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Maya Caspari & Ruth Daly

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Reading Otherwise: Decolonial Feminisms

Maya Caspari  and Ruth Daly 

This special issue considers the meanings and possibilities of decolonial feminisms today; how they shape, and are shaped by, practices of reading – but also writing, speaking and living – ‘otherwise’ in academia and beyond. It comprises six conversations between thirteen scholars, writers, artists and activists, which have taken place online over the past three years (2021–23). Instead of beginning with a single, fixed definition of ‘decolonial feminism’ – or indeed, ‘reading otherwise’ – it opens space for critical examinations of these concepts through staging this series of *encounters-in-conversation*. When conceiving of this special issue as a series of conversations, we were interested in how ideas form through encounters in the present, how present words carry past voices with them, how conversations themselves might offer modes of thinking otherwise. Reading through the issue again in preparation for writing this introduction, we began to make a list of recurring words and themes. Rather than forming a linear, coherent set of terms, our listed words began to read more like an unwieldy index, gesturing at something almost like – we optimistically thought – an experimental poem, a moving assemblage: discomfort (mess); the archive; technologies of modernity (citizenship); technologies (subjects); violence; disobedience; violence (quotidian); joy; repair; song – and so on. As we read and wrote, we began to sense conversations across the conversations: resonances, and sometimes differences, between each piece, and how they work together as a whole collection with its own rhythms, pauses and frictions. Here, ‘feminism’ and ‘decolonial’ emerge, in a sense, as archival – they evoke and carry with them, histories of articulation and action – but also as material-discursive formations that are necessarily multivocal, in-process and potentially open to change.

Our investigation of ‘decolonial feminisms’ and ‘reading otherwise’ lies not only in this issue’s thematic focus but also in its form. By staging and curating a series of encounters-in-conversation, the issue engages their potential as affective and, concurrently, tactile and sonic *events*. We understand ‘events’ as relational encounters of interdependence – and the intimacy of being *with* – that remain attuned to the immediacy of ideas as they unfold in the moment, and may thus constitute dynamic moments of potential/otherwise(s). In so doing, we also aim to embed a practice of *speaking with* into the form of the issue: *speaking with* entails a commitment to the histories, places and voices that shape, and dialogue with, our words in the present. This not only returns to the important and long-standing feminist point that writing and speaking emerge in ‘transpersonal’ relation to other scholars, activists and artists, as well as to the varied places, spaces and bodies in which these articulations are

produced and heard or read.¹ As contributors explain and enact here, *to speak with* also entails an active ethical and political commitment to naming the collective and relational processes of speaking and writing – how these build on and interact with the work of others. It recognises the material conditions, places and histories which shape, and delimit, the possibilities for speaking, reading, writing and imagining – and refuses the violent practice of speaking *for* a silenced ‘object of study’ from a position of abstract authority.²

We investigate how conversations, as sites of affective, tactile and sonic encounter, might enact this approach. At the start of each conversation, we asked our contributors, ‘[W]hat brought you to your work?’ Here, we sought to open space to engage the varied imbrications of work and ideas with the lives, places and bodies they emerge from, considering not only what is shared but also what is not. This imbrication is discussed, but also lived, throughout conversation, in which ideas are not produced by a single, disembodied, knowing subject but rather in ongoing relation to others. In these terms, understood as an event, the conversation not only carries the embodied, affective, social and intellectual histories and experiences through which participants and their words are formed, but also renders them open to potential change and movement in the sonic, tactile and affective encounter.³ Such encounters can complicate linear forms of meaning-making, carrying echoes of previous interaction, and also reverberating beyond the present moment.

In these terms, we are also interested in how staging forms of sonic, tactile, affective encounter can punctuate the confines of the academic special issue to open up modes of thinking and knowing otherwise. Here, we think with what Ashon Crawley terms ‘otherwise possibility’ and also, ‘otherwise, instituting’.⁴ For Crawley, discussing the Black pentecostal tradition, sonic and tactile ‘choreographic encounters’ produce vibrations which recall, echo and continue to reverberate, moving otherwise than the containment, categories and institutions of colonial modernity.⁵ Crawley is discussing specific practices and sites of resistance; we do not suggest that the conversations here are examples of what he describes. Yet, along with varied scholarship on affect, such ideas shape our interest in, and attunement to the ‘otherwise’ meaning-making *potential* of the sonic and felt forms which shape, intertwine with, and sometimes exceed what is said or written in normative institutional contexts, aesthetic practices and encounters.

Here, it is important to note that, even while it may enable affective encounter and intellectual exchange, ‘conversation’ does not erase the difference between histories, structural positions and contexts. Nor does being ‘affected’ mean being affected in the same way. As such, we do not understand ‘conversation’ as an inherently neutral space, some utopian form of engagement, or a transparent window onto a speaker’s life and work. Nor do we read affective encounter in generalised terms, as some easy antidote to the structures of colonial modernity. Varied affective encounters, events and

practices function differently: as scholars have illustrated, affect shapes, emerges in, and sometimes reinforces, capitalism's exclusionary structures, even where it can at other times exceed them.⁶ Cognisant of these complex discussions and possibilities, we were interested in attending to the specific affective and intellectual resonances, frictions and textures that emerged in each particular conversational encounter; how these might move us and our contributors, and texture our understandings of the concepts we discussed.

For this reason, when planning the issue, we sought to establish generative dialogues across generational, disciplinary and geographical boundaries, while also seeking out conversations between contributors with affinities across their work. The different and shifting standpoints of our contributors inflect each conversation. This is not intended to be comprehensive. Were we to continue this project, we would extend the range of such conversations further and host accompanying live events or recordings. Contributors joined online conversations from varied geographical locations including South Africa, Kenya, Chile, France, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. The majority of our contributors are academic scholars, yet many also work as creative writers, artists and curators, often troubling disciplinary boundaries, and extending the borders of what 'academic work' might mean. Though all emphasise the importance of working across multiple fields, they are trained and professionally housed in disciplines including literary studies, history, heritage, social and political sciences, and visual art. This variety subtly affects the focus of conversations. In addition to their work as scholars, writers and artists, the majority are also teachers and supervisors. We are interested in the relations and intellectual exchanges that are created across generations as well as in pedagogical spaces, in how the classroom space may function as a site of political potential and transformation. As such, we staged some conversations between contributors who have worked together in this capacity, as well as inviting early career researchers to contribute alongside established scholars.

Throughout, we sought to build the issue through collaboration and dialogue. We began by approaching one or both contributors and suggesting interlocutors and/or inviting them to suggest who they might like to be in conversation with, based on careful consideration of their work. We then compiled conversational prompts based on our engagements with their work, and the issue's key terms. We organised the conversation to take place on Zoom, where it was recorded. After this, we transcribed, edited and introduced the conversations; each dialogue continued after the initial event as we worked with contributors to reach a final version. Still active during the editorial process, contributors at times reflected further, slightly amending wording or adding comments.

Our conceptual aims were intertwined with material conditions including changing professional situations, institutional expectations, and the effects of chronic illness. Though such conditions are sometimes obscured in academic

writing, it is important to attend to their effect on the formation of the issue. Increasingly bureaucratic, and corporatised academic ecosystems privilege standardised, normative, and extractive ways of working that are centred around ‘fully abled and able being(s)’.⁷ Navigating the academy and negotiating the conventions of the academic ‘special issue’ alongside the realities of living with (invisible) chronic illness in this environment has presented significant challenges, particularly in a project dependent on live encounter. In one instance, it was not possible for both of us to be present. As such, we invited Rebecca Macklin to participate in the conversation with Eve Tuck and Jodi Bryd; we are especially grateful for her attention, care and time.

Conversations took place online. The marketing of digital technology often portrays it as a cloud-like space abstracted from the material realities of the world it inhabits, enabling connection without messiness.⁸ Yet, technologies are implicated in global capitalism’s processes of extraction and waste-production, as well as reinforcing its categories and hierarchies, including algorithmic pathways, which deepen with each use.⁹ Notably, while Zoom facilitated these conversations across geographical borders, this is not necessarily a smooth or evenly accessible process. Conversations based in South Africa, for instance, were rescheduled due to load-shedding. Untranscribed, too, is the strangeness of appearing on Zoom, voices delayed or echoed, pauses, moments of glitchiness and blurriness that also create moments of disjuncture or disconnect.

We have discussed the significance of the affective, tactile, non-verbal textures and gestures that shape conversation. Yet these are hard to translate into the written form and conventions of the academic special issue. As we transcribed the conversations for the issue, we were often reminded of how normative modes of ‘writing’ and archiving often prioritise written modes of communication, particularly in the academic sphere, thus potentially eliding a gendered “‘repertoire of embodied knowledge’”.¹⁰ At points, and at contributors’ suggestion, we have included a reference to a gesture or movement. Harder to convey are the varied affective textures of each conversation; the multiple languages contributors use alongside English, and concurrently, that which remains untranslatable and untranslated; and moments of connection, of friction. We invite readers to attend to, and imagine, such textures.

In editing, we attempted to capture the particular grammars and flows of each conversation. We also decided to use contributor’s given names in the conversation transcripts, after an introduction detailing their full title and professional history. This was a complex decision and we spent time considering issues including, for instance, how women and people of colour’s work is devalued through use of given names; violent histories of naming; and how the convention of first name and surname is not a universal approach to naming.¹¹ We decided to use given names as part of our attempt to convey some of the affects and intimacies of the conversations as they happened, in which contributors referred to each other and ourselves by first or given

names. This does not mean that conversations took place without an awareness of academic hierarchy and difference in position. However, it is part of our desire to offer something otherwise, to perhaps begin to interrupt the distance conventionally implied by the academic article.

Every conversation implies the creation of a particular and provisional ‘with’ or ‘we’, which inevitably differs each time, and which, in each case, also relates and positions the speakers differently. We wanted to remain attentive to what might surface in moments of encounter and as such, we facilitated conversations as lightly as possible, to let them develop organically between contributors. However, our presence is also part of the conversations – of shaping what is and, importantly, what is not said – as are the prompts we sent in advance. In our conceptualisation of the issue, it has been important to attend to our differing histories and the ways our racialised and gendered identities mediate our relations to each other, to contributors, and to the terms this issue takes up. In this introduction, we have been using the collective ‘we’ to write as co-editors. While the collaborative nature of this co-edited project – and its basis in friendship, trust and care – has made its conception, progress and completion possible, there are also differences in position and perspective. And, as we discuss in the following section, several contributors remind us that it is important to distinguish between different voices within the category of the ‘we’, especially when co-writing.

Whilst the participation of editors is often silent or hidden, we have chosen to flag our presence and direction as editors, academics and participants in the conversations. Before discussing what has emerged across the conversations, we briefly reflect on our own positionality in relation to the curation of the issue and the concepts it discusses.

Ruth

My interest in what it means to read ‘otherwise’ is located in a desire to understand reading as a mode of response-ability and the ways in which that mobilises the reader in affective, tactile, and ethical relations with texts and people. I am interested in thinking about durational affective encounters with literature – being held to and with something out of time; a desire to stay with and be transformed by texts as well as honouring affective encounters that refuse to allow texts to become fixed in discourses hostile to the concerns and problematics they expose and explore.

To think about reading as a mode of response-ability, then, necessitates a continual engagement and interrogation of my positionality, the space I occupy as a white Irish woman, what it means for me to ‘read’, why I read, whom I read.

Working on this issue has been a deeply challenging experience that has been punctuated by moments of ineffable encounter with scholars whose

work I greatly admire and whose words have posed profound questions about how I practise decolonising – in my research and how I show up in the world. It has posed renewed questions around how I attend to my research with reflexivity while working from within a colonial, neoliberal institution with the privilege I hold. It has asked me to continually attend to the questions of: Who does the work? Who has more to give? To whose work do I have access and what remains unreadable and unknowable to me?

Maya

Working on this issue entails being and speaking in-relation: to each other, to contributors and to the varied places, conversations and wider bodies of work that shape us. Along with my family histories, and the gender, class and race structures that mediate my movement through the world, I feel myself forming and sometimes changing in these relations and encounters. Indeed, as I recently explored in a poem (2021), as a mixed, mostly white-presenting woman, I have often felt my identity to be contingent on, and shifting in, such relations and contexts: who I am with, where I am, the slippery interplay between presenting – being seen by others – and being.

Growing up in London, I heard the stories of my parents and grandparents who had, for varied reasons, moved across countries and continents. Long before I actively reflected on these stories, I sensed what they could do: the textures of the words and worlds they created; how some characters were mythologised, while others faded; how the stories seemed to hold onto elsewhere and draw them into the present. At the same time, in political and everyday discourses, I sometimes sensed what I might now understand as a neoliberal fantasy of multiculturalism and individualised identity, where difference is good if it is exotic, or better, exotic but white: a pressure to be light, not in skin colour only, but in an ability to shape-shift, skip across places, to be smooth, to fit into the world's categories, to not carry weight. Sometimes, I had the possibility and privilege of enacting this, but often, I experienced it as an edge, and found myself jarring, frictive and awkward against it.

I was fortunate to have a mother involved in early campaigns to (what might now be called) decolonise the curriculum in schools and universities, who gave me books which helped me to imagine forms of otherwise belonging. Since this time, I have been interested in practices of reading but also relating otherwise. My work explores the politics of touch; how creative writers represent the intimacies and frictions of diverse yet intertwined histories of modern violence; and how they imagine and enact modes of being, relating and remembering otherwise.

Decolonial Feminisms: Resonances, Patterns, Frictions

Our desire to explore 'decolonial feminisms' as multiple, in-formation, and in relation to practices of 'reading otherwise' is borne out by our

contributors' varied responses to these concepts and evocations of the many different movements and projects they might evoke. Across the issue, each conversation is introduced and contextualised in relation to the ideas we seek to explore. Here, we trace the resonances, patterns and frictions that emerge *across* conversations.

Firstly, the term 'decolonial' prompts scrutiny.¹² As well as evoking specific struggles for independence from colonial rule – and the ideological, political, social and psychic structures colonialism violently imposes – contributors use the term to evoke resistance to the technologies, ideologies, institutions and operations of colonial modernity. Here, building on bodies of work in this area, 'colonial modernity' is understood as an ongoing project, which, as Sylvia Wynter has argued elsewhere, reduces the category of the 'human' to bioeconomic, Western 'Man', through violently negating and suppressing other 'modes/genres of being human' and forms of knowing.¹³ This is manifested in global histories of colonisation and enslavement, and in an ongoing system of extractive racial capitalism, which continues to devalue, dehumanise and lay waste to those lives it positions outside, or as less than, the human.

Several contributors also interrogate the term, pointing out that it is often mobilised as an institutional buzzword. For instance, in 'Memory Work Alerts Consciousness' a conversation between Mbali Mazibuko and Danai Mupotsa, Mazibuko argues that the term 'decolonial' can become reductively monolithic – not allowing for manifold forms of practice – or, as Mupotsa says, 'someone can describe their work as decolonial but everything about the structure of it is completely colonial'. For Mupotsa, this occurs in a neoliberal academic desire to commodify the 'decolonial' as a new intervention, defining it against other, interlinked critical movements such as the postcolonial, where in fact, a 'decolonial gesture would not compartmentalise intellectual fields of thought'.

Similarly, in 'Reweaving From the Future', a conversation between Victoria Vargas-Downing and Patricia Domínguez, Domínguez cautions against creating reductive oppositions between 'decolonial' practice and contemporary 'institutions', advocating instead context-specific non-oppositional forms of disobedience and reparation. Meanwhile, the troubled usage and appropriation of 'decolonisation' is also a theme in the conversation between Eve Tuck and Jodi Byrd, 'On Being Committed to Indigenous Feminisms', building on Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's well-known article 'Decolonization is not a Metaphor', and critiquing how 'decolonisation' has sometimes been articulated as a self-congratulatory, figurative gesture. Relatedly, in 'Against Imperial Knowledges', a discussion between Lisa Lowe and Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, Lowe suggests that the noun – 'decolonial' (unlike the verb 'decolonising') risks implying stasis, as though the need for action and activism is already completed.

Further tensions emerge when the term ‘decolonial’ is used in conjunction with ‘feminism(s)’. As Lyndsey Stonebridge and Jacqueline Rose illustrate in ‘Hope Can Make Bad Politics’, feminism is the site of multiple, sometimes conflicting, histories of thought and struggle. Nonetheless, Stonebridge suggests, under neoliberalism, feminism is sometimes co-opted into a brand – ‘an identity package [...] an acquisition’ – rather than practised as a politics. Significantly, meanwhile, Lowe and Azoulay do not name their ‘primary commitment’ as ‘feminist’, due to the ‘normative genealogy of European and North American liberal feminism, which,’ Lowe says, ‘often affirms a universal notion of womanhood’. For Lowe, feminism tends to foreground gender, eliding its entanglement with ‘the contradictions of colonialism, race, empire and capitalism’.

Related critiques appear elsewhere. Mupotsa argues, for instance, that for African feminists, ‘theories of power are [...] contaminated with the liberal subject’, the sovereign individual that discourses of liberalism, including liberal feminism, have universalised and enshrined. Here, she implies that, as Saidiya Hartman has argued elsewhere, ‘the universality or unencumbered individuality of liberalism relies on tacit exclusions and norms that preclude substantive equality’.¹⁴ A similar point is made in ‘You Don’t Have Revolution Without Sound’, a conversation between Christina Sharpe, Françoise Vergès and K’eguro Macharia, as Sharpe comments that ‘subjectivity is another form of governance that produces our slow deaths’. Rather than discussing subjectivity, then, Sharpe is ‘interested in other forms and other ways of living, perhaps many of which may not even be immediately, or even beyond immediately, apprehendable’.

These discussions point to the contradiction between ‘feminism’, in its liberal form, and an anti-colonial or decolonial project. Moreover, as Intan Paramaditha has argued elsewhere, ‘decolonial feminism’ may risk remaining at the level of ‘a demarcating utterance’ without the readiness and capacity to listen and learn from those who have already and continue to ‘resist the coloniality of power’.¹⁵ Yet, for many contributors, considering the relation between feminism and decolonial politics nonetheless evokes the possibilities – and, crucially, histories – of ‘decolonial feminisms’ committed to enacting and imagining ‘other ways of living’ than the exclusionary human subject of colonial modernity. Rather than rejecting the term ‘feminism’, in other words, many foreground the possibilities for practising ‘feminism’ otherwise than a liberal Western frame. As Vergès argues elsewhere, ‘the idea is to define a feminism I can associate myself with, one racialised women who’ve been leading anti-colonial and anti-racist fights can associate themselves with’.¹⁶ Here, feminism and decolonisation are necessarily intertwined.¹⁷

What, then, are decolonial feminisms – or what could they be? Significantly, for many contributors, as for us, decolonial feminisms remain a necessarily *ongoing* question and a process, a project that entails ongoing interrogation of its own terms as well as those of the norms it resists. For Mazibuko, for instance, instead of reducing the ‘decolonial’ to a single form of action or identity, it must be a

‘continuous process of disobeying the colonial and sexist centres of power’. Here, the practice and meaning of ‘decolonial feminisms’ is necessarily responsive to the specific contexts and processes of its emergence. Discussing Indigenous feminisms, meanwhile, Byrd begins the conversation by asking, ‘what do we actually name as an Indigenous feminism, and can it even exist in academia?’ The act of posing this as a question stages the possibility of Indigenous feminism in academia, while simultaneously attending to the conditions through which such possibilities might be shaped or limited.

In related terms, many contributors intertwine a material analysis of the conditions and violence of colonial, patriarchal modernity with an imaginative drive to generate, and recall, possibilities for reading, living and working ‘otherwise’. As contributors note, the term ‘otherwise’ itself carries a history of interventions, including Crawley’s, as well as those of Kandice Chuh, Lola Olufemi, Rosa Luxemburg, Tina Campt, and others.¹⁸ Yet, while there are links across conversations, there are also differences in responses to: the term, the form of *relation* it suggests, and the question of – in Byrd’s words – ‘what is it that we’re trying to do this other to?’

The diverse geographical, institutional and disciplinary contexts that contributors live and work in prompt varied ‘otherwise’ practises. Indeed, while the notion of a global ‘colonial modernity’ might be critiqued for its potentially flattening breadth, reading these conversations together illustrates how it is differently, and unevenly, manifested in varied places – and concurrently, how different places and times may necessitate different forms of activism or resistance. Here, the term ‘disobedience’ recurs, as does an emphasis on ‘repair’. For Domínguez, for instance, at times, it is both ideologically and pragmatically necessary to avoid the potential exhaustion of direct ‘opposition’. She suggests instead practising ‘disobedience’, renegotiating ‘in little steps’, and becoming attuned to ‘other ways’ of knowing. Byrd similarly wonders whether, in academic institutions, the best strategies are sometimes ‘the covert ones’.

Significantly, not all contributors accept the term ‘otherwise’ – or the term ‘reading’. For Azoulay, ‘otherwise’ risks commodifying newness, rather than speaking with the histories of anti-imperial struggle. Arguing that ‘*refusal*’ offers a different relation to colonial modernity than ‘otherwise’, Lowe and Azoulay reject the notion of a chronological historical narrative, in which the past is shut off from the present and fixed, as though ‘imperial violence is [...] a *fait accompli*’. They advocate a methodology of recalling the *potential* existence of ‘other modes of being-in-relation’, that which *could have been* there.

For others, conversely, resistance to neoliberal and neocolonial narratives of newness and discovery is at the heart of ‘otherwise’. Tuck and Bryd for instance highlight the importance of understanding the ‘otherwise’, after Chuh and Crawley, as a mode of recalling and speaking *with* that which was, as Tuck says, ‘*there all along*’. Indeed, to read – as Crawley does – with the

sonic and choreographic, with repetition, reverberation and echo, is also to contest linearity: a reverberation both recalls the past in the present, and potentially changes it. Importantly, though, Byrd also reminds us to consider what is ‘other to’ the framework of otherwise, particularly in relation to Indigenous communities, lands and waters. In these terms, along with the otherwise, Byrd foregrounds the ‘elsewhere’. Here, Byrd and Tuck – along with Domínguez and Vargas-Downing – point to the importance of engaging otherwise *spatialities* as well as temporalities, along with more-than-human forms of being and knowing.

From another angle, Rose suggests, feminist engagements with psychoanalytic thought can trouble neat, gendered categories and notions of the ‘human’ individual as self-contained sovereign subject, turning instead to that which ‘escapes the mastery of the human mind’. For both Rose and Stonebridge, feminist practice must attend to this instability, thus refusing what Stonebridge terms ‘thinking in a nice bundled-up and clean category’ and, as Rose says, imagining spaces where ‘other forms of lives are possible’. Meanwhile, Mupotsa and Mazibuko also point to the potentiality, messiness and necessarily multiple nature of ‘otherwise’. Rather than defining any single ‘otherwise’, Mupotsa argues there are ‘many otherwises and they can all rub, and they can shift [...] their force is different from when you say “new”’. Notably, this foregrounds the role of affect and touch – practices of *relating* otherwise – in decolonial feminisms. Rather than a single, ‘clean’ category of ‘decolonial feminism’ or indeed ‘reading otherwise’, such projects are produced and moved in frictive relation to others.

The significance of affect and touch, including the possibility of discomfort, recurs in discussions of ‘otherwise’ across several conversations. To touch evokes the potential to be moved in as yet unknown ways, yet it also suggests remaining rooted in a body which carries a history and memories of previous encounters. As well as transformation, it can entail violence. Reflecting this complexity, some conversations explore the potential of tactile and affective encounter as an alternative to the distant reading practices they see enshrined by some academic disciplines and museums – a mode of relating otherwise. They find potential in the reciprocity, potential vulnerability and non-linear temporalities engendered by moments of touch. Vargas-Downing comments that museum objects ‘are here[...] not in another time. We can see them and we can touch them’. Similarly, discussing working with archives and museum objects, Azoulay rejects the term ‘reading’ which she associates with a practice of spectatorship. Lowe concurs, arguing that ‘an anti-imperial practice must refuse to subordinate these living relationships as inert objects fixed in a “past”’. Mupotsa and Mazibuko similarly imply that a decolonial feminist mode of ‘reading otherwise’ may entail staying with the body to refuse the distanced position of authority which academia can encourage taking up, in Mupotsa’s words, ‘the authority of knowledge over a subjugated someone who is not myself’. Nonetheless, Mupotsa cautions, drawing affect into research and pedagogical spaces also requires responsibility and care.

Other contributors relatedly discuss how sonic encounters may trouble the boundaries, categories and laws of the normative, as well as forming or imagining sites of community. Vergès, Sharpe, and Macharia end their conversation with a discussion of sound. As in Crawley's 'otherwise', sound is a mode which carries, gathers and echoes, potentially resisting what Vergès evocatively calls 'regimes of unbreathing'. For Vargas-Downing, similarly, both feeling and 'reading [sound's] embodied vibrations moves away from the idea that knowledge comes from a disembodied and detached observer' and necessitates attunement to 'communication beyond words and visible forms'.

Significantly, here, where a form of 'reading' practice does have a role to play in generating 'otherwise possibilities' in academia and beyond, contributors often conceive it as a form of speaking with, listening, and affective encounter; and concurrently, along with practises of imagining, living, and relating otherwise. This understands the term 'reading' otherwise than – and in excess of – the extractive and distant mode of engagement some position as the norm. Rose and Stonebridge, for instance, point to the possibilities generated by creative writing and reading, suggesting that these may, in Rose's words, allow something 'to be spoken that is *otherwise impossible to hear*' (our italics). Meanwhile, Sharpe, Vergès and Macharia discuss the value of reading – and listening – as encounters with others' words and voices, which offer consolation and community, engender political action, and move across disciplinary distinctions and categories. As Sharpe comments, 'reading and writing can intervene in practices of violence'. For Macharia, reading can engender a 'kind of undisciplining', refusing the narrowness of the categories in which Black women writers in particular, are sometimes read and framed.

A connection between 'reading otherwise' and 'undisciplining' practices of recalling relations across geographies, histories and groups recurs across conversations. For Lowe, it is essential to 'read across or read between, associate unlikely objects, times, texts, and operations, and to frame an approach that is alert to relation' in contrast to the imposed separations of archival materials into 'colonial departments' and disciplines. In dialogue with W.E.B. Du Bois, she also recalls the *potential* 19th century 'alliance of Black and white workers, as well as workers in China, India, and around the world' that *could have* taken place, were it not for the backlash against abolition. Similarly, Tuck and Byrd point to the importance of what Byrd terms 'holding relationality' of varied kinds in their practice, including between Indigeneity and Blackness. Importantly, along with other contributors, they remind us that re-imagining 'relationality' also necessitates rejecting the coloniality of gender, and concurrently, the imposition of heteronormativity and binary gender categories.¹⁹ In these terms, Tuck argues, 'queerness' must instead be actively 'centred in how we're describing what kind of futures we want for our communities, for our lands and waters'. For Tuck, 'Indigenous futurities are nothing without queer and trans Indigenous people'.

While discussing relating otherwise, many contributors highlight the need to attend to the specific contexts and structural hierarchies in which relations

form, and concurrently, the ‘difference’ of particular positions and practices in colonial modernity’s regimes of in-/hyper-visibility and extraction – even where ‘difference’ is not fixed, but itself relational. Byrd foregrounds the importance of retaining the ‘difference of Indigenous interventions’ in a context where academia is trying to ‘silence’, smooth over and appropriate them. Invoking Édouard Glissant’s writing on opacity and Dylan Robinson’s notion of extractive ‘hungry listening’, Tuck meanwhile emphasises the need to not only speak *with* but also, at times, to signal who ‘we’ are *not* – to say what’s ‘not available for extraction’.²⁰ Similarly, Mupotsa speaks of how she seeks to ‘jump in and out of vernaculars that don’t let everybody in’ in her creative work. Along related lines, all of the contributors remind us throughout that the generative potential of ‘reading’ and ‘otherwise’ emerges from experience and materially-grounded analyses of intertwined economic inequalities, sexism and racism. While Vergès, Sharpe and Marcharia discuss processes of invisibilising and destruction of Black and Brown women under racial capitalism, Rose and Stonebridge also point to the normalised forms of violence – including state-sanctioned border violence – that render lives and worlds disposable.

Decolonial feminism(s), then, do not mean an *expansion* of the category of the human subject – an extension of a liberal politics of recognition – but rather a grounded analysis of the operations and uneven global effects of colonial modernity, combined with imagining and recalling possibilities for reading and living otherwise. Seeking to embed otherwise possibilities into the form of the issue, throughout we stage ‘decolonial feminisms’ as a question, as a multivocal history of activism and articulation, and as a site of potential: a material-discursive formation which might continue to move and evolve as it is responded to, imagined and remobilised in varied conversations and contexts. As we have discussed, to suggest that ‘decolonial feminisms’ are multivocal is not to suggest that all the voices they carry are heard in the same way, nor that these terms neatly cohere. Nor does foregrounding the ongoing and multiple nature of ‘decolonial’ and ‘feminist’ projects elide their grounding in particular and sometimes conflicting histories. Nonetheless, as Sara Ahmed has argued, norms can be understood as ‘well-trodden’ paths, which are deepened by their recurrent usage in material and discursive, or material-discursive, contexts.²¹ In these terms, we suggest that while existing paths – and the histories of usage they evoke – shape and inform the present, they do not fully delimit it; there may be room for other directions to be recalled, imagined, and perhaps, to emerge through present and future actions, articulations and encounters. Decolonial feminisms might continue to imagine and enact practices of living and reading ‘otherwise’ than those normative pathways enshrined and enforced by colonial modernity. At the same time, such practices in turn form, have formed, and may continue to re-imagine, the possibilities and meanings of decolonial feminisms.

In this introduction we have begun to gesture towards connections, subtle differences and frictions that emerge across conversations. We find these forming, as we have said, an unwieldy but generative assemblage, generating – as

we have hoped – the issue’s key terms through relational encounters of interdependence. We invite readers to share in the intimacy of reading *with* the conversations that follow, to remain open to these conversations as sites of affective, tactile, sonic encounter; to glimpse what remains unsaid, and what cannot be captured as language slides and shifts, and to consider how such moments of encounter themselves constitute moments of potential.

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Notes

¹ Miller, ‘Getting Transpersonal’.

² See, e.g., Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes’, and Spivak, ‘Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism’.

³ While we draw on a range of work on affect (see: Stewart, ‘Atmospheric Attunements’; Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual*; Felski, *Hooked*), we do not read through any single theoretical paradigm. Broadly speaking, we understand affect as our attentiveness or attunement to the intensity of what is happening in moments of affective encounter – how this often ineffable *what* mobilises thought – and our ‘*capacity to act*’ (Tembo, ‘Bodies out of place’) in such encounters.

⁴ Crawley, ‘Stayed | Freedom | Hallelujah’, and Crawley, ‘Otherwise, Instituting’.

⁵ Crawley, ‘Stayed | Freedom | Hallelujah’, 209.

⁶ See, e.g., Berlant, *Compassion*.

⁷ Brown, ‘Introduction’, 3.

⁸ See, e.g., Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care*.

⁹ See, e.g., Benjamin, *Race After Technology*.

¹⁰ Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 2.

¹¹ Atir and Ferguson, ‘How gender determines the way we speak about professionals’.

¹² For a summary of the critical emergence and location of this term, see Ruiz, ‘Postcolonial and Decolonial Theories’.

¹³ Wynter, ‘Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom’, 281.

¹⁴ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 122.

¹⁵ Paramaditha, ‘Radicalising “Learning From Other Resisters” in Decolonial Feminism’.

¹⁶ Bechiche, “‘I’ve Never Needed to Read de Beauvoir’”.

¹⁷ See Lugones, ‘The Coloniality of Gender’.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise*; Olufemi, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise*; Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*; Campt, *Listening to Images*.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Lugones, ‘Toward a Decolonial Feminism’.

²⁰ See Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, and Robinson, *Hungry Listening*.

²¹ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*.

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ORCID

Maya Caspari  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2763-2756>

Ruth Daly  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3958-7702>

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Ruth Daly is Lecturer in Cultural Studies and Global Creative Industries at the University of Leeds. Working closely with feminist interventions in psychoanalytic theory, feminist literary criticism, and affect theory, her research examines ethical practices of reading in the humanities. More broadly, her research interests include critical and cultural theory, postcolonial studies, decolonial theory, and visual culture. Her writing has appeared in *Australian Feminist Studies*, *Images: Journal of Visual and Cultural Studies*, *symplokē*, *Leeds African Studies Bulletin* and *New Irish Writing*. A chapter in Routledge companion text *Progressive Intertextual Practice in Modern and Contemporary Literature* will be published in 2024. Email: Ruth Daly r.daly1@leeds.ac.uk

Maya Caspari is a writer, curator and Lecturer in Literature and the Creative Industries at the University of York. Her forthcoming book *Memory, Violence and the Politics of Touch in Contemporary World Literature* explores creative engagements with modernity's violent histories. She has worked at various arts, heritage and research organisations. She recently curated *Forms, Voices, Networks: Feminism and the Media*, an exhibition featuring stories of twentieth-century feminist activism in Britain, Germany and India. Her poetry has been published in magazines including *Poetry Review*, *Ambit*, and the 2023 Forward Prize anthology, among others. She is working on her first collection. Email: maya.caspari@york.ac.uk