in East and Southeast Asia. There was no encounter in 1492, as Jaar ironically notes by using quotation marks to denounce the infamous way in which Spain and advocates of the “discovery” were celebrating the quincentenary as the “Encuentro de Dos Mundos” (Encounter of Two Worlds).<sup>4</sup> And there is still no encounter today. In the post–Iron Curtain era, the global economy had not opened borders and provided more opportunities for all; in other words, the free economy is not as free as its name implies. Yet there is critical hope, that is, ways of inhabiting, knowing, and creating that imagine and work toward more just and reciprocal worlds. Therein lie the presence, insistence, and urgency of the arts and critical discourse. As Jaar once said: “A life without art would be unlivable. Art is life.”<sup>5</sup>

Born in Santiago, Chile, in 1956, Alfredo Jaar created his early works in the 1970s, joining a generation of Latin American artists working under

right-wing regimes in the Cold War context. In 1982, he moved to New York City and further developed a multimedia project by means of public space interventions, memorial monuments, performances, drawings, films, and large-scale installations composed of photography, text, mirrors, light, and press archives. Today, having moved to Lisbon, Portugal, in late 2025 in response to the political climate imposed by the Trump regime, Jaar is one of the most celebrated artists working in the global context—his work has been exhibited at multiple art biennials, museums, and galleries; numerous art institutions collect it; and it has been the subject of more than eighty monographs and thousands of interviews and reviews. As the object of multiple awards, including a MacArthur Fellowship in 2000, a Hiroshima Art Prize in 2018, a Hasselblad Award in 2020, and a MacDowell Medal and a Prix Pictet in 2025,—Jaar’s art certainly has not been ignored. What has been ignored is the decolonial time that drives his art and thinking.

This book offers a new understanding of Jaar’s art by arguing that the decolonial in general, and decolonial time specifically, has been centrally informing Jaar’s art from the very outset of his career in the early 1970s, propelling him to create an aesthetic project that refuses to give up, to stop the fight, to erase, to forget. Elaborating on what I call here the aesthetics of the unfinished through the concepts of mourning, accountability, and failure, this book examines how Jaar has been identifying and critiquing coloniality in the global neoliberal present, inviting us to think that things could be otherwise, although they are not yet. As such, this study reads Jaar’s oeuvre as fundamentally incomplete, just as the decolonial itself. More specifically, it maintains that Jaar’s art has been informed by two interconnected historical events: the 1973 US-backed military coup that initiated the Chilean dictatorship and its corollary neoliberal economic system, adopted in Chile for the first time in the world. It further contends that this twofold experience has been central in Jaar’s art and thinking ever since—from works related to Chile and Chile-US relations to projects that expose the devastating humanitarian consequences of neoliberalism throughout the world, as he does in 1992.

Based on ten years of archival research, interviews with the artist and his contemporaries, and the analysis of iconic, lesser-known, and totally unknown works, this book further reframes the discussion around the photographic and the ethics of representation in Jaar’s art through the perspective of decolonial time, revealing the crucial role of critical journalism and radical poetry in Jaar’s art and thinking. “I am a kind of frustrated journalist [who] want[s] to bring the news to the world . . . with poetry,” Jaar once said.<sup>6</sup> Across an introduction, a conclusion, and three chapters—“Mourning,”

“Accountability,” and “Failure”—*Alfredo Jaar: Decolonial Time and the Aesthetics of the Unfinished* ultimately proposes decolonial time as a critical analytic that reimagines memory studies and art history together, proposing an understanding of Jaar’s and other contemporary art by relating them first to the legacies of colonialism globally from the perspective of the Americas.

## REPRESENTING DECOLONIAL TIME

Modernity is a cultural construction that began to develop in the sixteenth century with the conquest and the simultaneous establishment of mercantile capitalism and the production of the idea of “race.” Coloniality, on the other hand, is the conceptual continuity of traditional colonialism in current social orders and forms of knowledges.<sup>7</sup> Modernity and coloniality are constitutive of one another; they are “two sides of the same coin.”<sup>8</sup> Specifically regarding the question of time, at the outset of modernity, the colonial tropes of newness, innovation, and progress came to justify Europe’s expansionism toward the “New World” as well as the development of new methods of labor control that were possible only through Indigenous denigration and slave trafficking from the Western part of the African continent. Enacted as if the past had never existed, a destruction of all human and nonhuman life in the “remote” and “backward” lands of Abya Yala (the Americas) had to occur to build every institution in society “virtually ex nihilo,” as sociologists Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein have argued.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, the Americas were “not incorporated into an already existing capitalist world economy”; their very “discovery” propelled such order.<sup>10</sup> This is why, as Quijano and Wallerstein further maintain, “we can speak about Americanness as a concept.”<sup>11</sup> A central heuristic in this book, Americanness means that since the nineteenth century, with the different paths taken between the United States and Latin America, with the former embracing global power and the latter hemispheric subordination, coloniality has operated at both the hemispheric and the global levels.<sup>12</sup> Standing against modernity’s progressive time and its machine of denigration and oblivion, Quijano explains, “Vivimos adentro, pero en contra” (We live inside it, but against it).<sup>13</sup> Jaar’s art represents that living inside and against from the perspective of decolonial time, critiquing what Quijano calls “coloniality of power” or the world as it is.<sup>14</sup> “I select wrongs within the very system and create works departing from those wrongs,” Jaar said.<sup>15</sup>

Such is the case of Jaar’s 2016 *I Can’t Go On, I’ll Go On* (figure I.1). Created in response to Donald Trump’s election as the forty-fifth president of the



1.1 Alfredo Jaar, *I Can't Go On, I'll Go On*, 2016. Courtesy of Alfredo Jaar.

United States and installed since in different cities worldwide, this work uses neon to write the famous statement from Irish playwright Samuel Beckett's 1953 novel, *The Unnamable*, which Jaar divides into two rows.<sup>16</sup> The fragment on the top is rendered with red neon and reads, all in capitals: "I Can't Go On." The phrase at the bottom is rendered with white neon light and reads, also in capitals: "I'll Go On." As Jaar often explains in his public lectures, Beckett's phrase was inspired by Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, who, while witnessing the rise of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini's Fascism in interwar Europe, defined himself as intellectually pessimistic and optimistic in will.<sup>17</sup> A fervent reader of Gramsci, Jaar identifies with this mode of lamenting and creating, revealing that while coloniality punishes social change, it cannot paralyze the struggles for liberation. It cannot paralyze hope.

Importantly, this form of identification is not binominal, as it is not aimed at replacing power positions within structural coloniality. As I show throughout this book, Jaar's art is not about providing solutions but about exposing the problem, propelling critical aesthetic modes of representing and enacting reparation, reciprocity, and certainly decolonial time. It is about recognizing that *vivimos adentro, pero en contra*, disobeying pessimism while knowing that we will fail.<sup>18</sup> In Jaar's words, "It's about our incapacity to change this reality; even though I keep going, I keep trying."<sup>19</sup> And while it is true that Jaar emphasizes his position of radical hope by enlarging the scale of the words "I'll Go On" in his installation, that does not mean that coloniality has withdrawn. After all, "I can't go on" is still there, rendered in red and at the top of the sentence, showing Jaar's acknowledgment of coloniality's continuum.

"What can we do when apparently nothing can be done, and doing nothing is not an option?" asks Diana Taylor in her 2020 book, *¡Presente!* Advocating for being there, next to migrants on the US-Mexico border and to those seeking legal options once in the United States, Taylor argues that the action of *acuerpamiento* (to embody) may advance in the process of going through a togetherness that resists oppression from intellectual inequity and performance as activism.<sup>20</sup> While for Taylor the response is being present, for Jaar, it is representation of decolonial time. "I don't know what art can do in the face of war and global warming of our planet," Jaar said in 2022.<sup>21</sup> "I don't know what to do so I offer a space of uncertainty," he continued, with those spaces embodying relational aesthetic forms that expose no solutions but spaces nonetheless that still exist in the realm of representation as a means to convey hope.<sup>22</sup>

In Jaar's art, these narratives have also involved the body, a political act of *acuerpamiento* as a sense of solidarity and togetherness. In 2019, for instance, when he installed *I Can't Go On, I'll Go On* at the Bridge of Sighs in Edinburgh, Jaar, alongside a group of collaborators—most of them local art students—walked together under the bridge and through streets of the Scottish capital wearing sandwich boards as minimalist design covering their torsos (plate 2). This wearable design contained text on both sides. The text on the front, rendered with white lettering over a black background, reads, "I Can't Go On." The text on the back, rendered with black lettering over a white background, reads, "I'll Go On." This dialectic of positive and negative shows again the fission and coexistence of pessimism and optimism in the thought of Gramsci, Beckett, and many others, reminding us about the complex and never-fixed identity of the photographic, a central empiric in

Jaar's art and thinking. "The fact that a photograph is often split between negative and positive manifestations means that its identity is always simultaneously divided and multiplied," writes photography theorist Geoffrey Batchen.<sup>23</sup> Photography from this perspective offers a metaphor—whether formal, processual, technical, and/or narrative—of the unfinished essence of the decolonial, propelling aesthetic modes to exist that contest modernity's binary logic. In the words of Afro-Indigenous artist and poet Alan Pelaez Lopez, whose work is a call for justice for undocumented migrants on the US-Mexico border, "I would like to live in a world where my work was not necessary."<sup>24</sup>

From the perspective of the Americas, Jaar's art exposes that in the time of coloniality, the oppressed are deprived of their memory and their culture, simultaneously signaling the potential of art to resist and therefore exist in relational pasts, presents, and futures.<sup>25</sup> In reading Jaar's art through the concept of the "aesthetics of the unfinished," this study joins what philosopher and decolonial theorist Nelson Maldonado-Torres has defined as "an increasingly self-conscious and coalitional effort to understanding decolonization, and not simply modernity, as an unfinished project."<sup>26</sup> Importantly, as modernity only acknowledges "human cultural activity [through] finished products . . . expressed in an habitual past tense," these efforts have faced multiple obstacles.<sup>27</sup> Contesting such a mode of understanding humans and society, the art of Jaar, Pelaez Lopez, and many others in cultures of resistance proposes unfinished inquiries that imagine a world that is yet to come through the relational times that modernity denies.

Embracing this idea of the unfinished from critical science fiction literature, that is, from decolonial time, in his 1920 short story "The Comet," Pan-Africanist writer and sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois tells the story of a comet that suddenly hits New York, unleashing toxic and fatal gas that kills everyone in the city but Jim Davis, a Black man.<sup>28</sup> As Du Bois narrates, in the aftermath of the catastrophe, Jim wanders around the rubble of a city in ruins; he wanders around the wreckage of modernity. Suddenly, Jim enters a restaurant on Fifth Avenue, where he previously would not have been allowed because of the color of his skin, and then he finds a car and drives uptown. Upon arriving near Seventy-Second Street, he hears a woman's cry from a window. Jim has found another survivor: a young, wealthy, and white woman called Julia. Together, Jim and Julia walk toward a future beyond and away from coloniality's obstructions, which seem to have been transformed into a concluded inequitable past. There was hope, or at least that was what Jim believed at the time. However, that future is not yet there, as Jim soon

realizes that only New York was affected by this cosmic disaster and that the world continues as it is. And in the world as it is, the oppressed—in this case Jim—although trying while wandering in the search for hope, fails at overcoming the racial capitalism that defines modernity.

As in “The Comet,” Jaar’s art is about critiquing hegemonic time as a fascist totality that “rejects the past [and] praises the present as the site of the real and the future as the horizon of expectation and the ultimate source of meaning,” as philosopher Rolando Vázquez maintains.<sup>29</sup> With the time of modernity systematically devaluating the narratives of the oppressed and the traumas of past violence, the emancipatory hopes for otherwise futures as those imagined by Du Bois are eradicated or ignored by the colonizing culture. Still, as Vázquez continues, “we live in a time of open wounds,” with such openness propelling the in-process cultural analysis created by visual, textual, sonic, or bodily forms and a collective practice of humility aimed toward radical hope.<sup>30</sup>

Art and art history from this angle, and for that matter aesthetics, are contingent, humble, and committed to reparation struggles that question the universalization of an art history understood from a linear approach.<sup>31</sup> Standing against Immanuel Kant’s theory on judgment, where aesthetics regards a formal process that aims at universal and transcendental beauty, art from this perspective affirms neither progressive time nor art history as we know it, in which events are set to advance and thus erase. It rather acknowledges that art history and its public face, the museum, are colonial institutions that arose at the height of imperialism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and have since designated what art is and is not and thus what value is placed on it, with that value following a temporal linearity though a victorious locus of enunciation.<sup>32</sup> Advocating for an unfinished, relational art history that does not aim for modernity’s success, Māori art historian Ngarino Ellis writes: “As they say, history is typically written by the victors.”<sup>33</sup> Or, as Beckett wrote in *Worstward Ho* (1983): “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”<sup>34</sup>

In 1958, the Mexican historian Edmundo O’Gorman brought a pivotal argument to the decolonial debate: that America was not “discovered” but “invented.”<sup>35</sup> Representing not two different interpretations but two different paradigms, “discovery” embraces the European imperialist, victorious perspective of the world’s linear history, and “invention” the perspective of those who have been left aside and who are expected to continue the steps of progress within a history in which they do not perceive themselves to belong.<sup>36</sup>

Thinking from the paradigm of the “invention” therefore means thinking from the decolonial. Within this paradigm, also in the mid-twentieth century, intellectuals from the Caribbean started challenging the global legacies of the conquest from their Afro-descendant experiences, adding to the decolonial its understanding as an incomplete project, as described by Maldonado-Torres. “To see clearly, to think clearly—that is, dangerously—and to answer clearly the innocent first question: what, fundamentally, is colonization?” wrote the Martinican poet and politician Aimé Césaire.<sup>37</sup> Urging the reader to observe modernity’s sweeping away of all its “encounters,” from modes of knowing, learning, and relating to forms of living in the incompleteness of decolonial time, Césaire uses the term *danger* as a call for epistemic, ongoing revolution.<sup>38</sup> It is nothing short of a call for the unfinished nature of the decolonial.

Half a century later in New York City, Jaar responded to such a call, countering the colonial rhetoric of the encounter with works such as *1992*. A few years earlier, in the years leading up to the quincentenary, he did the same with his little-known installation *Motherland, Motherland. What Mother, What Land?* (1984) (plate 3). Shown one time only in a group exhibition at the Fisher Gallery at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, the work includes mounds of earth on the floor, neon tubes, and four images mounted to the wall.<sup>39</sup> The image on the far left is taken by Jaar from a drawing in the Boturini Codex or “Tira de la Peregrinación” (The Pilgrimage Strip), one of the earliest documents of migration in the Americas.<sup>40</sup> Showing the migration of the Chichimeca and the Mexica from Aztlán to Tenochtitlán in the Valley of Mexico, the image is organized in a geometrical composition. Turning singularity and collectivity, and figuration and abstraction, into relational modes rather than hierarchical oppositions within a fixed colonial cartography, the image “does not show the contours of the geographical territory but rather the events, motion, and internal relations between and among beings: divine, natural, human, animal.”<sup>41</sup> Quite different than in Jaar’s *1992*, migration here is depicted through an aesthetics of relational hope, with the act of walking, in Taylor’s words, conveying a “way of becoming in motion [that is] never a simple practice, never one foot in front of the other.”<sup>42</sup> In this sense, the line—that is, that horizontal continuity that forms at the center through the footprints of the Mexica—represents *not* modernity’s time as “the single-track logic of . . . analytical thought.”<sup>43</sup> Indeed, this logic is what Jaar shows and critiques by placing next to “Tira de la Peregrinación” a reproduction of a 1594 copper plate engraving from the series of volumes *America*, by Flemish engraver Theodor de Bry.

Representing the foundational moment in which time became linear, de Bry’s plate manifests the European rhetoric of salvation through oppositional

binaries—conqueror and conquered, dressed and naked, leaning forward and leaning back, foreground and background. Depicting assimilation by means of oppression, it further reproduces a one-sided location of meaning based on the event/paradigm of the discovery, which de Bry had learned about from testimonies of superiority narrated by conquerors back in Europe.<sup>44</sup> As an image of testimony and as a site of “encounter,” it shows the backward Other offering their “gifts,” seen by the receiver as profit, to the *conquistadores*, who have saved them from their less-than-human experience. After all, the debate in sixteenth-century Spain between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda was whether the Indigenous had souls and therefore were human at all, a condition they could obtain only if educated properly by submissively immersing themselves in the path of Christianity.<sup>45</sup> In this context, considered essential in providing unpaid labor for imperial capitalist expansion, Indigenous populations who resisted what Amílcar Cabral calls “cultural alienation” were targeted as “uncivilized” and “temporally remote,” risking their life and therefore the erasure of their memory.<sup>46</sup> They were “given a residual status that . . . converts them into minorities [and] savages.”<sup>47</sup> As such—that is, as people from the past—Indigenous peoples have been “turned into multicultural adornment for neoliberalism,” as Bolivian theorist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui maintains.<sup>48</sup> Justifying a culture of land appropriation and exploitation of labor, this distinction between the time of humans ensures the presence and dominium of cultural capitalism. “The fundamental characteristic of culture is its intimate interaction with the economic and social realities of the environment, and with the level of the forces of production and the means of production of the society which created it,” writes Cabral.<sup>49</sup>

In 2011, Jaar created an installation criticizing such a characteristic by inscribing the linguistic equation “Culture = Capital,” which is also the title of the work (figure I.2). Using neon lights to show formally and allegorically what coloniality hides under the global promise of “technological advances,” Jaar’s equation displays, *clearly* and *dangerously*, that in our neoliberal world, culture sells. And, because it sells, colonial silence and strategies of invisibility regarding the violence that produces that culture *as* capitalism *must* continue. There is no wonder why de Bry’s engravings have become so famous and why decolonial readings of them, as in Jaar’s *Motherland*, are so urgent. “There is an important reason to engage in a decolonial reading of De Bry,” writes decolonial theorist Walter D. Mignolo. “Not only De Bry silences the Indians (as objects rather than persons), but scholarship on De Bry has tended to maintain that silence.”<sup>50</sup>



1.2 Alfredo Jaar, *Culture = Capital*, 2011. Courtesy of Alfredo Jaar.

In *Motherland*, Jaar further exposes that silence by reading de Bry's engraving together with that of "Tira de la Peregrinación," highlighting their formal differences as an extension of their approaches to the discovery. For the Indigenous people in Tawantinsuyu, for instance, the "encounter" depicted by de Bry was seen as *Pachakuti*, with the word *Pacha* meaning "mother," "world," "life," "space," and "time," and *kuti* meaning "drastic shift."<sup>51</sup> As a "violent invasion, merciless destruction, disdain for existing life forms in the continent, and convulsion at all levels of existence," *Pachakuti* means the origins of Americanness.<sup>52</sup> In Jaar's *Motherland*, it means that the earth, in the shape of four conical piles, may represent the Andes Mountain range in South America as a symbol of ecological resistance, and the neon tubes, with their arrow-like shape, may symbolize the outset of the colonial wound. Relating meaning to form and metaphor rather than to monolingual materiality, in Jaar's iconography, neon also means the merging of aesthetics and politics and

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the understanding of culture through what anthropologist Johannes Fabian calls “temporal coevalness,” where the Other is not placed outside the flow of time.<sup>53</sup> It further means that culture can, and should, fight capitalism, even, or perhaps precisely, because of coloniality’s aims at ignoring that fight.

Two more images are reproduced in Jaar’s *Motherland*. The third one from the left shows a 1983 photograph of US troops moving ashore in a mock landing as part of the Pig Pine II exercises, a US Army operation that trained Honduras counterforces against Nicaragua’s Sandinista government. The fourth and final one, a close-up photograph of the Chilean military during the dictatorship, lacks any specific markers of time and site, thereby representing fascist values of uniformity and restraint. This image thus could have been taken any time between 1973, when the dictatorship started, and 1984, when Jaar did the work. It could also have been captured *before* the third one, made in 1983 Nicaragua, showing that, in Jaar’s narrative, history’s progressive temporality, which goes from past to present and left to right, is confronted and criticized. Indeed, we may go even further and say that, allegorically, this photograph could have been taken *after* 1984, as photography in Jaar’s art, as I will elaborate later, is not only about what happened in the past but also about what *should not* happen again in the future. Yet, in life under modernity, the future is the inevitable reproduction of the past. In the case of Chile, the country this image represents, neoliberalism reproduces the logic of capitalism, just as does the military coup with the paradigm of discovery. This is why Jaar places the image of the Chilean military at the “end” of his narrative, exposing the temporal circles within coloniality. In so doing, he shows one of the main arguments in this book: that his oeuvre is centrally informed by a twofold historical paradigm—the Chilean dictatorship and the neoliberal system it inaugurated—and that said paradigm, in which human repression is needed for profit, dominates in the global order today, in the ongoing neoliberal present.

## THE ONGOING NEOLIBERAL PRESENT

On the morning of September 11, 1973, a US-backed military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet overthrew the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende in Chile. Injecting a machine of terror that tortured, assassinated, and disappeared thousands, the coup’s main aim—and that of the dictatorship that followed—was the implementation for the first time in the world of an advanced form of capitalism: neoliberalism. A cultural model that celebrates market-oriented life through harsh forms of

austerity and individualism, neoliberalism reduces the influence of the communal and thus of reciprocal forms of inhibiting and relating among human and nonhuman beings. It also limits rights for nonhegemonic subjects and political subjectivities through relations of submission and domination. In this context, that is, under free-market rule, if justice is “the ethical norm that should govern the whole, [justice] could also be the mask of terror, an absolute principle of sovereign demand that attempts to leave no residue, an ideality that justifies cruel dehumanization,” as literary scholar Fernando J. Rosenberg maintains.<sup>54</sup> In the “laboratory” of Chile, the implementation of this model of cruelty was so successful that its conceptual designer, the US economist and winner of the 1976 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, Milton Friedman, called it a “miracle.”<sup>55</sup> “Chile is an economic miracle,” he wrote for *Newsweek* on January 25, 1982, proudly assessing the effects of his economic policies, applied in Chile by the Chicago Boys, a group of young Chilean economists who studied under him at the University of Chicago. “Chile is an even more amazing *political* miracle,” he continued, praising the politically severe military scenario in which such a miracle is possible.<sup>56</sup> And thus the dictatorship developed, benefiting the elite and multinational market-oriented life while displacing and humiliating the Othered majority. Meanwhile, Friedman’s best student, a disciplined Augusto Pinochet, “was torturing people so prices could be free,” as Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano so pointedly said.<sup>57</sup>

This is what Friedman meant in a letter he sent to Pinochet after their April 1975 meeting in Santiago. “The only way to fix the ‘coercion’ in Chile [resulting from] collectivism . . . and welfare state [is by a] severe, drastic, and shock treatment,” he wrote. “With the many measures you have already taken [you have offered] more room for individual initiative and for a private sphere of life [and thus a] chance of a return to a democratic society.”<sup>58</sup> Recalling the drastic shock imposed by Europe with the conquest, the Chilean dictatorship was nothing but a *refoundational* project of colonialism, that is, an “epochal transition that closes the cycle of the modern liberal and populist states in the region and ushers in the third, telematics and planetary phase of capital,” as cultural theorist Idelber Avelar has maintained.<sup>59</sup> With the term *epoch* meaning a period of time characterized by a distinctive series of memorable events, the Chilean regime was an indelible moment in history, yes, but one operating *within* modernity’s colonial foundations designed in 1492.

In the neoliberal phase of modernity, multiple linguistic terms have been used to transform traumatic events into incidents and measures of salvation,

such as the word *encounter* or slogans such as “Encuentro de Dos Mundos.” The same can be said about the term *freedom*. Adopting the latter, in 1976, Richard Nixon’s US Secretary of the Treasury, William Simon, “congratulated Pinochet for bringing ‘economic freedom’ to the Chilean people.”<sup>60</sup> And the general, of course, was quite gratified with such a compliment. He may have thought: a shock policy has worked, Chileans are now “free,” and the United States is giving Chile the highest grade in the course on Americanness. As Pinochet told Henry Kissinger, Nixon’s secretary of state and the main intellectual architect of the Chilean regime: “We are behind you. You are the leader.”<sup>61</sup>

And thus the 1970s passed by, and Pinochet, the economic elite, and the military class consolidated their power through a constitution that meant, in short, the textbook of neoliberal authority. A task started by the conservative Jaime Guzmán as early as two days after the coup, in the next decade, Chile’s 1980 constitution eradicated political dissent through severe measures that interpellated the subject as consumer, securing a culture of individualism, racism, sexism, and extractivism.<sup>62</sup> And, since fascism is always contested by revolution, whether this latter fails, the 1980s also saw the rise of popular discontent and increased pressure from the international community, revitalizing the hopes of liberation of a mourning society in collective pain.<sup>63</sup>

Writing from my own positionality as an art historian born and raised in the 1980s in Santiago, I recall overhearing with my sister from our bedroom in our family home the passionate conversations about politics that my parents had with their colleagues and friends until late at night. I knew that my father, an architect, had served as mayor of Santiago’s commune of La Reina from 1972 until September 11, 1973, the date of the coup. I also knew he was held for three days in the detention camp of Tres Alamos in Santiago and that his architecture office’s partner, Allende’s nephew, was exiled to Mexico and later to Cuba. Like many kids my age, I also recall the chants and songs of the “No,” a campaign created by the opposition to propel Chileans to cast their votes against the continuity of Pinochet in the 1988 National Referendum. I remember those hymns and songs, streamed from television in the weeks before the elections, being intoned everywhere, from the streets and organized public events to my friends’ homes and recess at school. The “No” won, surprising the economic and military class and their supporters. On March 11, 1990, the transition period began, and a day later, on March 12, my younger sister was born. “She was born in democracy,” my mother often said. A climate of hope was felt in Chile. Or, at least, that is how I recall it at the time.

Yet the end of the dictatorship was hardly as it sounds. Pinochet, right after leaving office, appointed himself senator for life, becoming commander in chief of the military and thus remaining *inside* the country's leadership. Furthermore, the neoliberal constitution injected during his regime stayed intact, securing amnesty for the perpetrators and maintaining the harsh economic differences and cultural policies of heteronormativity and extractivism in "democratic" Chile. With the dictatorship's neoliberal ghost defining all modes of life in the early 1990s, "Chilean political democracy was a fragile enterprise."<sup>64</sup> A series of Center and Center-Left administrations followed until 2010, when the late right-wing billionaire Sebastián Piñera, who had made his fortune in Chile's neoliberal heaven, won the presidential election. Piñera succeeded the socialist government of Michelle Bachelet, herself a victim of Pinochet's regime. In 2014 Bachelet was reelected, and four years later Piñera won the presidency again, denoting a highly polarized society living under harsh neoliberalism in the late 2010s.<sup>65</sup>

In 2018, the same year he returned to office, Piñera traveled to Washington, DC, to meet with Donald Trump, then serving his first term as president of the United States. Replicating the pitiful assumption of obedience from the part of the assimilated Other regarding the empire that Pinochet had so proudly voiced to Kissinger in 1976, Piñera, after telling Trump at the Oval Office that Chile shared with the United States its values of democracy, human rights, and freedom, offered his US counterpart a gift: a print of a small Chilean flag delineated in the middle of a large US flag (figure I.3).<sup>66</sup> Using the white and red stripes and the last star at the bottom right from an altered version of the US emblem, the Chilean flag was simply denoted by a "witty" Piñera through a white rectangular contour. There is no need to create another flag, stripe, or star, Piñera seems to tell us with his "conceptual" print, in which a unified entity is built through an overlapped two-nation flag. As he proudly told Trump and the dozens of journalists with a big smile: "Chile is in the heart of the US."<sup>67</sup>

Piñera's gesture rapidly became viral and mocked through thousands of memes in social media. In decolonial terminology, this irony means that the Chilean president, in reducing a nation to a fragment of another, showed no heart or collaborative friendship. Instead, it demonstrates the continued presence of imperialism in the age of global neoliberalism and the support of this presence by the elite Piñera so well represented. Maybe that is why Trump, witnessing Piñera's flag, laughed and pleasantly agreed. A behavioral pattern of modernity, Piñera's flag, just as Pinochet's response to Kissinger, represents nothing but "the sad dreams of Latin American elites of becoming



1.3 President Donald Trump meets with Chilean President Sebastián Piñera at the White House, September 28, 2018.

modern while diving deeper and deeper into the logic of coloniality,” as Mignolo so pointedly states.<sup>68</sup> After all, since the nineteenth century, a key historical moment in Americanness, imperialism has equated the prevalence of Manifest Destiny in successive and successful hemispheric programs of imperial US strategies. And in this context, so the story goes, Latin America has been “naturally” and derogatorily understood as “America’s backyard.”

“For over a century—beginning with the Monroe doctrine—Latin Americans resisted, often violently, both the United States’ self-assigned mission to reform humanity . . . and the militarism that such mission inevitably generated,” writes historian Greg Grandin.<sup>69</sup> In so doing, Latin Americans, as Grandin continues, “forced the United States, often against the worst impulses of its leaders, to develop more pragmatic and flexible imperial strategies, strategies that proved indispensable in its postwar rise to global superpower.”<sup>70</sup> This means that, regardless of collective and organized resistance, liberatory projects against imperialism have failed, allowing Americanness to continue ruling culture and society through neoliberal tactics of interventionism. In recent years, such “pragmatic and flexible imperial strategies” have been replaced by blatant derogatory and dehumanizing language. In 2018, for instance, just days before Trump’s meeting with Piñera at the Oval Office, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, in acknowledging the threat of China’s growing relations in Latin America, said: “Latin America does not need new imperial powers.”<sup>71</sup> And on September 3, 2025, when the United States



1.4 Chicano students from the University of Wisconsin–Madison protesting on Columbus Day, October 12, 1992.

blew up a vessel that the Trump administration accused of smuggling drugs out of Venezuela, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, sidestepping Latin American nations' sovereignty and the legality of such actions, said, "[They will only stop] when you blow them up, when you get rid of them. [Otherwise, this will] happen again."<sup>72</sup> And so it has been, with more vessels being blown up in the Caribbean waters through operations managed by the defense department recently renamed, plainly and shamelessly, the U.S. Department of War.

Jaar's art on decolonial time critiques coloniality's more and less flexible imperial strategies, showing and honoring in turn different waves of revolutions in diverse periods and sites. One of these revolutions occurred during the quincentenary, when Jaar created *1992* and millions took to the streets across the hemisphere and beyond to say no: "Columbus didn't discover America; he invaded it," as reads, for instance, a sign carried by a group of Chicano students at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in a protest of Columbus Day (figure 1.4). Another recent revolution was Chile's *estallido social*, the largest civil unrest in Chile since the end of the dictatorship.

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1.5 Protest in Santiago, Chile, October 2019.

Commenced on October 18, 2019, when hundreds of high school students took to the streets in Santiago responding to a subway fare hike imposed by the Piñera administration, the *estallido* was soon joined by millions across generations and social, ethnic, and racial backgrounds, all while solidarity chapters were being formed in cities like Barcelona, Beirut, Berlin, Istanbul, London, Lima, Mexico City, New York, Tokyo, and more.<sup>73</sup> Demanding the end of the dictatorship's neoliberal legacies and centuries of colonial rule, one of the revolt's main mottos reads: "Neoliberalism was born and will die in Chile" (figure 1.5).

Witnessing the spread and scope of the revolt, Piñera, who two weeks before the protests' outset had described Chile as Latin America's "oasis," for which he meant neoliberal heaven, announced on public television: "We are at war."<sup>74</sup> He called the military to the streets and ordered a state of siege. Thousands were arrested, dozens were killed, and hundreds suffered ocular injuries through pellets fired by state security agents directly into their eyes. Observing the events from the United States, the Trump administration said: "The United States stands with Chile, an important ally, as it works to peacefully restore national order."<sup>75</sup> Discipline, punishment, and the restoration of neoliberal order were central, just as shown in Piñera's gift to Trump in the form of an obedient and assimilated flag.

Pressure from international human rights organizations, however, left no option to the Piñera administration but to agree to a referendum to resolve two questions: first, if citizens wanted a new constitution; and second, if this should be written by elected members of the Parliament or by a Constitutional Convention formed by elected civilians. On election day, in October 2020, almost 80 percent of the population voted yes to both questions. A renewed sense of hope was felt in and beyond Chile. In Jaar's words: "Have we finally reached the end of the dictatorship? I hope so, and this would be the achievement of the street."<sup>76</sup> In May 2021, Chileans returned to the polls to elect the members for a gender parity Convention with Elisa Loncón, a Mapuche linguist, academic, and Indigenous rights activist, serving as its first president. Later that year, left-wing former student leader Gabriel Boric won the presidency, while the constitution's draft became available for citizens to review and vote on. This time, however, the opposition lost, and quite overwhelmingly. This means that while in 2020 the large majority voted yes to replace Pinochet's constitution, two years later, the majority voted no to the same ontological question. "How could this be explained?" we all wondered. The answer is, again, Americanity. For the traditional political spectrum, neoliberalism was *not* related to decolonial demands. Put differently, capitalism was detached from issues of race, gender, reparation, and environmental justice. And so, under Americanity's rule, it should come as no surprise that, in 2025 Chile, Pinochet's fervent admirer, far-right conservative José Antonio Kast, won the presidential election with an overwhelming 58 percent of the vote, reflecting the current far-right turn in Latin America.

In this context, Taylor's question "What can we do when apparently nothing can be done, and doing nothing is not an option?" emerges as ever so urgent, just as Jaar's aesthetics of the unfinished becomes ever so contingent. As Jaar said when asked about what motivated him to exhibit *I Can't Go On, I'll Go On* in Edinburgh: "We have seen winds of fascism emerge all around Europe, the United States, Asia, and Latin America. I went through . . . Pinochet's regime in Chile [and] when I read this statement by Beckett, I was fascinated; I felt it reflected my mood, a mood of impotence, a feeling that I cannot go on, I do not understand, I am lost."<sup>77</sup> Revealing an ongoing state of mourning that began in his native Chile, Jaar's words expose that the ruins of the dictatorship are relational, exceeding the nation-state. They also reveal that language is not separated from coloniality and that words, such as the terms *encounter* and *freedom*, are perpetuated in those ruins.

The chapters in this book are about those ruins; they are about how Jaar has been denouncing linguistic formulas of inclusion within a "free world

without borders” by insisting on the fact that America was not invented twice but once, as O’Gorman would say. This means that, regardless of Columbus’s name being removed from the holiday, known in New York since 2022 as “Italian American Heritage Day and Peoples’ Day,” and of the many monuments of the conquest being destroyed in recent years in the wake of Black Lives Matter protests, Columbus’s legacies still define life under modernity. Indeed, considering that the federal holiday was never eliminated and that the history of victors is not burned in the debris of the past, Trump’s 2025 announcement at the outset of his second term in office of “reinstating Columbus Day” by bringing the explorer “back from the ashes” is nothing but a linguistic tactic to keep modernity as is.<sup>78</sup> It is nothing but a blatant imperial statement of Americanness. As Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes from Aotearoa (New Zealand): “There is one particular figure whose name looms large . . . : Christopher Columbus. [He] sets its modern time frame (500 years) and defines the outer limits of that legacy, that is, total destruction.”<sup>79</sup>

Responding and reacting to such destruction, Jaar’s art exposes forms, methods, and experiences that refuse to forget, to lose hope. As linguist and activist Noam Chomsky said when asked about the colonial pressure to forget *Nakba* in 1948: “To forget about the past means forgetting about the future because the past involves aspirations, hopes.”<sup>80</sup> And because forgetting informs the textbook of the world, or *el mundo, le monde*, and so forth, as a masculine and singular noun that obstructs emancipatory temporalities in the sequential progression of modernity, “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”<sup>81</sup> Forgetting thus means the semantic tactic of repeating cruelty, genocide, and the justification of war. And art, as art historian Boreth Ly maintains, “cannot solve this moral and ethical conflict or provide complete healing for the wound.”<sup>82</sup> Still, as she continues, it can “help to engage us in this difficult dialogue and serve as catharsis.”<sup>83</sup> Acknowledging the never-completed task of creating, relating, and remembering and the role of art in the interpellation of modernity in both communal (dialogical) and personal (catharsis) realms, Jaar maintains: “Art is our attempt to change the order of reality. How do we accomplish such an impossible task? I don’t know. That is why I am an artist. During decades, I have searched for an answer to this question.”<sup>84</sup>

## HEMISPHERIC AND GLOBAL ENTANGLEMENTS

Jaar’s critique of neoliberal coloniality is not detached from his own experiences in different periods, sites, and diasporic memory accounts. Jaar was born in 1956 in Chile during the second presidency of former dictator Carlos

Ibáñez del Campo. When the artist was five and right-wing president Jorge Alessandri's policies of austerity and freezing of public sector pay unleashed widespread industrial and social unrest, his father decided to move the family from Chile. They moved to Martinique, coinciding with the moment when Caribbean intellectuals such as Césaire were starting to think about decolonization as an unfinished project.<sup>85</sup> Once on the island, Jaar attended the Lycée Schœlcher in Fort-de-France, the same place where Césaire, his wife Suzanne (a surrealist poet and feminist activist), and the decolonial novelist Joseph Zobel had been teachers. Jaar's schooling was thus informed not only by Western "classics" but also by the legacies of educators and alumni such as Frantz Fanon and Édouard Glissant, both students of Césaire. Named after Victor Schœlcher, the nineteenth-century abolitionist and writer who played a leading role in the emancipation of enslaved people in France and its colonies during the Second Republic, the school building was later designated by Césaire, who served as Fort-de-France's mayor and was a deputy in France's National Assembly from 1945 to 2001, as a national monument.<sup>86</sup> Further embracing this understanding of monuments, where what's honored is not modernity's narrative of independence but a hemispheric and global poetics and politics of a decolonial project in becoming, Jaar was recently invited to propose a monument to Césaire. "This is a tremendous honor for me," he said.<sup>87</sup>

In retrospect, it was during his middle and high school years in Martinique that Jaar started to absorb critical histories of racial justice, emancipation, and liberation, a rare learning experience within a world whose restricted pedagogy "limit[ed] the imaginative capacity of youth and non-youth alike." Indeed, one can further say that Jaar's experience was based on an abolitionist teaching, where "the radical imagination of collective memories of resistance, trauma, survival, love, joy, and cultural modes of expression and practices . . . push and expand the fundamental ideas of democracy."<sup>88</sup> Art from this perspective, as education scholar Bettina L. Love argues, "is freedom dreams turned into action because 'politics is not separate from lived experience.'"<sup>89</sup> With the noun *freedom* here meaning not the countless offerings of the globalized market but the communal and shared actions of movements of liberation, Love's statement recalls the title of Angela Y. Davis's 2016 book *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle*, a collection of interviews, presentations, and essays on global justice and transnational solidarities in the aftermath of the Ferguson unrest and the question of Palestine. Importantly, since these actions are global, it should come as no surprise that in 1971, when Davis was arrested as one of the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives, students in Santiago from the Universidad de Chile organized a week of solidarity that included

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street rallies, graphics, and petitions demanding her liberty.<sup>90</sup> It should come as no surprise either that a year later, when Davis was released from prison, she visited Chile at the height of Allende's government and that a day after the coup, on September 12, 1973, she organized a rally in New York protesting the role of the Nixon administration in Allende's overthrow.<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, solidarity committees were being formed all over the world. From France, Italy, Sweden, the United States, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to Algeria, Japan, and Palestine, the transnational solidarity movement with the victims of the Chilean dictatorship was of significant proportions. "Every day, an act of solidarity was created in some locality in the closest or most remote corners of the planet," said architect, dictatorship survivor, and 2019 National Architecture Award winner Miguel Lawner.<sup>92</sup> And while it is true that this movement reached a global scope during the coup, it started before, when hundreds of people from all over the world traveled to Chile to experience firsthand Salvador Allende's socialist revolution.

Alfredo Jaar was one of them. In 1972, a year before the coup, the then fifteen-year-old returned to Chile from Martinique. His father, a fervent reader with a great passion for critical information and social justice, wanted his family to directly live the social reforms of Allende, who had been democratically elected president of Chile in 1970.<sup>93</sup> He wanted his children to experience such hope. In March 1973, with Allende still in office, Jaar, after performing well in the national college entrance exam, was accepted into the Universidad de Chile's Facultad de Arquitectura y Urbanismo (FAU, Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism), where he enrolled in three "continuous" studios that were part of the "creative" curricula.<sup>94</sup> In these studios, conducted by architects Hernán Montecinos, Pedro Murtinho, and Ramón Méndez, assignments were divided into phases and students were encouraged "to find the political, cultural, and sociological skin of space by analyzing space and light," as Jaar's classmate, Jorge Dalmazzo, recalls.<sup>95</sup> Another classmate, Isabel Devés, remembers: "We were prompted to go out to the street and observe to find the context's essence and then translate those findings through different modes of representation, which were not necessarily architectural plans."<sup>96</sup> "We were encouraged to think about the city as an open book," said another classmate, Bernardo Urquieta.<sup>97</sup> And in this "book," as Montecinos's teaching assistant Jorge Iglesias recalls, "instead of following conventional formulas, as was the case in other workshops from the 'non-creative' curriculum, students came with their own conclusions and observations, and then exchanged them with their classmates and teachers, leaving the studio with even more questions."<sup>98</sup>

As a mode of searching, embracing observation, experiential learning, and collective analysis, this methodology in which architecture is an ongoing process has been applied by Jaar throughout his more than five-decade career. “As a trained architect my art responds to context,” he often says, with *context* meaning what he does and does not see from the media, the streets, and the city’s urban planning; and what he does and does not hear from political addresses, the masses, and the public space. After identifying context through extensive research, which includes archival gatherings of media clips and other forms of visual, textual, and sonic documentation, Jaar signals said presences or absences regarding the orchestration of the real, that is, regarding the manipulation of truth by modernity’s power channels: “I edit, edit, and edit, in order to arrive at the essence of what I want to say.”<sup>99</sup>

With its heart in the public space and in how the political, cultural, and social develop within that space, Jaar’s method of art as a response to context recalls art historian Eddie Chambers’s take on art history and by extension art itself: “In writing art history and/or art criticism, context is everything. Without the art we study and teach being considered from the perspectives of multiple contexts—including social, racial, historical—it is unlikely to be sufficiently or properly understood,” he argues. “Except for those invested in social history, mainstream art historians frequently disregard context as a significant area of inquiry.”<sup>100</sup> Likewise, Jaar’s education at FAU embraced neither universal narratives and rules nor predetermined formal, theoretical, and experiential sources, methods, and temporalities. It acknowledged that “to think of history as one is to posit the equivalence between three ideas: one time, one humanity, and one history,” as Paul Ricoeur has said.<sup>101</sup> In this sense, Jaar’s thinking about time allies with architect Lina Bo Bardi, who explains that “linear time is a Western invention; time is not linear, it is a marvellous entanglement.”<sup>102</sup> And in that entanglement, the path for becoming creates relational traces with no beginning or end, nor one way or another, or civilized or barbaric, modern or postmodern, colonial or postcolonial, or any other binarism from what the Venezuelan anthropologist Fernando Coronil coined as a modality of Occidentalism, in which “the question [is] presented as a problem *for* the Self, not *of* the Self or *for* the Other.”<sup>103</sup> Art from this perspective, and education about culture for that matter, embraces a sense of mobility, ongoing observation, an unfinished search for hope, and a collective building of projects that are essentially *in progress*.

In Jaar’s art, that sense of decolonial motion is oftentimes formulated by overlapping images and text and the building of complex spatial forms that portray light and lighting as aids for remembrance. As such, light and lighting

are never just that: a radiation that makes visible the appearance of things or a symbolic source of knowledge beyond and away from representation. They are rather ongoing grooves that acknowledge the multiple pasts and thus times that modernity buries in the remote sites of non-history. Such was the case of Allende's Chile, whose peoples, murals, songs, and hopes were all aimed to be destroyed with the coup. So was the university and thus Allende's dream of transforming Chile "into one big school."<sup>104</sup> Indeed, beginning with the coup, public universities became controlled by different military divisions, extending the brutality of the regime into the realm of education. With its "creative" line, however, FAU managed to continue its studio offerings. After all, the military did not see "creativity" as disobedient or revolutionary. It was not part of Occidentalism's "rational" mental binarism; thus, it was not considered a threat.

Nor was the idea of happiness, whose meaning in dictatorial Chile propelled Jaar to develop one of his most famous projects, *Studies on Happiness*. In this series, created between 1979 and 1981, Jaar asked the inhabitants of Santiago if they were happy by different means, including interviews in the public space and images of eight advertising billboards with the question "¿Es usted feliz?" (Are you happy?) (figure I.6).<sup>105</sup> Rendered in stark black text on white backgrounds, Jaar's question invited people to think critically about the nation's freedom regime, that is, the machine of censorship, torture, and repression led by the US-backed Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (DINA, National Intelligence Directorate)—renamed in 1977 as the Central Nacional de Informaciones (CNI, National Information Center.) Saying no in this sense means a critique of the public secret that propelled the coup in the first place and that was starting to materialize with the 1978 plebiscite and its resulting neoliberal constitution of 1980. It means no to a free-market culture that was soon to be injected all over the world. It means no, in feminist scholar and activist Lynne Segal's words, to "the contemporary [capitalist idea of] happiness agenda [that] may be better described as its opposite: a misery agenda."<sup>106</sup> As Jaar said in 2017 when asked about what motivated him to create this project: "A neoliberal model was strongly being established. I wanted to question [that model, so] I asked: Do we want this? Are we happy with this?" The journalist then asked: "What are you looking for with this question today?" Jaar responded: "The same as before. To question the existent model."<sup>107</sup>

Through a conceptual strategy depicting the ostensibly innocent question about happiness, Jaar circumvented censorship, subverting the one-sidedness of the emitter in the speech under dictatorship while signaling the



1.6 Alfredo Jaar, *Public Interventions*, 1981, from the series *Studies on Happiness* (1979–81). Courtesy of Alfredo Jaar.

humanitarian and ecological constraints that the new model of neoliberal freedom was starting to inject into society. And, as neoliberalism has become a global phenomenon, Jaar has been reenacting the question in multiple cities worldwide, from the port city of Valparaíso in Chile to Monterrey in Mexico, Austin in Texas, and more (figure 1.7).<sup>108</sup> Rendered in stark white text on black backgrounds, the work disrupts the partiality of those who speak in the free market's planetary regime, highlighting the question's reproducibility by turning negative into positive and vice versa through graphic design. And just as the negative-positive identity of the photographic can reproduce the image—or the referent—into endlessness, so does Jaar through language and the inquiry of happiness. As novelist Clarice Lispector writes in *The Hour of the Star*, “[As] long as I have questions to which there are no answers, I shall go on writing.”<sup>109</sup> In Jaar's art, the inquiry about happiness is what keeps him going, *writing* an artistic project that remains urgent, open. “In a way, throughout the years, I have been repeating the same question about happiness again and again in different projects and geopolitical contexts,” Jaar once said.<sup>110</sup> Recalling Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, which, paraphrasing English scholar Bret Benjamin, is first and foremost a denouncement of the role of capitalism in humans' happiness, Jaar's project says no, the question of capitalism and



1.7 Alfredo Jaar, *For Freedoms*, 1981/2018, from the series *Studies on Happiness* (1979–81), Austin, Texas. Courtesy of Alfredo Jaar.

coloniality is not detached from the question of happiness.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, this happiness, which is thought from the decolonial, is not detached from the incomplete struggle for a world yet to come.

As a mode of being and becoming, happiness from this perspective was central in anti-imperialist experiences and discourses in dictatorship Chile. Understood not as the result of the struggle but as the struggle itself, happiness regards the hopes in the present for an imminent decolonial future. Miguel Enríquez, for instance, one of the founders of the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR, Movement of the Revolutionary Left), wrote: “My happiness is my fight.”<sup>112</sup> Evoking Karl Marx’s 1865 “Confessions,” for Enríquez (who in 1974 was assassinated by DINA while living clandestinely), happiness occurs “when people can surrender completely to the moment they are living; when being and becoming are the same.”<sup>113</sup> In this scenario, the answer no in Jaar’s work means to give up, to assimilate with the regime, to break oneself and betray to survive death while simultaneously falling into the obscenity of torture.<sup>114</sup> The answer yes, on the other hand, means the persistence of the fight, even, or perhaps precisely, in life under dictatorship. Jaar’s work from this perspective offers the possibility of embracing such a fight while also preventing risking one’s life, challenging the assumption that words are transparent and that the relation between signifier and signified is always fixed, universal. Through a multilayered question that exposes the

complex decolonial meaning of happiness and freedom together, Jaar's work "conceive[s] affect, happiness or otherwise, as an entry into political subjectivity and the legitimate ground for political act," as scholar of contemporary art and literature Esther Gabara maintains.<sup>115</sup> And in that space, the answers yes and no mean not simply the rejection or affirmation of fascism and imperialism by adopting and adhering to a two-party system. They also mean a negation of binarism as the single source of subjectivity. In this sense, Jaar's series "create[s] another form of (realist) fiction [that] need not be the opposite of avant-garde critique, and it should not be collapsed with ideology."<sup>116</sup> And this is why, as Gabara continues, in the epigraph of Jaar's book *Studies on Happiness* the artist paraphrases a famous line by Nigerian novelist, poet, and critic Chinua Achebe about the capacity of art to create otherwise realities.<sup>117</sup> The epigraph reads: "Art is our constant effort to create for ourselves a different order of reality from that which is given to us."<sup>118</sup> Such understanding of *aesthetics* as an *unfinished* effort impels Jaar to continue posing the same question—he knows that while neither yes nor no can do much to change the course of modernity and dismantle its linear time, their relational inquiries can still imagine otherwise realities. In so doing, the graphic content in Jaar's work, that is, the seemingly binominal poll about happiness, raises the following questions: How has happiness as a form of decolonial fight existed within neoliberalism? What forms has it taken and how have these forms addressed the restrictions of the free market? The answer proposed by Jaar is art: art as a mode of insisting over and over from different conceptual forms on the question of liberation—art as a form of radical hope.

In 1982, finding himself "completely suffocated by the political situation," Jaar decided to leave Chile.<sup>119</sup> He moved to New York, where the Chilean economic "miracle" and its semantics of freedom were rapidly being injected by the Ronald Reagan–Margaret Thatcher axis, causing even more harm to humans and the planet.<sup>120</sup> Importantly, as Reagan's New Right relied on modernity's rhetoric of "democracy," speaking against it, that is, saying no openly and loudly, was *not as dangerous* as in a formal fascist autocracy, as in Chile. "[Fascism] sees its salvation in granting expression to the masses—but on no account granting them rights," writes Walter Benjamin.<sup>121</sup> And the people know. From the realm of the decolonial, they know that the liberation project is ongoing as revolution is likely to fail in the world as it is. They know, in other words, that modernity continues denigrating peoples, cultures, and subjectivities that embrace and expand the narratives on nonlinear times and that that is precisely why they won't stop the fight. "The more conservative things became under Reagan, the more space I found for my work. [In this]

environment, an opposition developed, and there was a space for the kind of things I was doing,” Jaar recalls.<sup>122</sup>

This is why, in 1985, Jaar appropriated the June 7, 1985, cover of *The Economist*, which featured the following headline: “What will they leave behind?” (figure I.8). Here, the artist simply reproduces the cover and shows it as such, with the image of Reagan and former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher walking away, their backs to the camera, while readers, or the world, see them bailing out as a symbol of impunity in the global justice system. Responding to the rhetorical question of *The Economist* of “What will they leave behind?” Jaar proposes the following answer: the linear past. What Reagan and Thatcher turn their backs on, Jaar seems to tell us, is the time of crime they helped develop and then escaped from. It is the time of victors’ history that regards progress but also walking away from coloniality, death, oblivion, and certainly accountability. In representing the cover twice, that is, as cover and as art, Jaar invites us to think about another time, the time of behind, where dynamic and active memories indeed exist, even if only in images.

In the next decade, when Jaar made *1992*, neoliberalism, in the words of anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, was “whiz[zing] around the globe.”<sup>123</sup> In this context, Jaar developed his most famous series, *The Rwanda Project* (1994–2000), where he addresses the indifference of the Western mainstream media regarding the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. In the project’s 1994 installation, *Untitled (Newsweek)* (plate 4), Jaar appropriates the covers of the US weekly magazine *Newsweek* published from April 11 to August 1, 1994. Beneath each cover, he adds text describing events in Rwanda taking place at that same moment. Aiming to provide strategies to protect individuals’ stock shares while ignoring massacres across the hemisphere and overseas, *Newsweek*’s headline on the first cover reads: “Focus. On Your Money: How to Survive in a Scary Market.” The headline on the last cover, on the other hand, reads: “Hell on Earth: Racing Against Death in Rwanda,” to which Jaar adds: “August 1, 1994: Newsweek magazine dedicates its first cover to Rwanda” (figure I.9). Alongside the text is a photograph showing people lying dead in the dry dirt in Rwanda, while others stand up in the rubble of the past as a representation of the present. A young child in the foreground witnesses the ruins, their expression simultaneously of pain, consciousness, and commotion. The child’s expression is the testimony of modernity’s denial of happiness.

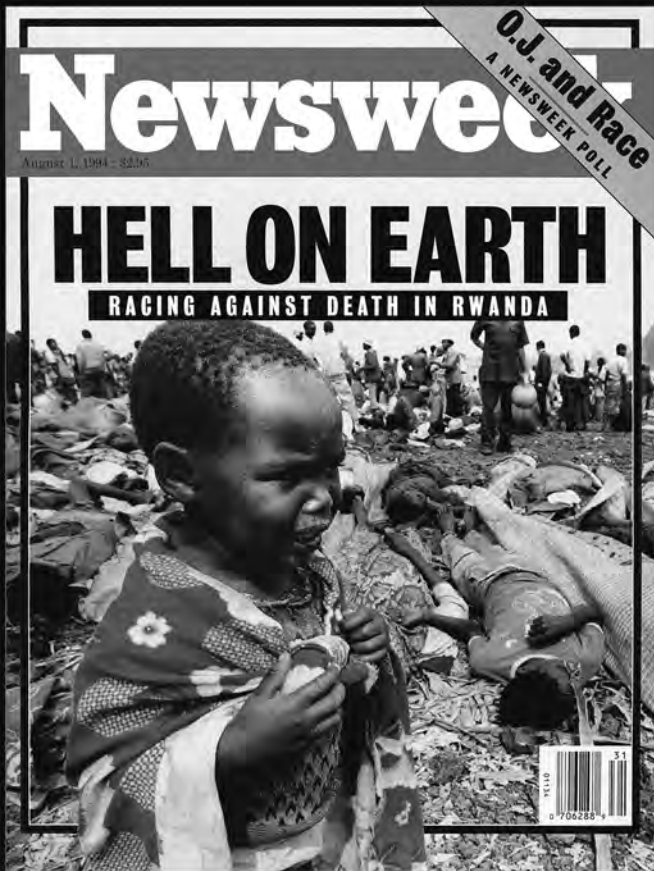
“The conviction that another acknowledged crime against humanity was perpetrated against the Africans by slavery and its catastrophic and far-reaching, later colonial, effects, is the central problematic of Alfredo Jaar,”



1.8 Alfredo Jaar, *What Will They Leave Behind?*, 1985. Courtesy of Alfredo Jaar.

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August 1, 1994: Newsweek magazine dedicates its first cover to Rwanda.

1.9 Alfredo Jaar, *Untitled (Newsweek)* (detail), 1994, from the series *The Rwanda Project* (1994–2000). Courtesy of Alfredo Jaar.

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writes art historian Griselda Pollock. “Jaar feels called upon, by his refusal to look away from what is happening in the world to and around Africa, to examine . . . what our current regimes of representation do in this double bind of representation.”<sup>124</sup> In Jaar’s critique of the media and the regimes of representation it imposes, however, it is key to note that the artist’s own experience growing up in Martinique has informed his interest in Africa and the African diaspora. “I lived for ten years [in] Martinique, which was the birth country of Aimé Césaire, one of the founders of Négritude. I had these very strong links with Africa through Martinique, and I immediately realized the wrongful, racist portrayal of Africa in the media. To focus on these issues became quite natural,” he said.<sup>125</sup> In turn, in Jaar’s understanding of “history,” there is no “later colonial” but coloniality of power, that is, an ongoing system begun in the sixteenth century alongside the invention of the Americas. In Jaar’s words: “This idea of ‘postcolonial’ is as illusory as ‘postwar.’ Unfortunately, the ‘colonies’ are pretty much alive [as they] are extremely dependent on the former colonizers. And conflicts exist now because these former colonies that are still colonies are trying to distance themselves from that system of oppression.”<sup>126</sup>

Jaar’s art is about connecting the conceptual locus of the conquest with neoliberalism’s capitalist violence in the global context, questioning the idea of happiness in free-market narratives embracing liberty, access, and success. It is about exposing the colonial dangers of modernity and the complicity of the media and intellectual discourse in such dangers, signaling that words such as *openness, cooperation, freedom, democracy*, and so on have indeed multiple and, most of the time, opposing meanings. From the perspective of capitalism, these words are well established in linear time. As Princeton University professor of political science John Ikenberry proudly reported in 2018: “The liberal international characteristics of order—openness, rules, multilateral cooperation—are deeply rooted and likely to persist.”<sup>127</sup> Jaar’s art, in all, is about showing the world *just* as it is, one in which the life of the majority has a lesser value than that of those replicating and benefiting from economic freedom. And in this binominal equation, millions are censored, tortured, and sometimes—many times—killed or made to disappear. Many others are criminalized, incarcerated, deported, and dehumanized, as shown in Jaar’s 1992.

This is what Jaar meant in his proposal for this work. He offered: “One of the most tragic consequences of this situation is the movement of peoples searching for a better life. My [work] depicts the ‘reception’ being given to Vietnamese refugees arriving in Hong Kong Whitehead Detention Center, where more than 25,000 people wait for a screening procedure to define their status.”<sup>128</sup> By “this situation,” Jaar refers to the legacies of the conquest in the

neoliberal present, where “reception” means no encounter but imprisonment, erasure, and denial of mourning. If Jaar’s work, installed in SoHo, the heart of New York’s art world at the time, and displayed underground beneath the Columbus Day parade, addressed the “social, political, [and] economic . . . shifts affecting us all at the close of the 20th century,” as prompted by the Public Art Fund (the art organization that, alongside the Whitney Museum of American Art and the American Center in Paris, had invited Jaar to create *1992*), it was precisely to state that in 1992, the foundations of capitalism as established five hundred years ago have not only remained but expanded further. And today, in our digital, globalized world built on smart technologies, frenetic consumerism, and social media spectacle as forms of reality, there are more prisons, despair, genocide, and deaths; more freedom, connectivity, progress, and linear success.

As I write in 2025, the global migration crisis represented in Jaar’s *1992* has exacerbated even further. In the United States, for instance, the Trump administration has adopted the infamous Alien Enemies Act of 1798 to deport immigrants to inhuman detention centers abroad regardless of evidence of criminal records, all while creating fear in society through political and media spectacle. In this context, humans considered “aliens,” a disparaging term used since 1798 to describe lawful permanent residents in the United States, are seen by the administration literally as “enemy.”<sup>129</sup> The same is the case with the university. Enacting to the letter Vice President JD Vance’s statement from 2021—“universities are the enemy”—federal funding has now been removed or threatened to be removed if requests for epistemological and cultural exceptionalism are not met.<sup>130</sup> Demanding higher education to obey Americanness in their curriculum, research, and reparation programs, the Trump administration, in Jaar’s words, is “forcing people to remain silent. It’s Pinochet, again.”<sup>131</sup> And here we are, with the war against the university recalling the Chilean dictatorship, where cultural institutions were taken over and freedom of speech was repressed. In this context, Jaar’s question about happiness is today, just as ever, immanently urgent.

So is the question about Palestine. As a fourth-generation Palestinian whose paternal family migrated to Chile from Bethlehem during the Ottoman Empire in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Jaar, since an early age, has not been estranged from this question. He recalls: “I grew up witnessing my father’s suffering upon the issue of Palestine, and in a way that pain was transferred to me.”<sup>132</sup> Within the decolonial framework of this book, such pain—which Jaar absorbed through oral tradition from his father’s diasporic grief vis-à-vis other experiences he has lived firsthand, such as the coup—has materialized in his art throughout a refusal to forget the global catastrophe of

progressive time. This is what the artist meant when referring to Palestine and the mainstream media. He said: “The Western media conveniently starts the narrative from October 7th, ignoring the historical context. Consequently, the aggressor is portrayed as the good guy while the victim becomes the villain.”<sup>133</sup> In this context, as Jaar explains elsewhere, “when students in the U.S. started protesting and asking for a cease fire, for the end of the genocide, the Biden-Harris administration sent the police.” And today, Jaar continues, “this is going even further.”<sup>134</sup> Yet, as the artist further denotes, referring to the 2024 student solidarity encampments with Palestine across university campuses in the United States from the lens of decolonial time and radical hope, “the younger generation is the consciousness of the world.”<sup>135</sup> Referring to this all in his acceptance speech at the MacDowell Medal ceremony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, on June 29, 2025, Jaar said, “As an architect making art, I respond to context. And what is the context today? Censorship is emerging everywhere. . . . We are sponsoring a genocide and supporting an apartheid system. Students have faced threats of imprisonment, yet they continue to speak out. . . . Their courage in the face of adversity is a beacon of hope.”<sup>136</sup>

In 1985, Jaar had his first solo exhibition in the United States at New York University’s Grey Art Gallery (now the Grey Art Museum). In *Installation Projects*, with the selection of the word *projects* for the title, Jaar was introducing himself to Manhattan’s downtown art world as an artist whose aesthetic was essentially unfinished. However, said aesthetics went unnoticed at the time. As one critic wrote in relationship to *Motherland*, which Jaar displayed as a sketch on a sheet of paper: “By placing neon in conjunction with natural materials such as earth, [Jaar] draws attention to the gap between technology and nature, between developed and underdeveloped countries, evok[ing] the magic realism associated with South American liter[ature].”<sup>137</sup> Equating earth with nature and neon with civilization, that is, progressive time, this critic’s comparison of a work by a Latin American artist with the genre of magical realism in Latin American literature is not surprising. After all, in the words of literary scholar Matthew Bush, magical realism “provided global audiences with an exotic look of Latin Americanness that has proven hard to shake.”<sup>138</sup>

In the 1980s, with the emergence of a Latin American art market, US art institutions created reductive and homogenizing cultural stereotypes, linking the arts of the time with the literature boom of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>139</sup> Solidarizing with the boom as an axis from which to think about Latin American art’s new global identity, art curators and scholars celebrated the boom’s most famous writer, Colombian Nobel Prize in Literature winner Gabriel García

Márquez, whose best-known novel, *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1967), creates a cultural project inseparable from what García Márquez called Latin America's "monstrous reality."<sup>140</sup> "Our aim, perhaps ambitious, has been to take up this challenge in relation to the visual arts: we would argue that the way to understand contemporary Latin American art must be to see it in the context or reality, the 'monstrous reality' of world politics," note Latin American art scholars Oriana Baddeley and Valerie Fraser in their landmark 1989 volume of Latin American art.<sup>141</sup> Yet, to paraphrase literary critic Jean Franco, the myth of Macondo—the fictional city in *Cien años de soledad*—not only contrasts with the reality of Latin American cities, then in the process of disintegration through a series of military dictatorships, but also represents a virgin state disconnected from US oppression and dominion.<sup>142</sup> In turn, as Cuban novelist and thinker Arturo Benítez Rojo states, the book further shows a recurrent theme in the Caribbean novel in which at stake is the search "toward a Utopian territory" or "a hypothetical center of origins," recalling the search for El Dorado and the strong presence of Western enunciation in the representation of culture and thus time.<sup>143</sup> By adopting, expanding, and marketizing cultural subordination through the circular novel in the search of roots, a critical take on Americanness is exactly what García Márquez's novel lacked.

Also in 1985, the same year as his exhibition at NYU's Grey Art Gallery, Alfredo Jaar made *Cien años de soledad [no realmente]* (plate 5). Using neon to politicize the material in its temporal dimension, Jaar writes the title of García Márquez's novel in cursive script with white neon lettering. Below it, written with red neon and all in capitals, he adds: "No realmente" (Not really). "As you know, García Márquez's novel gives a completely wrong idea of Latin America," Jaar said.<sup>144</sup> Showing that aesthetics and politics, or art and life, are not *always* mirrored, García Márquez's most famous novel not only reproduced but also marketized—and quite successfully—the colonial time of modernity. Seeking to substitute the region's "backwardness" by repudiating any link to tradition and advocating for "newness," writers of the boom insisted "in the foundational role of their generation in erasing the past to 'catch up' with history's present," as Avelar has argued.<sup>145</sup> In his *Cien años de soledad* specifically, Avelar continues, García Márquez presents "allegories of an 'author' doubled in the foundational character, who appears without predecessors and often operates outside the system of change, hierarchy, and power that has condemned Latin American countries to anachronism and dependency."<sup>146</sup> This means that, by removing the self from the past, García Márquez and his most famous novel advocate for literature's autonomy,

secularity, and globality. They advocate for sales, aligning with “the Chicago-school modernization theories” and exposing “the need for reconciliation between fables of identity and teleologies of modernization, [that is, between] the circular time of myth versus the linear, onward-flowing time of secular history.”<sup>147</sup>

No wonder why Jaar appropriates this title and novel and shows it just like that: an allegory of the refoundational project of neoliberalism in life under modernity. Contrasting the temporality of *Cien años de soledad*, the phrase “Not really” in Jaar’s installation means “No, this is not Latin America.” Turned into a decolonial negation, this conceptual gesture further underscores the historical conditions that propelled Jaar to create this work and thus a second negation: “No, Latin America is not alone.” As Reagan had just publicly revealed his support to the Contras in Nicaragua, the negation of the word *solitude* thus means intervention, memory annihilation, ruins.<sup>148</sup> It means Americanness. After all, as Quijano and Wallerstein remind us, “independence did not undo coloniality; it merely transforms its outer form.”<sup>149</sup>

Informed by different hemispheric and global entanglements, Jaar’s art on decolonial time shows the ongoing state of mourning by those in cultures of resistance as well as the centrality of culture in indicting perpetrators in society and the fact that the struggles for reparation and justice have so far failed and thus decolonial efforts must continue. Jaar’s art, in total, is about mourning, accountability, and failure, a threefold decolonial paradigm that he enacts through what I call in this book his exercises of memory.

## EXERCISES OF MEMORY

In 1993, thirty-two-year-old South African photojournalist Kevin Carter traveled from his hometown in Johannesburg to Sudan, where he photographed the famine crises during the Second Civil War. In one of these photographs, a starving child is being observed by a vulture. Positioned in the foreground, in the lower right quadrant of the frame, the child hides, laying the elbows in the dirt. The vulture, on the other hand, depicted a few feet behind at the center right, stands defiant and sees, as if witnessing Carter’s presence, his lens, while waiting for its prey. Appearing first in the *New York Times* and then circulated worldwide, in 1994, this photograph earned Carter a Pulitzer Prize. It also prompted him to commit suicide three months later in response to the media scandal around the image, which accused Carter of his “vulture-like ethics.”<sup>150</sup> As one critic wrote: “The man adjusting his lens to take just the right frame of [the child’s] suffering might just as well be a predator, another vulture on the scene.”<sup>151</sup>

This and other commentaries published by the media were appropriated by Jaar in his 2006 installation *The Sound of Silence*, in which he contextualizes Carter's photograph by creating a theater-like space with an eight-minute video loop inside it (figure I.10). In the video, using white lowercase lettering over a black background, Jaar narrates Carter's story, from his birth during apartheid and his trip to Sudan to his suicide and the image's afterlife. Midway through his account, Jaar details the moment Carter captures the photograph of the vulture and the child, which, in turn, appears suddenly and shortly while a single flash discharges. Interrupting the viewer's vision and modernity's linear time, Jaar repeats Carter's name over and over. "kevin, kevin, kevin carter," he writes at the beginning; "kevin, kevin, kevin carter," he repeats by the end. Through a linguistic operation that insists on a word—a proper name—Jaar pays homage not only to Carter but also to the capacity of photojournalism to shape people's consciousnesses, creating a linguistic, photographic, and architectural memorial that honors the photojournalist's ethical sense of responsibility regarding the suffering of humans caused by modernity and its homologue of war. "Such images cannot be more than an invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to learn, to examine the rationalizations for mass suffering offered by established powers," writes Susan Sontag.<sup>152</sup> Equating imperial power with humanitarian catastrophe, Sontag asks: "Who caused what the picture shows? Who is responsible? Is it excusable? Was it inevitable?"<sup>153</sup> Jaar's response is the vulture as both presence and allegory—as a figure provoking starvation, sorrow, and death, the vulture in Jaar's work is neither the photographer nor the bird but the capitalist society in the context of modernity that creates these conditions in the first place.

Eight years later, in 2014, Jaar created another theater-like installation to contextualize a second image: Dutch photojournalist Koen Wessing's *Estelí, Nicaragua, September 1978* (figure I.11). Taken in 1978 during the Nicaraguan Revolution, this photograph shows two young female peasants crying in desperation upon learning about the assassination of their farmer father by the US-sponsored National Guard. Titled *Shadows*, the installation begins with a dark and narrow hallway, with a series of light boxes displaying contact prints from the same 35 mm film used by Wessing for his *Estelí* in the walls. At the end of the corridor, in an isolated dark room, *Estelí* appears to the viewer's eye through a projection that gradually illuminates the image, as the women become glowing silhouettes (figure I.12). In becoming silhouettes, they become anonymous bodies, representing society under modernity's state of terror, or society in collective pain.



1.10 Alfredo Jaar, *The Sound of Silence*, 2006. Courtesy of Alfredo Jaar.

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I.11 Alfredo Jaar, *Shadows*, 2014. Courtesy of Alfredo Jaar.



I.12 Alfredo Jaar, *Shadows*, 2014. Courtesy of Alfredo Jaar.

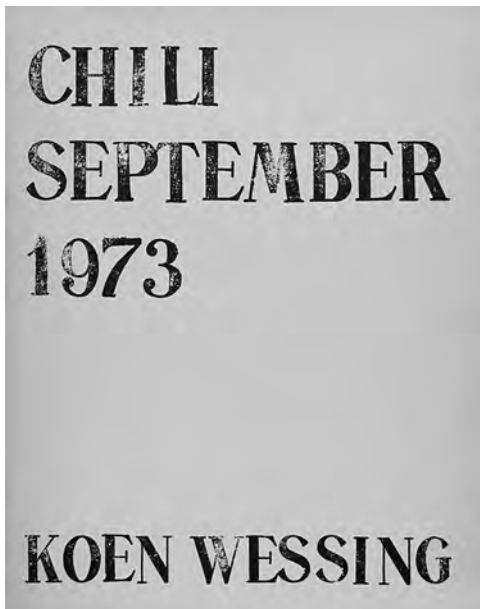
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Turning a local story into the story of many, *Shadows* also includes a testimony by Wessing in the form of a video in which the photographer narrates the moment before the shooting: “We were in Managua in the north of Nicaragua, and suddenly we saw a man lying on the road. . . . He had a big hole, like this, in his head. They shot him five kilometers from his house. His colleagues arrived and they put his body in a van and took him home.”<sup>154</sup> Wessing’s words provide information that every family of victims of atrocities deserves to know: a testimony of how their loved ones were killed so that justice may eventually be achieved. In incorporating this testimony, Jaar honors those fallen under modernity and those who mourn, including photojournalists such as Wessing and their fight for representing the existence and thus the past of the oppressed. In this sense, the glowing silhouettes, just as the flash discharged in *The Sound of Silence*, are allegories of photojournalism’s capacity to interface in our forms of seeing and judging within the art gallery, the museum, the media, the world.

Important to the discussion in this book about global coloniality, in *Shadows* Jaar displays, next to Wessing’s testimony, a photo book made by the Dutch photojournalist immediately after the Chilean coup (figure 1.13). Indeed, shortly after the military took over, thirty-one-year-old Wessing flew to Santiago to document the brutal images of the repression so that the world could “see,” creating the photo book *Chili September 1973*. Published in Amsterdam in 1973, both the book and its images were censored in Chile, just as with any image documenting the brutality of the dictatorship. This is why Jaar, only upon his arrival in New York in the early 1980s, was finally able to see thousands of photographs made by socially committed photojournalists such as Wessing; thousands of images showing people behind bars, crying, hidden, searching, and mourning; images of the military burning everything, from revolutionary literature to bodies and people, even when alive.<sup>155</sup> To modernize the nation, so the narrative of coloniality says, the past must be forgotten in the invisible debris of history. And today in “democratic” Chile, when many of these images have entered the country’s imaginary, millions remain to be seen. Connecting shared histories of repression under the rule of Americanness, *The Sound of Silence*, *Shadows*, and Jaar’s entire body of work are conceptually elaborated *with* the victims instead of *for* them, in an aesthetic project embracing collective reciprocity and hope. The line is fine, but it is also quite marked.

Jaar’s art on photojournalist images of human suffering has propelled some art critics to accuse him of “aestheticizing horror,” “exploit[ing the] subject,” and “manipulat[ing] the viewer.”<sup>156</sup> Reviewing *The Sound of Silence* for the *New York Times*, art critic Roberta Smith, for instance, states that the story



I.13 Koen Wessing, *Chili*  
September 1973, 1973.

“is trivialized and exploited by the art . . . , leav[ing] you moved yet irked, feeling raw yet manipulated. You may wonder whether Mr. Jaar is an artist or just some finely tuned hybrid of set designer, art director, editorial writer and graphic designer.”<sup>157</sup> Smith’s critique, however, not only presupposes a finalized and polished result by overlooking Jaar’s relational temporality. It also situates the artist in the position of a Western savior, while simultaneously nullifying the presence and agency of the photographed and by extension the more complex temporal and spatial dimension within the photographic. Yet, as philosopher Jacques Rancière writes by denoting the differences between pity (or Occidentalism) and compassion (of nonhegemonic reciprocity): “Humanism or compassion are words people like to use with regard of Alfredo Jaar. . . . But compassion is not pity for the unfortunate, it is the capacity to feel with them, which equally entails the capacity to make them feel with us.”<sup>158</sup> In turn, as media scholar Ariella Azoulay has argued, the space between the photographer, the photographed, and the viewer “is a political space where human beings look at one another, speak and act in a manner that is not solely subordinate to disciplinary constraints, not to ones of governance.”<sup>159</sup> This means that judgments formulated from the lens of “universal” aesthetics, as those appropriated by Jaar in *The Sound of Silence*, where the photographer—or Carter—is called “a predator, another vulture,” invalidate “the presence of the persons photographed and the relations of reciprocity

that exist between them and the photographer.”<sup>160</sup> What is negated is the very reciprocity that documentary images can indeed offer, challenging the idea that photographs of violence exploit their subjects to provide sensational material and thus feed voyeuristic tendencies. Quite differently, Jaar’s art on photojournalism embodies reciprocity through a process of learning that is ethically and politically necessary, one that, in line with social and cultural theorist Susie Linfield’s take on photography, may connect us to our history of violence and human cruelty.<sup>161</sup> It further represents the extended political spaces between lens, subject, and unfinished instances of reception, offering aesthetic modes of speaking (or making), existing (or performing), and listening (or critically understanding) through compassion, reciprocity, and humility together. Viewed from this perspective, critical photojournalism has the potential to advance toward decolonial approaches to human rights and photography as an ethical means to respond to our ever-increasing arrogant and nihilistic modernity. This is why photography, as used by Jaar, reminds us that photographs of atrocity show not only what *has been* but also that *things like this* should not happen again.<sup>162</sup> It reminds us of the motto “Nunca más” (Never again), used by families of victims in Latin America and beyond, recalling a collective performativity that relies on photographs of the deceased to prevent the reproduction of their death in other bodies, epochs, genocides, and wars. In this sense, Jaar’s art turns the *index* of the past, in singular, into a dynamic and activist sign of decolonial pasts, presents, and futures, in plural, reframing photography’s ontology as a sign not only and essentially related to its reference or to what the lens has touched through the action of light. Photography is also what *could* be touched, that is, what *could* be witnessed or lived in within a world of radical hope that is yet to come.

As Jaar’s art refuses to leave the struggles and memories of the past in oblivion, below the ashes of sequential time, he has called his works on Chile “exercises of memory.” As this book considers the global impact of the Chilean coup and its neoliberal implementation as a laboratory of the world, I will refer from now on to Jaar’s entire oeuvre as such, that is, as exercises of memory elaborated through and within an unfinished aesthetics, one where national, regional, and global decolonial debates all intersect. Viewed as representational practices that interrupt the frozen past of Western art, art history, and intellectual discourse, Jaar’s art represents the “ongoing reactivation of what every image related to the disappeared purports to achieve: that they appear, alive; and that those responsible are brought to trial and punished for their crimes.”<sup>163</sup> As such, it develops, expands, complicates, and re-thinks the ongoing present *as* presence, challenging, in Avelar’s argument, the

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“evolutionary narrative where the present emerges as the inevitable overcoming of a failed past.”<sup>164</sup> Jaar’s exercises of memory therefore aim at mobilizing historical and political consciousness so that crimes like those that happened in the past in Chile, the Americas, and the world “won’t happen again.” They thus remind us of Walter Benjamin’s always urgent statement about modernity, suffering, and ruins. Writing about the philosophy of history, Benjamin states: “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.”<sup>165</sup> Insisting on a colonial temporality that repeats the horrors of the world by reproducing the archive of justifiable war, Benjamin continues: “And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another.”<sup>166</sup> Thinking of himself as a pessimist in thought and optimist in will, Jaar knows that by appropriating and intervening in documents of the world as it is, he is portraying exactly that: that being modernity’s world and its corollary barbarism, oppression, criminalization, genocide, and war. Yet at the same time, Jaar refuses to give up, to give away his radical hope, creating an unfinished aesthetic project in which photography is central.

So is the case with poetry, which in Jaar’s art is formulated from a temporal dimension that rebuffs the erasure of sites of knowledges built upon decolonial chaos and ruptures. Like photography, poetry in Jaar’s art has taken multiple forms, from installations and images including verses and stanzas honoring anti-imperialist writers, to bibliography and archival resources informing his project on decolonial time. He has also invited poets to write about his works, intersecting and expanding his aesthetics of the unfinished in collaborative and relational ways. Importantly, considering the role of Caribbean intellectuals in decolonial thought in general and Jaar’s art in particular, one of these poets is Glissant, whom Jaar met in 2010 at a conference on the Caribbean at the National Arts Gallery in Nassau in the Bahamas. “After listening to Glissant, I was marveled,” he recalls.<sup>167</sup> What marveled Jaar was what Glissant called poetics of relation, where language and thought are “forever conjectural . . . latent, open, multilingual in intention [and] directly in contact with everything possible.”<sup>168</sup> And since relation “interweaves” instead of “projects” in “a line of energy curved back onto itself,” Glissant’s poetics interpellates modernity’s desire for ultimate achievements in the temporal continuity of the universal.<sup>169</sup> Glissant’s poetics, in this sense, as his English translator Betsy Wing tellingly describes it, is “based more on ascriptive principles than on any steady progress toward irrefutable proof.”<sup>170</sup>

This is why Jaar, after meeting Glissant in the Bahamas, invited him to write about a portfolio of fifteen photographs he took in Robben Island,



I.14 Alfredo Jaar, *The Sound of Silence*, 2006. Courtesy of Alfredo Jaar.

the prison off the coast of Cape Town where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated during apartheid (figure I.14). The coloniality of time is not detached from the coloniality of the cell, Jaar may have thought. Recalling his 1992 (plate 1), in which he denounces our binominal order by confronting freedom and confinement, here Jaar critiques modernity's Cartesian logic by showing together ocean waves and barbed wires, the horizon and the prison's walls, and the clouds merging into the sea next to a solitary hallway in cold green tones. Titled just as his 2006 installation, *The Sound of Silence*, the work honors Mandela's tireless fight for liberation and that of all those

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imprisoned in modernity's oppression, mingling modes to remember and mourn as open forms *in* relation. And thus Glissant wrote: "[we] hear out the world with equipoise and with fairness . . . where one minute is no less than a century . . . learning that the infinite grows in the green death of a hallway, and that the seas rush to places on earth."<sup>171</sup> Thinking from the fluid dimension of the Caribbean archipelago as a site from where to imagine a non-totalitarian world or the *tout-monde*, in this stanza, sound emerges from that world in becoming, resonating in a minute that is never just that but the ongoing time of the decolonial, and inhabiting the endless process of mourning as hope in the interweaving of seas, earth, sounds, and the ongoing search for reciprocity.<sup>172</sup>

There are circles within circles. Neoliberalism, as I have argued in this introduction, is the current phase *within* capitalism, just as globalization is the current phase *within* modernity. Exposing this coexistence by responding to different historical contexts at the national, regional, and global levels, in 1992, for instance, observing the expansion of the Chilean free market's "miracle" into the world, Jaar made his little-known and yet critically important 1992 (plate 1). Indeed, 1992—as artwork and epoch—represents the moment in which Jaar started incorporating into his exercises of memory interconnected situations of coloniality within a global context. In doing so, the work shows that "cultures of the world have always maintained relations among themselves," as Glissant wrote, and that by the early 1990s, when Glissant published *Poetics of Relation*, "the right conditions came together to speed up the nature of these connections," as Jaar said.<sup>173</sup> In this sense, 1992 shows that Jaar's focus on "global" issues does not simply follow "trends" in the art world or the art market as an extension of the world, that is, our capitalist-oriented system. Rather, Jaar's art is about critiquing these trends by showing them twice, appropriating a word, an image, a cover, a stanza, or a verse, and representing them through conceptual strategies engaging with decolonial time.

The chapters that follow address such aesthetics of the unfinished by reading Jaar's art in relation to critical discourses around the photographic, journalism, poetry, transnational solidarity, human rights jurisdiction, and hope, offering a new paradigm from where to think about global contemporary art from the concepts of mourning, accountability, and failure. Chapter 1, "Mourning," offers a comparative analysis of Jaar's art regarding victims of the Chilean dictatorship and of other regimes globally through the analytic of mourning, a concept that challenges a culture of oblivion by means of emancipatory temporalities. Chapter 2, "Accountability," focuses

on victimizers during and after the Cold War from the starting point of Jaar's project on Henry Kissinger, the conceptual architect of the Chilean dictatorship and of other genocides worldwide, further maintaining that since accountability exceeds a person's physical life as it perpetuates in modernity's institutional systems, demands for justice *must* continue.<sup>174</sup> Chapter 3, "Failure," centers on the idea of "America" in Jaar's oeuvre to discuss its colonial and anti-colonial meanings, recalling that since practices of liberation, including those regarding language, have so far failed, art as symbolic means toward reparation has not given up. Finally, the conclusion, "The End of the World," provides some closing remarks on how Jaar's lesser-known works addressing our planetary crisis in the age of digital totalization expose and expand on the three main concepts in this book, positing a narrative of hope where, perhaps, in Césaire's words, "the only thing in the world worth beginning [is] The End of the world."<sup>175</sup>

As a book on mourning, accountability, and failure, this book is also about protest, archives, and language, and about death, justice, and active listening. As such, art as aesthetics is understood through contingent relationalities that are always in process and thus rendered linguistically in the present tense. Joining an ever-expanding scholarship that "refuses to be written about in the past tense without the unpredictable—and persistent—intervention of the present tense," as Boreth Ly has argued, this book shows that "memories of traumatic events . . . always continue to hunt us," as Ly further maintains by quoting Raymond Williams.<sup>176</sup> It also reminds us what the Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana called *lenguajear* or languaging, where a noun-turned-verb allows us to use and interpret language and thus culture not as a finished product but as a continuous activity.<sup>177</sup> This is why, in all, this book's temporal flows, entanglements, conjectures, and transdisciplinary are rendered through a languaging that inhabits the present both formally and metaphorically, challenging the completed outcome of cultural analysis and aiming to be continued in future forms, epochs, sites, and art history writings.

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## FOREWORD. VIVIMOS ADENTRO, PERO EN CONTRA

1. Telephone conversation (hereafter TELCON) between Nixon and Kissinger, 11:50 a.m., September 16, 1973, Freedom of Information Act (hereafter FOIA) website, <https://www.foia.gov/>.

2. Jaar, *Eine Ästhetik des Widerstands*, 174.

3. Donoso, "Obra de Alfredo Jaar," 26.

## INTRODUCTION. DECOLONIAL TIME AND THE AESTHETICS OF THE UNFINISHED

1. "New York Columbus Day 1992 October 12th," Helga Vintage, May 9, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVYacklSYbE>.

2. The work was commissioned by the Public Art Fund, an organization that supports the development and exhibition of contemporary art in public spaces, in collaboration with the Whitney Museum of American Art and the American Center in Paris. It was also part of the multimedia exhibition *Trans-Voices*, in which fifty artists intervened with social and political content in publicity announcements in New York's Spring Station and subways in Paris.

3. Typescript of exhibition *Trans-Voices*, 1992, Series VI, Subseries A, Box 44, Folder 17, Public Art Fund Archive, Fales Library and Special Collections, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University (NYU) (hereafter Public Art Fund Archive).

4. Sachs, "Introduction," 457.

5. Jaar, "Questionnaire."

6. "Deep Dive: Alfredo Jaar," interview with Gary Carrion-Murayari, New Museum, November 8, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAbA7CTiMWA>.

7. For more on modernity/coloniality, see, among others, Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity"; Lugones, "Heterosexualism"; Maldonado-Torres, "Thinking Through the Decolonial Turn"; Mignolo, *Darker Side of Western Modernity*; Mignolo, "Geopolitics of Knowledge"; Moraña et al., *Coloniality at Large*; Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality"; and R. Vázquez, "Translation as Erasure."

8. Mignolo, *Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 217.

9. Quijano and Wallerstein, "Americanness as a Concept," 549.

10. Quijano and Wallerstein, "Americanity as a Concept," 549.
11. Quijano and Wallerstein, "Americanity as a Concept," 549.
12. Quijano and Wallerstein, "Americanity as a Concept," 551.
13. Quijano, *Vivir adentro y en contra*, 54.
14. For more on coloniality of power, see Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America."
15. Donoso, "Obra de Alfredo Jaar," 26. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.
16. Beckett, *Unnamable*.
17. Gramsci, *Letters from Prison*, 159.
18. Quijano, *Vivir adentro y en contra*, 54.
19. Dominic Rushe, "Art Provocateur Alfredo Jaar: 'I Want to Change the World. I Fail All the Time,'" *Guardian*, August 1, 2019.
20. Taylor, *¡Presente!*, 2.
21. Jaar and Levi Strauss, "Temptation to Exist."
22. Jaar and Levi Strauss, "Temptation to Exist."
23. Batchen, *Negative/Positive*, xxi.
24. Pelaez Lopez, "Alán Pelaez Lopez—Art of the Matter."
25. R. Vázquez, "Modernity Coloniality and Visibility," 112.
26. Maldonado-Torres, "Thinking Through the Decolonial Turn," 1–2.
27. Williams, "Structures of Feeling," 128. I want to thank Matthew Bush for sharing this reference with me.
28. Du Bois, "Comet."
29. R. Vázquez, "Modernity Coloniality and Visibility," 113.
30. R. Vázquez, "Museum, Decoloniality and the End of the Contemporary," 182.
31. For more on this, see Hutton, "Overcoming Art History's Meta-Narrative."
32. For more on this, see San Martín, "Time, Love and the Museum."
33. Ellis, "Being an Indigenous Art Historian," 64.
34. Beckett, *Worstward Ho*, 39.
35. O'Gorman, *Invention of America*, 10.
36. Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, 13.
37. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 32–33.
38. See Quijano Valencia, "Reseña," 255–62.
39. Titled *Aquí: 27 Latin American Artists Living and Working in the United States*, this exhibition included the work of Latin American and Latinx artists living in the United States, including, among others, Cuban American Ana Mendieta, Uruguayan Luis Camnitzer, Puerto Rico-born Papo Colo, and Argentines Liliana Porter and Leandro Katz. See Lugo-Saavedra and Spray, *Aquí*.
40. Castañeda de la Paz, "Tira de la peregrinación," 183–84.
41. Taylor, *¡Presente!*, 43–44.
42. Taylor, *¡Presente!*, 43–44.
43. Ingold, *Lines*, 2.
44. For more on this sense of superiority, see Rivera Cusicanqui, "Ch'ixinakax utxiwa."

45. See de Las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians*. Significantly, according to Maldonado-Torres, this debate represents “a staging of some of the most fundamental questions and terms about the meaning of the human in the context of Western modernity.” Maldonado-Torres, “Liberation Philosophy,” 17.
46. Cabral, “National Liberation and Culture,” 14.
47. Rivera Cusicanqui, “Ch’ixinakax utxiwa,” 99.
48. Rivera Cusicanqui, “Ch’ixinakax utxiwa,” 99.
49. Cabral, “National Liberation and Culture,” 15.
50. Mignolo, “Crossing Gazes,” 183.
51. Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, 76.
52. Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, 77.
53. For more on the concept of coevalness, see Fabian, *Time and the Other*.
54. Rosenberg, *After Human Rights*, 5.
55. Friedman, “Free Markets and the Generals,” 59.
56. Friedman, “Free Markets and the Generals,” 59 (author’s emphasis).
57. Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 165. For critical approaches to Friedman’s miracle, see Klein, *Shock Doctrine*; Richards, *Race and the Chilean Miracle*; Winn, *Victims of the Chilean Miracle*.
58. Kornbluh, *Pinochet File*, 591.
59. Avelar, “Dictatorship and Immanence,” 75–76.
60. Orlando Letelier, “The ‘Chicago Boys’ in Chile,” *Nation*, August 28, 1976.
61. Memorandum of Conversation (hereafter MEMCON), “U.S.-Chilean Relations” (Kissinger—Pinochet), June 8, 1976, FOIA website.
62. For more on Guzmán and the political ideology of *gremialismo*, see Castro, “Jaime Guzmán.”
63. See Kornbluh and Schlotterbeck, “Reagan y Pinochet.”
64. Gómez-Barris, *Where Memory Dwells*, 3.
65. Bachelet’s father, Alberto Bachelet, was brigadier general of the Chilean Air Forces under Allende. He died in 1974 after being tortured by the military for opposing the coup, and his family was detained, tortured, and forced into exile. For more on critical accounts on the end of the transition, see Barton and Murray, “The End of Transition?,” 329–38.
66. Trump White House Archives, “Remarks by President Trump and President Piñera of Chile Before Bilateral Meeting,” September 28, 2018, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-president-pinera-chile-bilateral-meeting>.
67. “La inusual sorpresa que mostró el Presidente Piñera en reunión con Trump,” Meganoticias, September 28, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3H1-Lon-kE4&APS/APS>.
68. Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, 57–58.
69. Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 15.
70. Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 15.
71. Main, “Is Latin America Still?”

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72. “Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Mexican Foreign Secretary Juan Ramón de la Fuente at a Joint Press Availability,” U.S. Department of State, September 3, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/09/secretary-of-state-marco-rubio-and-mexican-foreign-secretary-juan-ramon-de-la-fuente-at-a-joint-press-availability>.

73. For more on the social outbreak in relation to the arts, see San Martín et al., *Dismantling the Nation*; and Gordon-Zolov and Zolov, *Walls of Santiago*. For more on the transnational scope of the social outbreak, see, for instance, Draper et al., “Feminist Performance.”

74. “‘We Are at War’: Chile’s Pinera Extends State of Emergency,” *Al Jazeera*, October 21, 2019.

75. “Chile Launches Fresh Talks to Calm Deadly Unrest,” *Straits Times*, November 1, 2019.

76. Jaar, “Es difícil” (2021).

77. Jaar, “I Can’t Go On, I’ll Go On.”

78. Hernandez, “Why Trump Is Talking.”

79. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 20.

80. Chomsky and Pappé, *On Palestine*, xiii.

81. Santayana, *Life of Reason*, 284.

82. Yamashita and Ly, “Going Backward to Move Forward.”

83. Yamashita and Ly, “Going Backward to Move Forward.”

84. Jaar, “Message from the Artist,” 15.

85. Maldonado-Torres, “Thinking Through the Decolonial Turn,” 2.

86. See Jaar and Siitari, “I Need to Understand the World,” 69.

87. Pérez-Oramas, *Power of an Idea*, 29.

88. Cohen-Aponte, “Pathways to Art History,” 208; Love, *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, 100–101.

89. Love, *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, 100–101.

90. Donna Ristorucci, “Angela Davis Case Stirs World Peace Council Assembly,” *Daily World*, June 17, 1971, 6.

91. “Angela Davis Leads Allende Rally Here,” *New York Times*, September 12, 1973, 18.

92. Lawner, “Solidaridad internacional,” 58.

93. Alfredo Jaar, interview with the author, New York City, March 10, 2017.

94. Jorge Dalmazzo, Skype interview with the author, October 17, 2017.

95. Dalmazzo, interview.

96. Isabel Devés, Skype interview with the author, September 24, 2017.

97. Bernardo Urquieta, Skype interview with the author, September 26, 2017.

98. Jorge Iglesias, Skype interview with the author, September 24, 2017.

99. Frank, *Manifestos and Polemics*, 215–16.

100. Chambers, “Writing About Art History,” 49.

101. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 258.

102. Ferraz, *Lina Bo Bardi*, 327.

103. Coronil, “Beyond Occidentalism,” 61.

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104. Grandin, *America, América*, 448. For more on the relations between the dictatorship and education in Chile, see Errázuriz, “Dictadura militar en Chile”; and C. Ruiz, *De la república al mercado*.
105. For a comprehensive historical study on this project, see Vazquez, *Alfredo Jaar*; and Valdés, *Alfredo Jaar*.
106. Segal, *Radical Happiness*, 5.
107. Muriel Alarcón, “El mundo del arte en Chile no me entendió, no me daban pelota,” *El Mercurio* (Santiago, Chile), November 7, 2017.
108. Foxley, “Felicidad en la mira,” 41.
109. Lispector, *The Hour of the Star*, 11. I thank Paula Recart for sharing this reference with me.
110. Alfredo Jaar, interview with the author, New York City, October 8, 2017.
111. Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*; B. Benjamin, *Invested Interests*, 114.
112. Carmen Castillo, “Mi felicidad es la lucha,” *Jacobin*, October 5, 2024, <https://jacobinlat.com/2024/10/mi-felicidad-es-la-lucha2/>.
113. Castillo, “Mi felicidad es la lucha.”
114. Works of nonfiction, novels, documentary films, and essays by and about former victims of the regime who collaborated with the military abound. See, for instance, Luz Arce, *Inferno: A Story of Terror and Survival in Chile*, trans. Stacey Alba Skar (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); Diamela Eltit, “Cuerpos Nómadas,” *Debate Feminista* 14 (1996): 101–17; Arturo Fontaine, *La vida doble* (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 2010); and Michael J. Lazzara, ed., *Luz Arce and Pinochet’s Chile: Testimony in the Aftermath of State Violence* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
115. Gabara, *Non-Literary Fiction*, 13.
116. Gabara, *Non-Literary Fiction*, 19.
117. Gabara, *Non-Literary Fiction*, 19; Valdés, *Alfredo Jaar*.
118. Valdés, *Alfredo Jaar*. The original quote from Achebe reads: “Actually, art is man’s constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality from that which is given to him; an aspiration to provide himself with a second handle on existence through his imagination.” Achebe, “Truth of Fiction,” 139.
119. Jaar “Peripatetic Artist,” 131.
120. Jaar, “Peripatetic Artist,” 131.
121. W. Benjamin, “Work of Art,” 41.
122. Jaar, “Peripatetic Artist,” 131.
123. Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction*, 11–12.
124. Pollock, “Not Forgetting Africa,” 117.
125. Jaar and Siitari, “I Need to Understand the World,” 69.
126. Sky O’Brien, “Person-to-Person with Alfredo Jaar,” *Dispatches Magazine* (July 26, 2023): 28–33.
127. Ikenberry, “Why the Liberal World Order Will Survive,” 18.
128. Typescript of exhibition *Trans-Voices*, 1992, Series VI, Subseries A, Box 44, Folder 17, Public Art Fund Archive.
129. Shah, “Trump Invokes the Alien Enemies Act.”

130. “J.D. Vance | The Universities Are the Enemy | National Conservatism Conference II,” National Conservatism, November 10, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFR65Cifnhw>.
131. Jaar, “End of the World.”
132. Alfredo Jaar, Zoom interview with the author, October 10, 2024.
133. Jaar, “Understanding the World Before Acting in It.”
134. Jaar, “End of the World.”
135. Jaar, “End of the World.”
136. Jaar, “Alfredo Jaar Accepts.”
137. Alfredo Jaar, review, author not identified, 1985, Box 1:6, Folder 11, Alfredo Jaar, Installation Projects, 1980–1985, Grey Art Gallery and Study Center Archive 1975–1997, Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University.
138. Bush, *Other Americans*, 23.
139. See, for instance, Ramírez, “Beyond ‘The Fantastic’”; Goldman, “Booming Spirit of Latin America”; and Caragol, “Boom and Dust.”
140. Barriendos Rodríguez, “La idea del arte latinoamericano,” 47–51.
141. Baddeley and Fraser, *Drawing the Line*, 4.
142. Franco, *Decline and Fall of the Lettered City*, 125.
143. Benitez-Rojo, *Repeating Island*, 186–87.
144. Jaar, “Photography and Politics.”
145. Avelar, *Alegorías de la derrota*, 10.
146. Franco, “Memoria, narración y repetición,” 116.
147. Avelar, *Untimely Present*, 33.
148. Gerald M. Boyd, “Reagan Terms Nicaraguan Rebels’ Moral Equal of Founding Fathers,” *New York Times*, March 2, 1985.
149. Quijano and Wallerstein, “Americanity as a Concept,” 550.
150. Jaar, “Understanding the World Before Acting in It.”
151. Shah Stamets, “Were His Priorities Out of Focus?”
152. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 117.
153. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 117.
154. “Video interview with Koen Wessing,” in *Alfredo Jaar: Shadows*, Galerie Lelong. New York, 2014.
155. Such was the case of photojournalist Rodrigo Rojas de Negri, who was burned alive during a street demonstration against the dictatorship in 1986.
156. Roberta Smith, “One Image of Agony Resonates in Two Lives,” *New York Times*, April 14, 2009.
157. R. Smith, “One Image of Agony.”
158. Rancière, “Theater of Images,” 76.
159. Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*, 59.
160. Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*, 59.
161. Linfield, *Cruel Radiance*.
162. For more on this aspect of photography, see Linfield, *Cruel Radiance*.
163. Giunta, “Politics of Representation,” n.p.