The Grammar of Reparation: A Creative and Research Symposium

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Convened by: Wayne Modest, Esmee Schoutens, Carine Zaayman (Wereldmuseum), and Carlos Garrido Castellano, Beatriz Dantas Vieira (UCC)

Presentation Abstracts

Kathryn Yusoff

Geocide: Grammars of Disassociation and Geographies of Restitution.

Maria Raquel Passos Lima

Is pollution reparable? This is the question that guides this presentation in exploring the toxic ecologies of Guanabara Bay, one of the most urbanized and industrialized estuaries in Latin America. There, decades of industrial expansion, infrastructural development, and oil extraction have produced layered and largely concealed forms of environmental harm. This context is examined from the perspective of artisanal fishing communities that inhabit and work within it, particularly the fishers and fisherwomen organized through the Association of Men and Women of the Sea (AHOMAR) and the Association of Women Fishers of the Coast of Rio de Janeiro. At the center of the presentation is the first National Anti-Oil Day, organized by these communities in direct response to the expanding footprint of the oil industry in the bay and along the coastline. This collective act of naming, refusal, and claim-making is approached here as a form of reparative grammar in itself: a counter-lexicon forged from below against the language of inevitability and economic necessity that has long shielded extractive industries from accountability. The presentation also attends to the stories of resistance and strategies these communities have developed to fight for justice and to preserve the ecologies of the bay as a way of maintaining a traditional mode of living. A central argument is that in this context the maintenance and reparation of Guanabara Bay and its more-than-human ecologies, of the fishing communities, and ultimately of the metropolitan city itself are inseparable.

Uhuru Phalafala

My offering invites us into Ntu radical traditions of space(times) to establish, navigate and harness territories of being and belonging. We embrace the geo-triad of its poetics; we congregate at the *altar* to choreograph movements and rhythms that open the *alter*, the elsewhere; convene around what emerges to attend to the unknown and unknowable parts of ourselves and of earth/land/soil. We dance a song of alliance with cycles of ecological death and rebirth, damage and repair, decomposition and composition, composting and composing in deep time. The chorus from the *altar/alter* echoes and resounds poetics, visual arts and jazz from Southern Africa, which operate in sacred and ancestral imaginariums, revealing the utility of African spiritualities and cosmologies in cultivating dreamworlds and healing modalities for our times.

Joseph Pierce

Unsettling Repair

In *Speculative Relations: Indigenous Worlding and Repair*, repair is both a central commitment and a deliberately unsettled term. This presentation returns to that tension to ask what repair might mean when it is imagined neither as reconciliation nor as the restoration of a precolonial past. What if repair were a set of relational possibilities that are neither temporally nor culturally predetermined? Drawing from the book's account of speculation as a grounded, relational practice, I approach repair not as a means of resolving colonial violence, but as a way of speculating with Indigenous aesthetic practices that might offer alternative grammars of ethical engagement with others.

Jovan Scott Lewis

The limits of contemporary reparations discourse lie not only in its political and economic formulations but also in its grammar. The prevailing grammar of *to repair* organizes reparations through the logic of injury, in which harm authorizes recognition and justice is rendered as compensation. Within this framework, Black life becomes legible only through suffering, and the state's moral authority is affirmed through its ability to account for loss. This talk advocates for a shift from *to repair* toward *repair to*, a grammatical and political reorientation that moves from restitution to composition and from recognition to relation. *Repair to* describes a reparative practice grounded in place and oriented by collective life, in which repair is practiced through the making and maintenance of relation rather than just the settlement of accounts.

Siobhan Angus

In 1:10000, Dana Prieto reshapes soil gathered from the Bajo de la Alumbrera mine in Catamarca, Argentina, into a ceramic vessel—carrying the toxic traces of mining by-products—cast in the shape of the open-pit mine. Prieto then gifts the vessels to CEO and Corporate Social Responsibility executives of the Canadian mining companies operating the mine. I read this movement from extraction to care, waste to gift, and Argentina to Canada as a material grammar of reparation: 1:10000 returns the material consequences of mining to the corporations implicated in its production. The gift thus becomes a material address: it carries contamination, damage, and violence, embedded within the soil, back to those who have benefited from it, refusing to contain responsibility within the language of corporate social responsibility. 1:10000 asks what happens when contaminated soil is given a different grammar—one that reorganizes how land, waste, value, and responsibility relate to one another: waste becomes gift, extraction becomes a relation of accountability, and damage becomes an occasion for responsibility rather than disposability.

Chiara De Cesari
The im/possibility of restitution

This paper interrogates the alleged im/possibility of restitution by thinking with the work produced by the artists in residence of the *Pressing Matter* research project, which examined issues of ownership, value, restitution and repair in relation to colonial heritage held in Dutch museums (2021-2025). I depart from a set of wicked problems raised by the artists' projects. These can be grouped into two core paradoxes, which could be called the paradox of (heritage as) property and the paradox of (heritage as) representation. Firstly, Indigenous and postcolonial demands for the restitution of colonial heritage held in Euro-American museums articulate a dual, seemingly contradictory claim: that this heritage is cultural property that has been stolen from its rightful owners; and that it is wrong to treat this heritage as property because what museums and the dominant language of preservation regard as 'objects' are in fact living, relational beings in other ontologies. Secondly, restitution claims rely on a politics of recognition demanding that subaltern and oppressed identities and narratives are acknowledged and validated through public representation. Yet, this politics is simultaneously criticized as deeply problematic—because it assimilates subaltern identities and worlds into Western categories and logics—and ultimately cosmetic as it tends to obscure and undermine demands for a broader redistribution of stolen resources and sovereignties. Learning from artists' engagement with colonial heritage, the paper suggests a shift from a grammar of possibility in restitution work to one of potentiality that is attentive to the non-yet and forms of what I call 'anticipatory representation'.

Nicola Frith

From Compensation to Rematriation — Rewriting the Grammar of Reparations through African Indigenous Perspectives

This paper argues that the underlying grammar and lexicon of reparations is far from neutral. It has been shaped by Western-centred legal, parliamentary and financial vocabularies that view reparation through the narrow lens of the law courts and economic redress. Reading against this grain, I ask what happens when reparations are framed instead through African-centred initiatives that begin not from (re)payment, but from healing injury to relation: to land, ancestor, spirit, memory, knowledge and community. Drawing on both my ERC project 'Re-PAIR: Reparations as Pan-African Indigenous Repair' and on my film *Doors of Return* (set in Benin, West Africa), I propose rematriation as a key conceptual and methodological shift. Rematriation names a return to African Indigenous knowledge archives and to forms of spiritual and cultural repair that have been disrupted by enslavement, colonialism and epistemicide. The film offers a living example of this reparative grammar in practice: through journeys to Benin and encounters with spiritual and cultural custodians, it shows reparations as embodied, ceremonial and relational rather than solely financial and juridical. By exploring reparations from African-centred perspectives, we do not simply broaden existing debates, but reframe them entirely: from compensation towards cultural, spiritual and environmental repair; from antagonistic claimant-state relations towards community authority; and from redress towards ongoing processes of self-repair and cultural revalorisation. In this sense, reparations are something to be embodied, practised and narrated across communities that continue, in very different ways, to live with the structural and systemic legacies of African enslavement. In short, this paper seeks to contribute a decolonial re-reading of reparations as a pluriversal, future-making practice of justice.

Dr. Lola Olufemi

In *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams writes that "Language is practical consciousness." This paper examines the role of language in the production of liberatory narrative interventions: on the page, in the street and in creative practices. Inside of events of dispossession, how have human beings relied on narrative-making as a strategic tool to construct political demands? Drawing specifically on the cultural production of communist and radical social movements, it asks what is the potential of language and grammar in the reconstruction of sense perception? That is, what role does language play in making catastrophic world-historical events real and the resistance to them concrete? Against repeated narrative condemnations of the political present that seek to recruit individuals into stasis and despair, what definitional power does language have in shaping both the present and future?

Raquel Lima

De(com-position: Towards a Poetics of Reparation

This presentation explores *kalimba: de(com-position*, a video-poem-manifesto that interrogates the colonial museum as a device for capturing, classifying, and silencing cultural life. Centred on an Angolan kalimba, historically understood as a mediator between earthly and astral worlds, the work examines the violence of its transformation from a living, relational instrument into a decontextualized ethnographic artefact, confined within the hidden spaces of a European palace-museum, in Lisbon.

The presentation considers reparation not as restoration, but as the reactivation of interrupted relationships and the refusal of colonial regimes of knowledge, based on four axes: decomposition, position, deposition and composition. Through the performative gesture of playing the kalimba, sound and embodied presence interrupt the archive, challenging the institutional separation of object, body, community, and memory. The performer becomes a living archive and mediator between worlds, unsettling the museum's authority while reclaiming forms of knowledge that exceed scientific classification.

By bringing together artistic practice, institutional critique, and embodied knowledge, the work interrogates the necropolitics of colonial collections and the contradictions inherent in artistic interventions within museums. It proposes a poetics of reparation as a somatic, spiritual, and political practice that confronts historical rupture, opening fissures through which silenced relationships and alternative futures may emerge.