

The Peasant Paints: expanding painting decolonially through planting and pigment-making

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr John Chilver and Dr Ros Gray, for all their support and guidance throughout this project, and the wider peer group of staff and students at Goldsmiths that provided so much stimulation. I would also like to thank Simon and Donna Beckman for hosting the research for a pigment garden at Joya: Arte y Ecología, Almería, Spain, and Professor Antonio Doménech Carbó at the University of Valencia for analysing my samples of Maya blue. Thank you to all the institutions that have allowed me to use images from their collections. Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holders and obtain permission to reproduce the material contained within this thesis. Please do get in touch with any enquiries or any information relating to any images or rights holders. I gratefully acknowledge all the named and unnamed artists, past and contemporary, who have shared their expertise of working with plants, and finally, thanks to my family for all their support and encouragement.

In the memory of Anna Holmström, who introduced me to Southern Swedish Peasant Paintings

Abstract

My research proposes to expand painting by addressing its materiality and circulation through the relationship between painting and the figure of the peasant. I use the term *peasant-painting* to move between paintings-of-peasants and peasants-that-paint, countering dominant narratives of Western art history and re-appropriating the peasant as a transnational figure. I propose painting as a minor practice, following Deleuze and Guattari's call for a minor literature and Chakrabarty's call for attention to minor histories and subaltern pasts. It does not seek to construct an autonomous subject out of the peasant, but rather to disclose the political relationships embedded in the trajectory of Western European painting that were complicit in the construction of the modern self. It is therefore a decolonial move, as the Western European bourgeois tradition will be found to be just one provincial occurrence among many.

The practice-based element of the thesis is centered on the construction of a pigment garden in Almeria, Spain. Painting is expanded into the field of cultivation, and the performance of pigment-making, as well as the paintings themselves. The choice of planting and re-appropriation of pigment-making technologies traces the colonial relationship between Spain and the Americas. My retrieval of the technology of Mayan blue, a pigment recently rediscovered after being 'lost' during the early colonial period, and my re-adaption of the recipe for use with European woad will be elaborated in the written thesis. I will use it to explore the links between the inward and outward coloniality of Western modernity, and its suppression of other knowledges, (de Sousa Santos) and other genres of humanity (Weheliye, Viveiros de Castro). I will propose re-enactment (conceived as experimental archaeology, rather than spectacle) as a possible strategy for the generation of alternative modes of painting practice.

Contents of practice-based research

www.thepeasantpaints.pictures

This website documents the practice-based element of the project, and consists of the following pages under the overall heading “practice-based research”:

Plants and Planting:	the research behind the choice of plants in various pigment gardens.
Lake pigments:	the method of making pigments from plant dyes using the “laking” process.
Maya blue:	this page documents making Maya blue using various indigo-bearing plants, including woad and Japanese indigo, also other experiments using the Maya blue method.
Mordant-printing and dyeing:	printing using plant dyes and mordants on calico which were then used as supports for painting, and for making clothes for performances.
Paintings:	paintings made using plant pigments.
Performances:	performances and pigment-making demonstrations using the peasant-painter persona.

There is also a page called “publications” which lists several peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters that I have published in conjunction with the PhD.

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Introduction

This project comes out of a decade and a half of working with the figure of the peasant and making pigments. Indeed, it is hard to remember now what started me down this path, but I seem to remember a constellation of factors. On one level it was a wry acknowledgement of painting's status in an art world of new media - anachronistic, old-fashioned, irrelevant. I might as well go the whole hog and dress up as a peasant and make my own paints by hand - peasant-painting. On a deeper level, however, I was aware of the problem of how to address the *culture of nature* in a context where ironic landscape painting was having a brief fashionable moment in London and it was commonly said that 'there is no such thing as nature, it is just a construction.' Of course, the *separation* of nature and culture, human and non-human, *is* a construction - one which this thesis attempts to dismantle - but my experiences of my mother's family farm in Sweden taught me the entanglement of relations and agencies found in rural life could not be reduced to a figment of the Western European urban imaginary and left at that. Making pigments from plants that I had cultivated and foraged became a way to engage with non-human agencies through the materials of painting. This in turn became a performative part of the process, playing with my persona 'The Peasant-Painter' as a 'painter-of-peasants,' or a 'peasant-that-paints,' or, indeed, a 'painter-that-dresses-as-a-peasant-that-paints.'

Of course, peasants still exist all around the world today and are not such a distant memory in many parts of Europe, despite the Anglophone use of the word implying a distant, medieval past. Indeed, my own Swedish family only became landowning farmers after my mother's grandfather, a landless peasant, emigrated to Minnesota and made enough money working on farms (which had themselves displaced the indigenous population) to eventually return to Sweden and change the family fortunes. The pejorative use of the word peasant, especially in English, therefore, is linked to the way modernising projects around the world seek to exclude other ways of being and deny the coevalness of non-Western people. As a consequence, the word 'peasant' has become political, as it is positively evoked by movements such as *La Vía Campesina* and *La Confederation Paysanne* as a way to indicate their opposition to global agribusiness and capitalism.¹

¹ Edouard Morena, 'The Confederation Paysanne as "peasant" Movement : Re-Appropriating "Peasantness" for the Advancement of Organisational Interests', Ph.D., King's College London, University of London, London, 2011.

My interest in the figure of the peasant is similarly to activate its political potential, so, although I may at first seem to approach the figure of the peasant with humour – dress-up with a papier maché cucumber for a nose - I am, at the same time, completely serious. Working with the figure of the peasant has allowed me to explore the role of painting in the construction of modernity in Western Europe, and in a variety of contexts around the world, and, more importantly, it has also opened my eyes to other histories of painting, and working with plants and pigments. For instance, in 2011 I had the opportunity to live with peasants that were Dongba priests of the Naxi ethnic minority, in Yunnan, China, for two weeks, and learn how they made paper for their unique pictographic scriptures from the bark of a local species of *daphne*, while also growing Chinese indigo on a CSA (community supported agriculture) urban farm on the outskirts of Beijing. In Yunnan I encountered peasants that had chosen to return from being migrant workers in the city, and instead to retrieve their paper-making practices as a way to claim their status as a recognised ethnic minority within a system of limited opportunities.² At the same time, in Beijing, I met young middle class urban dwellers interested in going ‘back to the land’ and ‘self-sufficiency,’ and in Anhui the artist/writer Ou Ning who is exploring the contemporary cultural influence of Chinese rurality as part of a lineage going back to Shennong and the warring states period.

² Sigrid Holmwood, Jianyu Duan, and Fang Hu, *Cousins*, Vitamin Creative Space, Annelly Juda Fine Art, Beijing, 2012; Laura R. Graham and H. Glenn Penny, *Performing Indigeneity: Global Histories and Contemporary Experiences*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 2014.



Figure 1.1 Meeting Naxi villagers in WuMu, Yunnan, China, 2011

I have also encountered peasant-painting practices within Europe, which have been excluded from the Western European art historical narrative through their designation as ‘folk art.’ In 2012 I was invited to undertake a residency at Hallands Art museum in Sweden, and respond to their collection of eighteenth and nineteenth century paintings by Southern Swedish peasants (figure 2). These fantastic paintings, with their varied stylistic schools centred on different parishes and ritualistic usage, were painted by and for farmers. They demonstrate a socially-inscribed sense of the self in relation to other beings in the cosmos. However, it also struck me that, far from being a relic from a medieval past, these paintings were a response to the forces of modernisation going on around them. Their appearance coincided with the beginnings of a series of land reforms and the strengthening of the nation state. It was this project, in particular, that sparked the desire to explore these issues more deeply through a PhD thesis by practice and dissertation.



Figure 1.2 Installation view of exhibition of my work with a peasant painting by an unknown Sunnerbo painter, Hallands konstmuseum, 2013

Expanding painting decolonially

This project proposes painting as a minor practice, following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s call for a minor literature and Chakrabarty’s call for attention to minor histories and subaltern pasts. For Deleuze and Guattari, a minor literature is not a literature in a minor language, but rather a literature by a minority within a major language. In contrast to a universalising major literature, it works to

deterritorialise language. While major literature tends to focus on the autonomous individual and their experiences, in minor literature the individual is always connected to communal political issues.³ Instead of a grand narrative of painting, a minor painting would therefore not be making universalising claims for painting, but rather attending to local political issues - such as the paintings by peasants in South West Sweden. Minor histories, as Dipesh Chakrabarty explains, similarly start as an opposition to the grand historical narrative that has excluded the voices of various groups such as the working classes, women, migrants, and so on. In the 1970s this became known as 'history from below.' However, as Chakrabarty observes, this project was about turning history into an exercise of liberal democratic inclusion. It didn't throw the discipline into crisis, but rather replaced the grand narrative with multiple narratives and multiculturalism, contextualised by the same rational explanations of historical processes. At the same time, in telling minorities histories, subaltern pasts emerged. These do not fit so easily into a rationally defensible account of history. When confronted by a subaltern whose ontological explanation of narratives is radically different to that of the historian - such as a peasant who rebelled because his god told him to - the historian is made aware of the limits of their own discipline. The historian cannot put forth this supernatural explanation as their own. So, while minority histories put forward a case for social justice, subaltern pasts subvert the very grounding of historical explanations and may suggest "forms of democracy we cannot yet either completely understand or envisage."⁴ This project, therefore, aims to take seriously practices of painting that have been excluded from the Western European canon, not merely in the spirit of inclusion, but as a way to subvert the hegemony of this narrative in the first place.

At the same time, my research expands painting by addressing its materiality and circulation *through* the relationship between painting and the figure of the peasant. This thesis therefore responds to David Joselit's essay, *Painting beside itself* (2009), in which he asked how painting can visualise its belonging to a network – and represents a further reiteration of 'expanded painting.'⁵ The idea of 'expanded painting' came out of a response to Rosalind Krauss' identification of the 'post-medium condition' in her *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* (1979).⁶ Generally, it is used to denote practices in which painting breaks out from the physical confines of the easel, becoming painting as sculpture, or

³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1986.

⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts', *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no. 9, 1998, : 473–79. p477

⁵ David Joselit, 'Painting Beside Itself', *October* 130, October 2009: 125–134.

⁶ Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October* 8, 1979: 31–44.

as film, or as performance. Drawing on Martin Heidegger's *Origin of the Work of Art*, Mark Titmarsh identifies expanded painting as part of what he calls a new ontological aesthetics, in which "paint is to painting, as earth to the world."⁷ Paint, as earth, is a primordial doubled presencing and absencing which allows the world (or painting) to come forth. Yet, this new expanded painting frees itself from the conventions of what paint as a material is, in order to bring to light the conditions of its own being. Expanded painting reduces what is recognisable as painting to colour - "where colour is made present not by paint but by things that stand in for paint."⁸ Expanded painting may therefore look like sculpture, video, or performance, but it is the use of colour which makes it painting. This colour is no longer in the form of recognisable paint, but may be coloured tape, or plastic, or the video screen.

Titmarsh sees expanded painting as a response to the isolation of subjective individualism found in 'traditional aesthetics,' which constructed the subject/object divide.⁹ He links the 'traditional aesthetics' with what Heidegger calls 'age of the world picture' - the age of the easel painting which places nature before the viewer as something to be known, controlled, and exploited.¹⁰ As such it is inextricably linked with Western modernity. Expanded painting is a political project for Titmarsh in so much as it proposes a relationship with materials which works *with* their generative creativity, rather than trying to control them as craft. It is a "poli-ethetics" which subverts dominant economic and social structures by challenging the underlying ways of being and making that support them.¹¹

While I am sympathetic to this ontological turn, I would argue that it does not go far enough. Titmarsh places expanded painting into a historical lineage from the cave, to church, to easel, to 'the other' of the avant-gardes. While he admits that he is glossing over complexities of style and detail, he argues that this history reveals broad sociological and technological changes in painting that are paradigmatic. He conceives of expanded painting as a continuation of the grand narrative of Western European painting in which it is merely the latest paradigm shift. I would counter that this Euro-centric narrative does not fully take into account the coloniality in which Western modernity and the

⁷ Mark Titmarsh, *Expanded Painting: Ontological Aesthetics and the Essence of Colour*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2017. p127

⁸ Titmarsh. p136

⁹ Titmarsh.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1977, 115–54.

¹¹ Titmarsh, *Expanded Painting*. p210

'age of the world picture' is implicated. As Walter Mignolo observes, Western modernity is inextricably linked to the colonial matrix of power which has exploited human and non-human life.¹² In using the term 'decolonially' in this project, I am referring to the work of South American thinkers such as Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, and Nelson Maldonado Torres. They identify the entanglement of modernity and coloniality in the Eurocentric enunciation of Western knowledge as universal knowledge and call for a delinking from Western epistemologies.¹³ In Maldonado Torres' work this also extends to a coloniality of being, modelled on a Eurocentric conception of the self.¹⁴ I see a similar process in which Western European art history has been treated as a universal art history and has also served to construct modernity and coloniality. This coloniality has suppressed and silenced other ways of being, and placed European modernity as the ground zero of thought (for which Titmarsh simply presents the 'before' and 'after', without addressing that moment). In order to expand painting decolonially then, non-European histories of painting must be taken seriously and Western European painting must be provincialised.¹⁵

Although I use performance and video documentation in my practice, my thesis takes the inverse path to that suggested by Titmarsh. Rather than pursuing an expanded painting through the disappearance of paint into contemporary quotidian applications of colour, my tactic is to return to the historical medium of paint in order to uncover other histories of painting – of colour - and to provincialise the Western European historical narrative. Walter Mignolo and Silvia Federici both see the early modern period as an important moment for where we are today, but which also could have led to alternative futures. For Federici, the crisis of feudalism in Europe led to a blossoming of radical movements among the peasantry which were suppressed through use of witch hunts as a counter-revolutionary tactic, and the appropriation of women's reproductive labour to the ends of capitalism.¹⁶ Mignolo, for his part, argues that the world in 1500 was briefly polycentric and noncapitalist with several

¹² Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2011.

¹³ Anibal Quijano and Michael Ennis, 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America', *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3, 2000: 533–80; Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar, eds., *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, Routledge, London and New York, 2009.

¹⁴ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'On The Coloniality Of Being', *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3, March 2007: 240–70.

¹⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2009.

¹⁶ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, Autonomedia, New York, 2004.

civilisations coexisting.¹⁷ It was only with the development of Western capitalism/modernity that the balance of powers dramatically shifted. On the one hand, the appropriation of land and resources from the Americas kick-started capitalism in Europe, and, on the other, the development of humanism - with its subject/object divide in the 'age of the world picture' - also led to scientific and technological advancements.¹⁸ However, as Mignolo points out, "hidden behind the rhetoric of modernity, economic practices dispensed with human lives, and knowledge justified racism and the inferiority of human lives that were naturally considered dispensable."¹⁹ One could also add that the same dispensability applied to animal and plant life, which were reduced to 'natural resources,' – commodities - leading to the current environmental crisis.

Mignolo sees a double colonisation at work, of both space and time. While land outside of Europe, and peasant access to land within Europe, were subject to appropriation, non-Europeans were also pushed 'back in time' as less developed according to a Western European concept of linear progress. This thesis traces Western European painting's role in the construction of this modern self through images of the peasant and the savage, revealing Europe's inward coloniality towards its peasantry at the same time as its outward coloniality towards non-Europeans. By making pigments from plants, I follow these global histories of colonialism and bio-prospecting in which plant dyes were a central commodity. At the same time, these pigments have been used in other histories of painting, such as paintings by Southern Swedish peasants and Aztec *tlacuilos*. They reveal other ways of being with plant life, and other theories of the image. This opens up other ontologies of painting and allows us to expand painting decolonially, not just as the latest paradigm shift in a Western European narrative. The division between man and nature, object and subject, which was constructed through the easel painting in the 'age of the world picture' and on which Western modernity/coloniality was grounded, will therefore be disrupted from its beginnings, and found to be a provincial occurrence.

For my first chapter, I contrast the emergence of paintings-of-peasants as a genre of European high art, with the paintings by Swedish peasants that I encountered on my residency at Hallands Art Museum. This chapter serves to elucidate the inward coloniality of European modernity/capitalism,

¹⁷ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*.

¹⁸ Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture'.

¹⁹ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*. p6

played out through these contrasting practices of peasant-painting. It also explains my focus on the early modern period, as a period in which the forces of modernity are unleashed yet not fully entrenched, allowing for re-imagining of alternative futures.

The first half of this chapter concentrates on the appearance of the genre of peasant-painting (that is, paintings of peasants) during the sixteenth century in the Low Countries and Germany. Making use of Larry Silver's *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes* (2006) I show how the appearance of the genre of Peasant-painting is tied to market forces and the rise of the merchant class as new patrons of art, with the first open art-market situated on the second floor of the first stock market – making a clear reference to the contemporary links between the art market and speculative high finance.²⁰ At the same time as analysing these sixteenth century images of peasants, I attend to the actual exclusion and dispossession of European peasants at that time. I focus on Sebald Beham's prints of peasant festivals, which were produced after the German peasant war (1524-25) and served as an inspiration for later paintings by Antwerp artists such as Bruegel. I lay out how art historians such as Keith Moxey and Hessel Miedema have interpreted these images as moralising, employing a repressive humour in order to discipline the peasant body in a manner similar to Norbert Elias's *Civilising Process* (1939).²¹

This theme of the disciplining of the peasant body is developed with reference to Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the 'grotesque bodily principle,' and Michel Foucault's critique of the way that Marx approved of these disciplining forces as something necessary to control the unruly peasant class in order to cultivate a proletariat capable of a successful revolution.²² Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), forms a key part of my argument which links the disciplining nature of the images of peasants, with the way modernity constructs a conflict between Reason and the body and suppresses alternative cosmologies. In particular, Federici shows that this suppression was carried out through the genocidal tool of the Great Witch Hunts, which served to appropriate the female peasant body's

²⁰ Larry Silver, *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes: The Rise of Pictorial Genres in the Antwerp Art Market*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA, 2006.

²¹ Keith P. F. Moxey, 'Sebald Beham's Church Anniversary Holidays: Festive Peasants as Instruments of Repressive Humor', *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 12, no. 2/3, 1981: 107–130; Hessel Miedema, 'Realism and Comic Mode: The Peasant', *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 9, no. 4, 1977; Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners*, 1939; repr., Urizen Books, New York, 1978.

²² Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 1965; repr., Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN 1984; Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, MA, 1988.

reproductive capacities to the ends of capitalism as well as to obliterate alternative practices and knowledges.²³

However, I temper Moxey and Miedema's interpretation of Beham's images as wholly moralising by making use of Alison Stewart and Walter Gibson's more nuanced arguments that contend that sixteenth century responses to the images would have been varied.²⁴ Since it was common for city burghers to attend peasant festivals, one can assume many contemporary viewers joining in laughing *with* the peasants. Indeed, this is re-enforced by Karel van Mander's anecdote of 'Peasant-Bruegel' attending peasant weddings with a friend, disguised as distant relatives bearing gifts - a 'peasant-painter-who-dresses-like-a-peasant.'²⁵ Nonetheless, I show that Beham's images certainly became increasingly used as tools to discipline the peasant body and construct notions of Western modernity and progress. This is demonstrated by the way these images were re-printed towards the end of the sixteenth century by Theodore de Bry, who also printed similarly constructed images of American 'savages.' As well as Federici, I draw on Mignolo and de Sousa Santos to show how both peasants and indigenous peoples were represented by European elites as backward in relationship to modern notions of development.²⁶ I then link this coloniality of knowledge to the coloniality of being, citing Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Alexander Weheliye, who argue that Western modernity constructs racial hierarchies in which some people are excluded from full humanity. I end this half of the chapter by taking up Weheliye's call for minority studies to re-invent genres of the human.²⁷

In order to explore alternative cosmologies and genres of the human, the second half of this chapter turns from paintings-of-peasants to peasants-that-paint. It focuses on the practice of painting by peasants in the South West Swedish regions of Halland and Småland, which took place roughly between 1750 – 1850. These paintings offer an example of an alternative practice of painting within

²³ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*.

²⁴ Alison G. Stewart, *Before Bruegel: Sebald Beham and the Origins of Peasant Festival Imagery* : Ashgate Publishing Limited, Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT, 2008; Walter S. Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter*, University of California Press, Oakland, CA, 2006.

²⁵ Karel van Mander, trans. Hessel Miedema, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters : From the First Edition of the Schilder-Boeck (1603-1604)* Davaco, Doornspijk 1994.

²⁶ Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI, 2003; Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Another Knowledge Is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*, Verso, London, 2007.

²⁷ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'On The Coloniality Of Being', *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3, March 2007: 240–270; Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2014.

Europe, silenced by the dominant narrative of Western Art history. My thesis builds on previous scholarship on these paintings, by re-contextualising them in response to decolonial theory. I demonstrate that they reveal alternative conceptions of the self in relation to the cosmos, and represent a knowing resistance to the modernising process. Drawing on scholarship from Swedish art historians, Nils-Arvid Bringéus and Uno Hernroth, I employ eyewitness accounts from Linnaeus, and the peasants themselves, to show that the paintings had a deeply ritualistic usage, very much in keeping with the peasant festival.²⁸ The paintings were only used at Christmas and responded to the significance placed on the architectural spaces in which they were designed to hang. The hanging of the paintings was a social event in itself, and was associated with the appearance of supernatural beings. Jacqueline Van Gent's *Magic, Body, and the Self in Eighteenth Century Sweden* (2009), a study of eighteenth-century Swedish witch trials, gives valuable insight into the peasant-painters' sense of the self. For them, the body was socially inscribed and permeable, and other non-human beings were part of the household and social fabric.²⁹

I then go on to ask why exactly these peasants painted, in this area of Sweden, and at this time. Making use of the work of Swedish historians such as Alf Åberg and Eva Österberg, I first address the transmission of painting practices from guild-educated church painters to peasants, in the wake of the white-washing of the churches as a result of the reformation and the conflict between state power and the village and parish assemblies.³⁰ This chimes with van Gent's identification of a trend through the eighteenth century towards the parish priest moving from being a member of the community, to a member of the elites, exerting control over the peasants. Given that this does not fully explain why Halland and Småland, in particular, should witness the blossoming of peasants painting, I turn to the issue of land reforms and the socio-economic situation of these peasants.

I argue that the sites of peasant-painting in Halland and Småland corresponded with those areas that did not undergo socially devastating land-reforms until much later, and which had less poverty and greater social cohesion. The spread of peasant-painting throughout the rural classes, from the landed

²⁸ Nils-Arvid Bringéus, *Sydsvenska bonadsmålningar*, Böcker om konst ;Signum, Lund, 1982; Uno Hernroth, *Sydsvenska bonadsmålare 1750-1850: deras miljö och sociala bakgrund*, Nordiska museet, Stockholm, 1979; Carl von Linné, *Carl von Linnés skånska resa 1749*, repr. Wahlström & Widstrand, Stockholm, 1977.

²⁹ Jacqueline Van Gent, *Magic, Body and the Self in Eighteenth-Century Sweden*, Brill, Leiden, 2009.

³⁰ Alf Åberg, *När byarna sprängdes*, Natur och kultur, Stockholm, 1979; Eva Österberg, *Mentalities and Other Realities: Essays in Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavian History*, Lund University Press, Lund, 1991.

to the landless peasants, supports this argument. In response to Österberg's attempt to look for non-violent forms of peasant protest in Sweden, I put forward peasants-painting as one such practice of resistance which enacts a spirit of community and an interconnected peasant cosmology in the face of the colonality of Western modernity.³¹

The chapter concludes by focusing on the materials that the Swedish peasant-painters used. Using Ingaliill Nyström's recent technical analysis of signed paintings by peasants, I show that far from using exclusively local plant materials as Uno Hernroth supposes, the peasants used dyes imported from colonies and the latest modern pigments when they could afford it.³² I argue that this shows that far from being an isolated relic of a time gone by, the peasants were intimately connected to the globalising forces on-going at the time. This is made manifest by the Rasp- and Spinn- huis, as a site where the disciplined and punished peasant in Europe and the exploited and enslaved colonised outside of Europe meet through brazilwood, a plant dye.

Chapter two picks up from this meeting of the European peasant and the indigenous Amerindian through the materials of painting, by following the trajectories of certain dye-plants uncovered through my practice-based research into the construction of a pigment garden in Andalusia, Spain. By observing the local area, I noticed Spain's colonisation of the Americas inscribed into the landscape through the presence of prickly pear cacti infested with wild cochineal. This demonstrates that it is problematic to talk simplistically of 'native' and 'non-native' plants, but rather that it is important to be sensitive to their histories and modes of naturalisation. Consequently, the choice of planting for the garden, which was developed in response to the local conditions and flora, uncovered the directions of research expanded upon in this chapter. Building on the last chapter's exploration of the inward colonality of Western modernity, this chapter addresses its outward colonality through dye plants. It serves to elucidate the exploitative relationship towards plant and human life developed through bio-colonialism and the plantation system, which reduced non-Europeans to pure labour, and plant life to standing resources. In contrast, I attempt to retrieve the indigenous Mesoamerican the pigment-making technology for making Mayan blue, that was 'lost' in the wake of colonialism, and show how it reveals alternative genres of the human and plant-human relationships.

³¹ Österberg, *Mentalities and Other Realities*, 1991.

³² Ingaliill Nyström, *Bonadsmåleri under Lupp: Spektroskopiska Analyser Av Färg Och Teknik i Sydsvenska Bonadsmålningar 1700-1870*, Göteborgs universitet, Gothenburg, 2012; Hernroth, *Sydsvenska bonadsmålare 1750-1850*.



Figure 1.3 Film still from 'Cultivating Colour' (2015) video documenting planting woad in the garden in Almería Spain.

Focusing on indigo, the chapter begins with one Europe's first cash-crops - woad (*Isatis tinctoria*) - and the early Spanish attempts at establishing woad plantations in New Spain under the *encomienda* system. It was an attempt to use the appropriation of land and indigenous forced labour in order to cultivate this valuable commodity crop and break the French and German monopolies within Europe. Using Manuel Rubio Sánchez' study of the history of indigo in Central America I will then go on to describe how, in the wake of the failure of woad cultivation in New Spain, the native indigo of Central and South America, *xiquílitl* (*Indigofera suffruticosa*), was 'discovered,' leading to the eventual decline of woad production in Europe.³³ As Rubio Sánchez argues, the large plantations of indigo, and the harmful methods of extraction, were responsible for the institution of labour laws protecting indigenous workers, which in turn led to the proliferation of enslaved Africans. Therefore, we can see that the indigo plantations enact the European construction of racial hierarchies as outlined by Weheliye.³⁴ Wynter contrasts the alienated and routinised labour of the plantation with the peasant

³³ Manuel Rubio Sánchez, *Historia del añil o xiquilite en Centro América*, Ministerio de Educación, Dirección de Publicaciones, El Salvador, 1976.

³⁴ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

relationship to plants and the land found in the provision ground as a site of resistance.³⁵

Furthermore, drawing on Andrea Feeser's work on indigo plantations in colonial South Carolina, I point out that an emphasis on the reduction of non-European bodies to pure labour through slavery obscures the fact that enslaved people from indigo-producing areas of Africa were procured in order to exploit their knowledge.³⁶

For the next section of the chapter, I turn attention to the Mesoamerican knowledge surrounding their native indigo (which I shall refer to as *xiquílitl* rather than *Indigofera suffruticosa*) and the making of Mayan blue, which was occluded through colonialism. Utilising Londa Schiebinger's concept of agnotology - the study of ignorance - I explore the possible reasons why the technology of Mayan blue might have escaped notice of the Spanish, and why its manufacture by Mesoamericans eventually ceased.³⁷ I refer to historical sixteenth century Spanish eye witness accounts, such as Francisco Hernández's description of the extraction of indigo from *xiquílitl*, and Diego de Landa's description of Yucatán in which he details the Mayan use of Mayan blue in a religious context, in order to gain insight into the sacred role of this pigment.³⁸ Its subsequent use in early Indo-Christian painting, such as the Virgin of Guadalupe, before its eventual disappearance further supports the idea of its sacred nature.

In particular, I look at the *General History of the Things of New Spain* (*La Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España*), otherwise known as the Florentine Codex. This sixteenth century manuscript was produced by Friar Bernardino de Sahagún in collaboration with a group of Nahua scribes, and is widely considered to be the world's first ethnographic work, consisting of the history of the customs and religion of the Nahua people, as well as a natural history of the minerals, plants and animals of the area.³⁹ It includes a chapter on pigments from plants, with a section on *xiquílitl*, but does not fully explain the process for making Mayan blue, despite the fact the pigment is used for some of the

³⁵ Sylvia Wynter, 'Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World', manuscript, circa 1970, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.

³⁶ Andrea Feeser, *Red, White, and Black Make Blue: Indigo in the Fabric of Colonial South Carolina Life*, University of Georgia Press, Athens, GA, 2013.

³⁷ Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2007.

³⁸ Francisco Hernández, *Cuatro libros de la naturaleza y virtudes de las plantas y animales de uso medicinal en la Nueva España*, 1615, Biblioteca Digital Hispánica, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid; Diego de Landa, *Yucatan Before and After the Conquest*, Courier Corporation, North Chelmsford, MA, 2012.

³⁹ Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, 'General History of the Things of New Spain: The Florentine Codex', manuscript, 1577), Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence.

images in the manuscript. Diana Magaloni-Kerpel's research on the Florentine Codex, which includes a technical analysis of the pigments used, is particularly useful to interpret the way Mayan blue and other pigments have been used in a codified way throughout the manuscript.⁴⁰ I use this to support my argument that Mayan blue had a sacred meaning for the Mesoamericans and the technique for making it was intentionally withheld from the Spanish. Spanish agnotology – that is, their ignorance of knowledges that did not fit into their world view – therefore played into the hands of the Nahua, who simply did not explain what they were not asked. However, I will also argue that the image accompanying the description of *xiquilitl* gives more information about the process than the accompanying text, and the fact that this has been hitherto overlooked by scholars is an indication that the bias towards Western-centric notions of writing over the image outlined by Mignolo in his *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (2003) persists today.⁴¹

Magaloni Kerpel's linkage of the way the pigments have been used in the Florentine Codex, to the Nahua concept of the image, the *ixiptla*, as a skin is particularly useful towards unpacking the Nahua cosmology and how their concept of representation implies a radically different genre of the human. The famous Virgin of Guadalupe, painted by an indigenous painter called Marcos, is what Serge Gruzinski calls a Catholic *ixiptla*.⁴² With her mantle painted in what seems to be Mayan blue, she may have actually represented the Nahua Goddess *Tonantzin* under the noses of the Spanish. I develop these ideas further, using Alfredo López Austin's examination of the meaning of the *ixiptla* and how it relates to the Nahua concept of the body, James Maffie's recent study on *teotl* in Aztec philosophy, and Gruzinski's work on the conflict between indigenous and Spanish concepts of the image during the colonial period.⁴³

I go on to argue for a link between the *ixiptla* as a covering or skin, which makes the subject present (conflating signifier and signified), and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's theory of Amerindian

⁴⁰ Diana Magaloni Kerpel, *The Colors of the New World: Artists, Materials, and the Creation of the Florentine Codex*, Getty Publications, Los Angeles, 2014; Diana Magaloni Kerpel, 'Painters of the New World: The Process of Making the Florentine Codex', in *Colors Between Two Worlds: The Florentine Codex of Bernardino de Sahagún*, ed. Joseph Connors and Gerhard Wolf, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Max-Planck-Institut, Villa I Tatti, Florence, 2011.

⁴¹ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*.

⁴² Serge Gruzinski, *Images at War: Mexico From Columbus to Blade Runner (1492–2019)*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2001.

⁴³ Alfredo López Austin, *Cuerpo humano e ideología*, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, Mexico, 1980; Alfredo López Austin, 'Cuerpos y rostros', *Anales de Antropología* 28, no. 1, 1991; James Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion*, University Press of Colorado, Boulder, 2014.

perspectivism and multinaturalism in his *Cannibal Metaphysics* (2014).⁴⁴ This in turn, implies a genre of the human in which all beings are ascribed humanity. I support my argument with reference to Alan Sandstrom's ethnographic study of a Nahua village during the 1980s and 1990s, in which it is clear that the Nahua view plants, and in particular maize, as their own flesh and blood.⁴⁵

The chapter concludes by examining what Viveiros de Castro has called 'indigenous cosmopolitics,' drawing on Isabelle Stengers' and Bruno Latour. In contrast to Kantian 'cosmopolitanism' this cosmopolitics does not seek to include all things under a homogenising project of liberal democratic rights. Rather, it is a way of bringing other beings, that have previously been relegated to the sphere of the natural sciences under the Western European epistemic regime, into the sphere of politics. Marisol de la Cadena gives examples of this 'indigenous cosmopolitics' at work in South America, as what she calls 'Earth beings' such as Pachamama and mountains enter political discussions as persons rather than objects. De la Cadena highlights the importance of what Viveiros de Castro conceives as 'equivocations' – moments where one releases that we are speaking from radically distinct perspectives. These moments reveal the limits of our own thought and offer the possibility of changing our conceptual frameworks as we struggle to translate the thought of the other.

Mayan blue and the *ixiptla* demonstrates how radically different ways of thinking and being can result in colonial ignorance and equivocation. Viveiros de Castro argues that perspectivalism can lead anthropology to become the 'permanent decolonisation of thought' as it entails taking the other's thought seriously enough that it may change your own.⁴⁶ Thinking with Amerindian perspectives on what is human - through plants, pigments, and the *ixiptla* - reveals the provinciality of Western European painting and offers possibilities of transformation.

As a practice-based project, this thinking with other perspectives is not only theoretical, but also happens through working *with* plants and pigments. In the third and final chapter, therefore, I develop the centrality of practices to perspectivalism. To do this I connect it to reenactment as a bodily-based method to think with others, which is central to my own practice. Embodied practices are multi-layered in my work, and framed through my persona, 'The Peasant Painter.' I use

⁴⁴ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, 1st edition, Univocal Pub, Minneapolis, MN 2014.

⁴⁵ Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn Is Our Blood : Culture and Ethnic Identity in a Contemporary Aztec Indian Village*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OA, 1991.

⁴⁶ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*.

reenactment as a performance spectacle to communicate my practice-based research to the public. Dressed in peasant costume, with a papier maché cucumber for a nose, I demonstrate harvesting and pigment-making in the form of ‘performance lectures’ which take the peasant into spaces such as the laboratory and the museum. These performances draw on my experience working in open air museums with reenactment groups, and deliberately subvert the authority of the academic voice with the comic mode of the peasant clown. At the same time, I have practices which take place away from the public, and which employ reenactment as a way of generating knowledge. There are my practices of gardening, of pigment-making, and of painting, all of which I think of as forms of reenactment which engage with the work and being of others across space and time. This chapter therefore deals with these two different aspects of reenactment as an embodied practice. The first section of this chapter looks at reenactment as a spectacle. I trace its problematic history as a form of colonial display, and its relationship with the ‘human zoo’ and the development of living history museums for the display of European peasant culture. The second and third sections of the chapter discuss reenactment as a method. First, as a way to construct a malleable self, and secondly as a form of knowledge in which working in collaboration with materials is both a way of being and knowing.



Figure 1.4 A performance demonstration of making Mayan blue from fresh woad leaves, Annely Juda Fine Art, London, 2017

I tackle reenactment as a spectacle with two anecdotes - Ishi, the supposedly 'last wild Indian' who ended up living in University of California at Berkeley's Museum of Anthropology and reenacting his past life, and Nelly, a Swedish peasant who similarly ended up living out her old age in Hallands open air museum. I explore how these examples demonstrate the problematic history of re-enactment as colonial display. Both Ishi and Nelly were used to construct notions of modernity and progress, through the spectacle of their more 'primitive' life-styles, however they performed different roles in the construction of the racial hierarchies used to justify Western colonialism. Drawing on the work of Peter Aronsson, Cathrine Baglo, and Daniel De Groff, it can be seen that Artur Hazelius' invention of the open air museum at Skansen in Stockholm - which became a model for open air museums world wide - was inspired by his encounters with 'human zoos' at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1878, and Hagenback's Anthropological zoo.⁴⁷ The figure of the peasant in Sweden, was central for a nation-building based on an inclusive, democratic socialism, but she was also used in theories of race-hygiene.

However, while reenactment in the museum was undoubtedly used to construct notions of authenticity and historical progress, it also has disruptive potential. Despite its problematic beginnings, the development of the more complete embodied experience of the living history museum also undermined the disinterested scientific gaze. Additionally, as Cathrine Baglo argues, the live performance that comes with reenactment produces complex relations which are not always straightforwardly reducible to the colonial gaze.⁴⁸ To this end, I also address the artistic response of James Luna to the museological display of Native American lives through his performance in the museum, as an example of work which uses clowning and reenactment to produce a productive ambivalence.⁴⁹ His work has lessons for how I might approach my own reenactment and performance practice, which sometimes takes place in open air museums.

⁴⁷ Peter Aronsson, 'The Image of the Peasant within National Museums in the Nordic Countries', *Societal Change and Ideological Formation among the Rural Population of the Baltic Area 1880-1939*, Studia Baltica. Series II, Södertörns högskola, Huddinge, 2008; Cathrine Baglo, 'Reconstruction as Trope of Cultural Display. Rethinking the Role of "Living Exhibitions"', *Nordisk Museologi*, no. 2, 2015: 49–68; Daniel Alan DeGroff, 'Artur Hazelius and the Ethnographic Display of the Scandinavian Peasantry: A Study in Context and Appropriation', *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 19, no. 2, April 2012: 229–48.

⁴⁸ Baglo, 'Reconstruction as Trope of Cultural Display. Rethinking the Role of "Living Exhibitions"', *Nordisk Museologi*, no. 2, 2015: 49–68; Cathrine Baglo, 'Rethinking Sami Agency during Living Exhibitions: From the Age of Empire to the Postwar World', in *Performing Indigeneity: Global Histories and Contemporary Experiences*, Ed. Laura R. Graham and H. Glenn Penny, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE, 2014.

⁴⁹ Jane Blocker, 'Ambivalent Entertainments: James Luna, Performance, and the Archive', *Grey Room*, no. 37 2009: 52–77.

The next section of this chapter builds on this generative possibility of reenactment by moving away from the idea of reenactment as a display, towards reenactment as a method. Reenactment as an epistemological method has generally not been taken seriously by the academy. Scholars such as Vanessa Agnew have a particularly Euro-centric, individualist, view of subjectivity - which, as we will have seen, was partly constructed through painting in the 'age of the world picture.' This means that Agnew views body-based knowledge as inherently circumscribed as it is limited by individual subjective experience.⁵⁰ I counter this Euro-centric view of reenactment and the self with an account of Tupinamba Amerindians reenacting the brazilwood trade, alongside Norman sailors, in Rouen in 1550. Beatriz Perrone-Moisés draws on Amerindian perspectivalism, and Viverios de Castro, to point out that the Amerindian self is continually changing and constituted by practices.⁵¹ Consequently, for the Tupi, this reenactment was a way of becoming *with* the other, and as such a form of cosmopolitical diplomacy.

After addressing how reenactment can construct continually changing subjectivities that counter the modern self as 'individual' and essential, I discuss how it involves collaboration with non-human actants - in particular, plants and pigments. Anthropologists have recently used the term 'the alchemical person' to describe the way the Amerindian dynamic self is continually constituted through practices that involve working with materials.⁵² I use this idea of 'alchemy' to discuss the practice of reenactment within painting, in particular the practice of reconstructing pigment and paint recipes by conservation scientists and as a way of learning about paintings.

I start by looking at James Elkin's use of Alchemy in his book *What Painting Is* (1999). While his discussion of the agency of materials and bodily know-how is promising, ultimately his account valorises the Western modernist image of the painter working in isolation in his studio. Elkins emphasises the non-knowledge of alchemy and painting, over and against the knowledge of

⁵⁰ Vanessa Agnew, 'What Is Reenactment?', *Criticism* 46, . *Special Issue on Historical Reenactment*, Co-Ed. Vanessa Agnew and Jonathan Lamb No. 3, Summer 2004: 327–339.; Vanessa Agnew, 'History's Pure Serene: On Reenacting Cook's First Voyage, September 2001', in *Staging the Past: Themed Environments in Transcultural Perspectives*, Eds. J. Schlehe, M. Uike, C. Oesterle, and W. Hochbruck, transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2010, 205–18.

⁵¹ Beatriz Perrone-Moisés, 'Performed Alliances and Performative Identities: Tupinamba in the Kingdom of France', in *Performing Indigeneity: Global Histories and Contemporary Experiences*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE, 2014, 110–35.

⁵² Juan Alvaro Echeverri and Elizabeth Rahman, 'Introduction: The Alchemical Person', *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 13(2) 13, no. 2, 2015: 1–10.

technoscience.⁵³ This merely serves to reinforce hierarchies of disciplines that have been used to exclude non-Western and non-scientific forms of knowledge. Carlo Ginzburg's discussion of conjectural knowledge is a more fruitful way of discussing bodily-based practices such as painting and reenactment.⁵⁴ It is a form of knowledge which was associated with the peasantry, but which is also used in disciplines such as history, and medicine. Ginzburg argues that the perceived issue of repeatability in arts and the humanities is really a cultural choice.

I then turn to the use of reenactment in conservation science - an area which works at the interface between art, science, history, and anthropology. Spike Bucklow, a conservation scientist, also observes a mistrust of bodily-based practices due to their supposed lack of repeatability. However, he also points out that working in a laboratory also involves bodily skills and craft, and that things often mysteriously do not work out as expected. Bucklow has dubbed the way of working between disciplines and the use of bodily based practices, such as paint reconstructions, 'housewife chemistry.'⁵⁵ By doing so he indicates the denigration of women's knowledge that the disciplining of the academy within Western modernity entailed. For Bucklow it is important that paintings do not merely become passive objects of study. Making reconstructions of paintings and paint recipes allows conservation scientists to gain insight into how paintings themselves work, and how they belong to a vast cultural network beyond the studio.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, that conservators prefer to use the word reconstruction over the word reenactment reveals a nervousness around the status of embodied practices in relation to the apparent objectivity and repeatability of the scientific method. The word 'reconstruction' elides the presence of the body, placing emphasis on the art object. In contrast, 'reenactment' puts the performative moment with its entangled agencies at the centre. I argue that reenactment is an expansive practice which incorporates various forms of research, including the conjectural methods of historical investigation and anthropology, as well those deriving from embodied practices. Indeed, the practice of Luis Manuel May Ku, a Mayan artist who has investigated and recreated Mayan blue made from the indigenous plant *ch'oj* and locally dug up clay, demonstrates this interplay between forms of research. He used scientific, anthropological, and

⁵³ James Elkins, *What Painting Is*, Routledge, London, 2004.

⁵⁴ Carlo Ginzburg, 'Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method', *History Workshop*, no. 9, 1980: 5–36.

⁵⁵ Spike Bucklow, 'Housewife Chemistry', in *In Artists' Footsteps: The Reconstruction of Pigments and Paintings, Studies in Honour of Renate Woudhuysen-Keller*, Archetype, London, 2012, 17–28.

⁵⁶ Spike Bucklow, 'Cultural Networks and Artists' Materials', *News in Conservation, International Institute for Historic and Artistic Works*, 16 February, 2010. p 6

anthropological research, as well as the memories and knowledge of his community elders, and his own embodied interaction with the materials. As such reenactment dismantles hierarchies of knowledges, replacing the disciplining of academic knowledge with an ecology of knowledges, ontologies, and materialisms. It is also a practice-based way to ‘think *with* others.’

In this project, the practice of observing and working with plants, and the reenactment of pigment-recipes and painterly gestures has driven the theoretical direction of the thesis, which in turn has informed the practice. Reenactment expands painting into a wide network of relationships, while Amerindian perspectivalism offers a theoretic approach to attend to the radical difference and agency of the other. Observing prickly pear infected with cochineal in the landscape of Almería, sparks the expansion of further connections through the development of a hybrid Maya blue made from European woad. As such, painting is expanded by following its historical connections, and indeed, its ruptures. Expanding painting *decolonially* means not merely seeing expanded painting as the latest reiteration in response to easel painting in a grand narrative of Western European art, but to take the opportunity to disrupt the very grounding of that narrative at the point of its origins. Taking other histories of painting seriously is not to be done merely in the spirit of inclusion, but to provincialise Western European painting, and to ask ‘ourselves’ if another way of painting – and being – is possible. In ‘peasant-painting’, the studio expands into the field of plants, and all their entangled histories, and reenactment, as a body-based method, facilitates thinking *with* others.

Chapter One

From Paintings of Peasants to Peasants that Paint

This first chapter seeks to elucidate what I call the inward coloniality of European modernity/capitalism. I use this term to describe how the figure of the peasant was used to create notions of linear progress which served to justify the colonisation of indigenous peoples and their lands, and at the same time construct the modern bourgeois self. This inward coloniality also involved what Marx called primitive accumulation, whereby through the enclosure of the commons, peasants across Europe were disposed of their access to land and became a landless proletariat (which moved both to the cities, and abroad to settler colonies). Silvia Federici expands this notion of primitive accumulation of capital to include the appropriation of women's reproductive capacities through the terror of the Great Witch Hunts.⁵⁷ In this chapter I shall demonstrate how this inward coloniality is played out through the practice of peasant-painting, and explain my focus on the early modern period as an historic moment in which the forces of modernity are unleashed yet not fully entrenched. This allows for a re-imagining of alternative futures, proceeding from an imagined divergent path of history, in which peasant revolts and proto-eco-socialist movements were successful. It begins by introducing the figure of the peasant as a genre of European painting, which appears in sixteenth century Antwerp, and reveals its intimate links with birth of the art market and the construction of the individualised bourgeois self. Parallels are drawn between the use of the image of the peasant and the image of the American Indian 'savage' to construct notions of Western progress, linking the outward coloniality of European modernity, with its inward coloniality. Alongside the image of the peasant, I attend to the socio-economic exclusion of the peasants through the German Peasant War (1524- 25) and the Great Witch Hunts, as analysed by Federici.⁵⁸ I then contrast peasant-painting as paintings of peasants, with peasant-painting as peasants that paint. Using the example of Swedish peasants from Småland and Halland from around 1750 – 1850, I demonstrate an alternative trajectory of painting which stems from a different notion of the body and the cosmos. However, by

⁵⁷ Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*. Autonomedia, New York, 2004.

⁵⁸ Federici.

recontextualising these paintings through decolonial theory, I argue that rather than being a relic of lost tradition, this peasant-painting was a form of resistance to the modernising project on-going at the time. The chapter ends with an exploration of the pigments used by the Swedish peasants, which demonstrate their participation in global colonial trade networks, and once again brings the peasant and the Amerindian together through brazilwood and the punishment of the rasphuis, demonstrating the inward and outward coloniality of European modernity.

The figure of the peasant in painting has been evoked as she-who-must-be-excluded in order to construct modernity. As a figure of alterity, this exclusion is both real and symbolic, in representing the peasant, the bourgeois subject constructs the individualised self through what he is not, denigrating the 'backward' peasants or romanticising the 'old way of life.'⁵⁹ Indeed, as we know, the very word 'peasant' is used as a derogatory term in English. At the same time, there is the real socio-economic exclusion of peasants in modernising projects on-going around the world, such as those that I have encountered in China. As Federici has shown in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), the dispossession of peasants from land in the early modern period, their subsequent repression through criminalisation by vagrancy laws, and especially the genocide of peasant women through witchcraft trials, was integral to the creation of a proletarian class whose labour and reproductive capacities had to be controlled in order to drive the development of capitalism.⁶⁰ In contrast to classical Marxist narratives of primitive accumulation, Federici does not see this as some historical, evolutionary inevitability, but rather as a counter-revolutionary tactic against alternative, egalitarian visions of society that were being produced by peasant communities during the crisis of feudalism. It is therefore important to emphasise that the peasant was not just what had to be excluded in order to construct modernity, but also the potential source of alternative futures. The image of the peasant has also been the locus of a critique of these processes, and a more nuanced reading which allows peasant agency, can challenge the individualised body and the private aesthetic experience of the modern self.

⁵⁹ I intentionally use 'he' for the bourgeois subject, and 'she' for the peasant, to indicate the centrality of 'Man' in the construction of the modern self, and the subjugation of women, through tools such as the Great Witch Hunts as discussed by Federici. Moreover, my persona of 'The Peasant Painter' is female.

⁶⁰ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*.

Images of peasants

The figure of the peasant first appeared as a genre of painting in sixteenth century Antwerp, the centre of colonial trade. As such, the invention of the peasant as a subject of painting coincided geographically and historically with the origins of capitalism and the first stock market. Larry Silver argues that the development of peasant scenes and landscapes, along with a general explosion of genres, was the result of the rise of the art market.⁶¹ In contrast to earlier forms of patronage conducted through commissions from the church and the aristocracy, during the sixteenth century painters started to produce work speculatively for sale to the new merchant class on the open art market rather than in response to a brief. The *schilderpaand* was Antwerp's marketplace for the display and sale of paintings and, revealingly, it was situated on the second floor of the bourse, the world's first stock exchange. Silver sees the diversification of genres as a market-driven impetus towards the development of a 'signature style' whereby painters and paintings could be easily recognised and commodified. Therefore, the emergence of peasant painting as a genre, amongst others, marks the beginnings of today's contemporary art market, not least in the connection between art commodities and speculative high finance.

However, in the construction of a new bourgeois subjectivity, the image of the peasant was more than a niche market genre. The peasant paintings of the second half of the sixteenth century such as Pieter Aertsen's market scenes reveal a mercantile gaze. Silver argues that as representations of productivity, the peasants, along with nature, were displayed as a resource available for capitalist appropriation. Images of peasants first appeared in the form of engravings rather than paintings, such as Hans Sebald Beham's (1500 - 50) engravings of the peasant *kermis* or carnival (see figure 1). These engravings, which appeared after the German Peasant War of 1524 - 25, are interpreted by art historians such as Hessel Miedema and Keith Moxey as offering the recently vanquished peasant up as an object of moral reprobation, representing the backward, uncouth, drunken, vomiting, shitting, shagging 'other.'⁶² The very body of the peasant is subjected to the disciplining power of the image,

⁶¹ Larry Silver, *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes: The Rise of Pictorial Genres in the Antwerp Art Market*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, PA, 2006.

⁶² Hessel Miedema, 'Realism and Comic Mode: The Peasant', *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 9, no. 4/1977; Keith P. F. Moxey, 'Sebald Beham's Church Anniversary Holidays: Festive Peasants as Instruments of Repressive Humor', *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 12, no. 2/3, 1981: 107-130

following Norbert Elias' *Civilising Process* (1939), in which manners and etiquette are used to construct bourgeois class identity through the regulation of bodily functions.⁶³



Figure 2.5 Hans Sebald Beham, *Large Church Festival, 1535*, woodcut. 35.5cm x 114.2cm © The Trustees of the British Museum

Federici sees this “conflict between Reason and the Passions of the Body” as part of the process of alienation from the body that is a precondition for the development of labour-power and capitalism.⁶⁴ Indeed, Karl Marx compares the technologies of power used by capitalist industry with that of the modern army, although he also saw it as sowing the seeds of its own destruction, the working class; an army against capitalism: “with this too grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself.”⁶⁵ It is clear that Marx does not see the disciplining of the proletariat under capitalist industry as something negative; quite the opposite, as it is a necessary process to transform the ‘unruly’ rural population into a disciplined army of proletariat ready for the revolution. For Federici and Michel Foucault, however, this disciplining of the body is inextricably linked with an instrumentalised thought which silences any alternatives and colonises all aspects of life, “the relation between manipulating things and domination appears clearly in Marx's *Capital*, where every technique of production requires modification of individual conduct - not only skills but also attitudes.”⁶⁶

⁶³ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*. 1939; repr., Urizen Books, New York, 1978.

⁶⁴ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*. p134

⁶⁵ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 1867; repr., Penguin UK, London, 2004. p542

⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, MA, 1988. p18

Indeed, the lack of discipline and 'progress' of the peasant class was held up by Frederick Engels as the reason for the failure of the German Peasant War in 1525. Writing in 1850, Engels drew parallels between the German Peasant War and the failed revolutionary uprisings of 1848-49. Rather than seeing it as a religious rebellion, as had been generally interpreted, he emphasised the material and economic factors, as town patricians increased the taxes on the peasants and revoked their access to common land, and the aristocracy sought to curtail ancient rights and bring more peasants into serfdom through the introduction of Roman Civil law. Led by the radical preacher Thomas Müntzer, the rebels sought to establish a new order based on absolute equality with all goods in common. However, Engels complained that the peasants did not coalesce into a unified and disciplined movement with the town plebeians, and their class consciousness was not sufficiently advanced for the rebellion to succeed.⁶⁷

After the failed peasant revolt of 1525, the image of the peasant is used to construct the modern self by representing what the bourgeois subject is not — closer to nature, driven by bodily desires, gluttonous, overly sexualised, and ultimately less rational. Moxey argues that these prints represent a change in middle class attitude towards the peasants in the aftermath of the German peasant war.⁶⁸ He points out that in early Lutheran pamphlets, the peasants represented the 'common man' and were depicted as followers of Martin Luther. However Luther, and many other leaders of the reformation, were no supporters of the peasant revolts and did not wish a change in social hierarchies. Consequently, in the wake of the peasant war, peasants were depicted as a mob that needed to be controlled and dominated, much like nature itself.⁶⁹

In his writings on the carnivalesque, Mikhail Bakhtin has guarded against interpreting the earthy materiality of 'grotesque realism' in renaissance art and literature according to modern bourgeois norms.⁷⁰ He sees a comic mode born out of the folk culture of the pre-modern era in the work of writers such as Rabelais and painters such as Bruegel. It is a collective laughter that liberates by eliminating all social and class distinction through a reduction to the same base materiality. It is not a satirical laughter at the expense of the object of ridicule, the festive laughter of the Kermis is the

⁶⁷ Friedrich Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, 1850; repr., Routledge, London, 2015.

⁶⁸ Keith P. F. Moxey, 'Sebald Beham's Church Anniversary Holidays: Festive Peasants as Instruments of Repressive Humor'.

⁶⁹ Keith P. F. Moxey.

⁷⁰ Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. 1965. Repr., Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1984.

laughter of the common people and “is also directed at those who laugh. The people do not exclude themselves from the wholeness of the world.”⁷¹ Nonetheless, the renaissance does mark the beginning of a transformation from the grotesque, inclusive, bodily principle to the regulated individual body of the bourgeois self, and it is in these sixteenth century images that we see these contradictory aspects come into tension, creating what Bakhtin calls “the drama that leads to the breaking away of the body from the single procreating earth, the breaking away from the collective, growing, and continually renewed body of the people with which it had been linked in folk culture.”⁷²



Figure 6.2 Hans Sebald Beham, *Peasants behind the hedge*; a vomiting figure admonished by another male figure holding an axe; a kissing couple surprised by an onlooker; from a series of ten engravings. 1546-7 Engraving. © The Trustees of the British Museum

Recent scholarship by Alice G. Stewart and Walter Gibson have provided a more nuanced interpretation of the peasant festive imagery of Beham and Bruegel, maintaining the possibility that some contemporary viewers would have interpreted them critically while others would have been

⁷¹ Bakhtin. p12

⁷² Bakhtin. p23

sympathetic.⁷³ In particular, Stewart points out that the burgers of Nuremberg travelled out in great numbers to celebrate the kermis in the villages of the surrounding countryside, partaking in the festivities and self-identifying as members of the 'common people.'⁷⁴ At the same time as the more puritanical wing of the church council was attempting to ban the festivals, which indicates there was a multiplicity of social attitudes towards the peasants and their Kermis at the time. Indeed, it is worth noting that Sebald Beham himself was expelled from Nuremberg on the 26th January 1526, after the peasant war, for being a 'Godless Painter' because he shared the radical egalitarian views on religion and government such as those held by the reformers Hans Denck, Andreas Karlstadt and Thomas Münzter who were sympathetic to the peasant cause. However, the radical reformer and spiritualist Sebastian Frank was his brother-in-law, and he was vehemently against the vice of drunkenness. Therefore, it is not at all clear whether Beham intended to condemn or celebrate the peasants in his prints. As Stewart points out, "Both loved and hated, kermis celebrations in Nuremberg – and by extension the kermis prints – were viewed in various positive, neutral, and negative ways inside and outside Nuremberg."⁷⁵

One of the most compelling anecdotes that reveals this ambivalence between the collective laughter of folk culture and the emerging individual bourgeois self is given by Karel Van Mander's description of Breughel in his 1604 *Schilderboek*. In it he describes how Brueghel, with a merchant friend and patron, used to dress up as a peasant and attend their feasts:

He worked a great deal for a merchant by the name of Hans Franckert who was a man with a noble, good disposition who liked to be with Brueghel and who daily associated with him very companionably. Breughel often went out of town among the peasants with this Franckert, to fun-fairs and weddings, dressed in peasants' costume, and they gave presents just like the others, pretending to be family or acquaintances of the bride or the bridegroom. Here Breughel entertained himself observing the nature of the peasants - in eating, drinking, dancing, leaping,

⁷³ Alison G. Stewart, *Before Bruegel: Sebald Beham and the Origins of Peasant Festival Imagery* : Ashgate Publishing Limited, Aldershot, England ; Burlington, VT, 2008;; Gibson, *Pieter Bruegel and the Art of Laughter*. University of California Press, Oakland, CA, 2006.

⁷⁴ Stewart, *Before Bruegel*.

⁷⁵ Stewart. p61

lovemaking, and other amusements – which he then most animatedly and subtly imitated with paint...⁷⁶

This anecdote supports Stewart's claim that the burghers took part in the peasant kermis. Here the apparent distance of the artist's (and merchant's) observational gaze, is complicated by their bodily participation in the event and their performance of 'being-a-peasant.' The construction of the individual self is not quite complete, and sixteenth century viewers would have understood the collective nature of the festive experience: "The body and bodily life have here a cosmic and at the same time an all-people's character; this is not the body and its physiology in the modern sense of these words, because it is not individualised. The material bodily principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed."⁷⁷

This communal experience stands in stark contrast to the individual aesthetic experience that was to develop through the subsequent centuries, as epitomised by Kant's discussion of the beautiful and the sublime.⁷⁸ The peasant body within the genre of peasant-painting became tamed, as it was used to decorate beautiful bucolic scenes for the individual bourgeois gaze. No longer was the peasant festive and grotesque, reveling in a bodily excess of drinking, shitting and shagging, rather, she represented some kind of innocent simplicity.⁷⁹ However, the genre of peasant-painting once again took on a more critical edge during the nineteenth century, another moment of great social change with the industrial revolution. The peasant-painting of this period is sympathetic to the peasants, yet they are generally a figure of alterity, evoked in the search for authenticity and a critique of modern industrial life. This can be clearly seen in the paintings by Vincent Van Gogh, and his inspiration, Jean-François Millet.

⁷⁶ Karel van Mander, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters: From the First Edition of the Schilder-Boeck (1603-1604)* Davaco, Doornspijk 1994 fol. 233r, p 190

⁷⁷ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. p19

⁷⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, 1764; repr., University of California Press, Oakland, CA, 2003.

⁷⁹ Examples include peasant scenes by Dutch Golden Age painters such as Karel Dujardin and Albert Cuyp, and English 18th century pastoral painters such as Richard Wilson and Thomas Gainsborough.

Van Gogh is very clear in his letters that he views the peasants as more authentic than the bourgeois. Yet, his admiration slips into performance as, like Brueghel, he starts to dress up as a peasant. He even sees the material act of painting in parallel with the act of working the earth:

You will see from the self-portrait I add that though I saw Paris and other big cities for many years, I keep looking more or less like a peasant of Zundert, Toon, for instance, or Piet Prins, and sometimes I imagine I also feel and think like them, only the peasants are of more use in the world. Only when they have all the other things, they get a feeling, a desire for pictures, books, etc. In my estimation I consider myself certainly below the peasants. Well, I am ploughing on my canvases as they do on their fields.⁸⁰ [Letter from Vincent van Gogh to His Mother Saint-Rémy, c. 20-22 October 1889]

It is easy to argue that romanticising the peasant contributes to the construction of the bourgeois conception of the self rather than critiquing it. Mobilising the peasant as a figure of authenticity, who represents a better, past world, evokes precisely the melancholic beauty that characterises the individual aesthetic experience. To be fair to Van Gogh, however, we should remind ourselves that he wanted to work collectively in order to “exceed the power of an isolated individual,” and the intention behind inviting Paul Gauguin to Provence was to develop an artists' association.⁸¹ Indeed, far from rendering the peasant scenes in a saccharine way, Van Gogh's energetic troughs of thick paint and lurid colours summon up an exuberant and abundant materiality that could easily be described as a form of Bakhtin's grotesque realism. As Bakhtin argues, however, although instances of grotesque do appear from time to time in the centuries after the renaissance, it becomes one orientated towards the individual experience in what he describes as the ‘romantic grotesque’. Despite Van Gogh's best intentions, without collective laughter, the madness of the grotesque loses its positive, subversive and regenerative aspect: “In folk grotesque, madness is a gay parody of official reason, of the narrow seriousness of official ‘truth.’ It is a ‘festive’ madness. In Romantic grotesque, on the other hand, madness acquires a sombre, tragic aspect of individual isolation.”⁸²

⁸⁰ *The Complete Letters of Vincent Van Gogh: With Reproductions of All the Drawings in the Correspondence*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1999. Vol 3, p226

⁸¹ *The Complete Letters of Vincent Van Gogh*. p485

⁸² Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. p39

During the sixteenth century the forces of modernity are unleashed, but not yet fully entrenched. Consequently, focussing on the image of the peasant as it appears during this time allows for an analysis that opens in different directions, and makes possible the re-imagining of alternative futures. Nonetheless, towards the end of the sixteenth century, Beham's festive peasants were reprinted by Theodor De Bry in manner that more firmly served to construct the bourgeois self. The way De Bry used Beham's images of peasants was in line with the way he used engravings of the indigenous people of the New World based on the watercolours of early artists/explorers such as John White and Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues.⁸³ The indigenous Amerindians were depicted as savages in order to construct notions European superiority. As many post-colonial and decolonial thinkers have pointed out, the construction of Western modernity is inextricably linked with coloniality, which in turn is reliant on the construction of hierarchies as a justification for its violence.⁸⁴ Walter Mignolo places emphasis on the epistemological hierarchies that are integral to what decolonial thinkers have called the coloniality/modernity matrix of power.⁸⁵ European ethnocentric conceptualisations of modes of knowledge, writing, and history meant that colonised peoples were presented as 'primitive' and 'underdeveloped,' according to a constructed narrative of human progress.⁸⁶ Indeed, Theodor de Bry published images of pre-Christian Picts of Scotland painted with woad alongside images of Native Americans wearing body paint, in order to place them far behind Europeans on this imagined line human development (see fig. 3). The figure of the peasant in Europe would also eventually be pushed into the past in construction of this narrative.

This hierarchy of knowledges persists today in notions of 'development' and contemporary confrontations between 'scientific' and 'non-scientific' ways of knowing, where the peasants and indigenous peoples in so-called developing countries are seen to stand in the way of techno-scientific' progress, and denied as possessing their own technologies.⁸⁷ In response, Boaventura de Sousa

⁸³ Michael Gaudio, *Engraving the Savage: The New World and Techniques of Civilization*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008.

⁸⁴ For example, Aníbal Quijano *Colonialidad y Modernidad/Racionalidad* (1991), Silvia Wynter, *1492: A New World View* (1995), and Kathryn Yusoff *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2019).

⁸⁵ Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2011.

⁸⁶ Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI, 2003

⁸⁷ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Another Knowledge Is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*, Verso, London, 2007.

Santos calls for ecologies of knowledge, where different ways of knowing enter into dialogue. As de Sousa Santos says: “The future is not in going back to old traditions, since no technology is neutral: each technology carries with it the weight of its mode of seeing and being in nature and with other human beings. The future can thus be found at the crossroads of knowledges and technologies.”⁸⁸



Figure 2.7 left, John White, *A Pict Warrior*, 1585–1593, pen and body colour on paper; right, John White, *An Indian ‘Werowance’, or chief, painted for a great solemn gathering’*, 1585–1593, pen and body colour on paper, © The Trustees of the British Museum. John White compares the body painting of the Native American to the woad-painted Pict.

It is important to bear in mind that these hierarchies of ways of knowing are inseparable from hierarchies of ways of being, wherein various groups were excluded from the Western modern conception of full humanity through constructions of race, sexuality, and gender. Nelson Maldonado-

⁸⁸ Santos. pxi

Torres argues that Descartes' famous statement, "I think, therefore I am" which formed the foundation of much of Western modern philosophy should actually read "I think (others do not think, or do not think properly), therefore I am (others are-not, lack being, should not exist or are dispensable)."⁸⁹ For Alexander Weheliye, it is the task of minority discourses such as post-colonial theory, black studies, feminism and queer theory, to not only reveal how these groups have been excluded from Western modernity's conception of the human, which he calls 'Man', but to imagine alternative conceptions of the human.⁹⁰

Disentangling 'Man from the human' also involves disrupting the linear conception of time that relegates peasants to an unintelligible pre-modern other. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that the encounter with a subaltern past collapses the linear time of the Western modern historical mode, it "faces us as a way of being in this world, and we could ask ourselves: Is that way of being a possibility for our own lives and for what we define as our present?"⁹¹ An analysis of peasant-painting within a contemporary art discourse serves not only to trace how the figure of the peasant was used to construct the genre of human that is the Western modern self through paintings-of-peasants, but also to suggest that the genre of the human and the genre of peasant-painting might be re-invented from the position of the peasant-that-paints. Consequently, one can ask: What ways-of-being-in-world were suppressed by the emergence of capitalism in Europe? If peasants were represented by the bourgeois subject as being closer to nature, perhaps we should question the assumed hierarchy implicit in this formulation. How do peasants position the self in relation to other beings such as plants and animals?

Peasants that paint

In *Plants as Persons* (2011), Mathew Hall looks for alternative ontologies to counter the Western reduction of plants to material resource.⁹² He sees the attribution of personhood to plants as key to

⁸⁹ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'On The Coloniality Of Being'. *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3, March 2007: 240–270. p252

⁹⁰ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2014.

⁹¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2009. p108

⁹² Matthew Hall, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany*, SUNY Press, Albany, NY, 2011.

bringing plants into moral consideration. While he looks to examples of Eastern religions and indigenous ontologies in their consideration of plants, in order to avoid accusations of cultural appropriation, Hall also seeks examples from European-based pre-Christian cosmologies, such as the Viking Poetic Edda and the Old Irish saga the Aislinge Oenguso. Hall roots the Western denigration of plant life in Aristotle's hierarchy of living beings and Christianity's subsequent theological reinterpretation of Aristotle, thereby placing it long before the rise of capitalism and modernity. While Aristotelian theology may provide the conceptual framework used to justify this reduction of plant life to material resource, I would argue that the origins of agrarian capitalism in Europe, and colonial plantation systems in the New World during the early modern period, mark the enactment of practices that constitute the instrumentalisation of plant and human life within and beyond 'the West.' It is at this point that plant and human bodies are colonised by Western modernity. Moreover, placing such an emphasis on Aristotelian theology, and only looking to pre-Christian traditions as alternatives, homogenises European culture to that of the elites, ignoring alternative perspectives that co-existed well into the modern period. As I will demonstrate, peasant culture did not necessarily follow the perspective of the church elites nor the feudal lords, and it is important to look at peasant practices that existed alongside peasant beliefs.

In Sweden, in the south west regions of Småland and Halland, and the Northern region of Dalecarlia, there was an extraordinary flourishing of paintings by peasants during the period between approximately 1750 and 1850. These were painting practices that did not rely on patronage or validation from the elites, and therefore give an insight into a peasant perspective. Both regions, although separated by some 500km have much in common in that they both possess relatively poor agricultural land and similar trajectories with regards to land reforms, however for the purpose of this text, I will focus on the paintings of the peasants in south west Sweden. Here, the painting practice can be divided into nine recognisable schools based in different parishes across Halland, Western Småland and South Eastern Småland - they include the Unnaryd school, the Kind school, the Breared school, the Femsjö group, the Ås group, the Knäred school, the Sunnerbo school, the Allbo-Kinnevald school, and the Blekinge painters.⁹³ The imagery in these paintings will allow us to glimpse the

⁹³ Nils-Arvid Bringéus, *Sydsvenska bonadsmålningar. Sydsvenska bonadsmålningar*. Böcker om konst ; 1. Signum, Lund, 1982.

syncretism of this peasant culture, while their materiality and context will position the peasants as agents in a rapidly globalising world.

Paintings by peasants: use and meaning

Passing through Småland in 1749, on his journey to Skåne, Carl Linnaeus, the well-known botanist, noted that “most peasant cottages have a painted tapestry on their main wall, which are here called a bonad, on which the three wise men are depicted, riding to the Virgin Mary and Joseph to make their offerings.”⁹⁴ Linnaeus, of course, developed the binomial nomenclature system that was to become the basis for the modern scientific method for naming and classifying living organisms. It is a system inextricably linked to colonialism as it was, and still is, a supremely effective tool to identify and extract natural resources. Yet Linnaeus’ travels around Sweden, starting with the ‘Expedition to Lapland’ in 1732 - which resulted in the *Flora Lapponica*, containing his first ideas about nomenclature – represented an expansionist *inward* coloniality.⁹⁵ As small, post-imperial country, Sweden could not hope to compete with the colonial empires of other European nations such as Britain and France. As a cameralist, Linnaeus believed that Sweden should develop a strong nation state by restricting foreign imports and either attempting to grow exotic species in Sweden, or replacing them with local substitutes.⁹⁶ The purpose of his journeys around Sweden, therefore, was to identify new plant species of potential economic value for the nation. As such, they not only contain descriptions of plants, but also anthropological observations of the peasants that lived with them and used them. The universal character of Linnaean binomial nomenclature facilitated a centralised gathering of knowledge that cut through the particularity of multiple, local common names.

While Linnaeus’ ethnographic descriptions on his travels were generally limited to ethnobotanical practices, when travelling through his home county of Småland his descriptions of folklore and beliefs are much more varied and extensive – including his entry on the bonad paintings. Nils-Arvid Bringeus

⁹⁴ Linné, *Carl von Linnés skånska resa 1749*. 5th May, 1749, repr. Wahlström & Widstrand, Stockholm, 1977 , 'Bondstugorna hava merendels på främsta väggen en målad tapet, som här kallas bonad, på vilken de tre vise män avskildras, som rida till Jungfru Maria och Josef att offra.' (my translation)

⁹⁵ The role of the figure of the peasant in the inward coloniality of Sweden will be developed further in the third chapter.

⁹⁶ Lisbet Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation*, 3. Print, Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, MA, 2001.

has pointed out that since the peasant paintings in Småland and Halland were generally only displayed at Christmas, and the entry in Linnaeus' diary is dated the 5th of May, it is more likely that this observation arises from his experiences of his home parish of Stenbrohult, in Allbo district, southern Småland.⁹⁷ The paintings had a decidedly ritualistic usage. Just as the early images of peasants by Sebald Beham, and later by Breughel, featured peasants celebrating, so these images painted by peasants served a festive role in their lives. They were kept rolled up in chests for most of the year until they were hung up for the Christmas period, from the night before Christmas eve generally until St Knut's day (13th January). This was called "pinning up Christmas" and was in itself a festive event, an account by one Stig Tornehed from Odensjö describes that "the evening before Christmas eve there was a knock at the door, and when it was opened it was entirely dark and nothing could be seen. But suddenly the rolled painting was thrown in across the floor and a voice shouted: Christmas in! Christmas in! Then father and mother came with treats for the children – apples and nuts, amongst other things – a little foretaste of the big festivity. That's how the paintings were hung up..."⁹⁸

The paintings were specifically made to fit the walls of the cottage and were hung along with decorative woven textiles that covered the beams, transforming the dark, unpainted wooden walls into a dazzlingly bright and colourful space. The south-western Swedish peasant cottages were highly uniform, following the same tightly choreographed spatial arrangement. In the 12th of May 1749 diary entry of his journey to Skåne, Linnaeus gives a lengthy description of these dwellings that he says "follow the oldest of architectural construction."⁹⁹ The cottages had an entrance room, with the main door on the southern side and a door leading off to the side to the main living area, which was lit only by a small skylight on the southern side. Just inside the door to the communal area there was the fireplace, and a cobble stone floor. The entrance proper to central communal living quarters was marked by a non-structural beam stretching between the fireplace and the wall, which Linnaeus calls

⁹⁷ Bringéus, *Sydsvenska bonadsmålningar*.p17

⁹⁸ "Att pinna upp Julen" (my translation). See Bringéus, p 22. Indeed, the word *bonad*, as the paintings are called in Swedish, comes from the old Swedish *bonaðer*, *búna*, which means to prepare, to arrange.

"Kvällen före julafton bankade det på dörren, och när den öppnades, var det alldeles mörkt och ingenting syntes. Men plötsligt slängdes rullen med bonadsmålningar in över golvet och en röst ropade: Jul in! Jul in! Sedan kom far och mor med godsaker till barnen - äpplen och nötter m.m. - en liten försmak av den stora helgen. Så hängdes målningarna upp..." (my translation), quoted in Bringéus, p 23

⁹⁹ Linné, *Carl von Linnés skånska resa 1749*. 12th May, 1749, 'Bondestugorna här neder i Småland vid skånska gränsen äro merendels alla lika efter de aldra äldsta tidens arkitektur uppbyggde' (my translation)

the *kronostång* (crown beam), and which marks the transition from the cobble stone floor to a wooden boarded floor. One could only pass beyond this beam, also known as the *stackarebjälke* (beggar's beam), if invited. Visiting beggars would have to remain in the entrance area, where there would often be a bench, sometimes with a folding table, for them to sit and receive food.¹⁰⁰ The long side walls of the communal living area had in-built beds and benches where the whole family slept. There was generally a small painted wooden cupboard marking the corner where the long northern side wall and the gable wall met. The gable wall, which was opposite the beggar's beam and most visible from the entrance, was the most important wall and was used to display the household's most valuable items. The dining table was located here, and the bench that backed against the gable wall was called *högsätet* (the high seat), the holiest and most honoured position in the cottage. The uniformity of these peasant cottages is to the extent that it is easy to identify the intended hanging locations of the peasant paintings now housed in museums. Their length and shape, including any cut-out area to go around the corner cupboard, indicate if they were meant for one of the long side walls or for the gable wall at the high seat.

¹⁰⁰ Alf Åberg, *När byarna sprängdes*. Natur och kultur, Stockholm, 1979. p87



Figure 2.8 View of the gable wall as seen from the entrance of a typical peasant cottage in South West Sweden showing the 'holy corner' at the back on the left with facsimiles of bonad-wall paintings by Johannes Nilsson. Bollaltebygget, Knäred, Halland.



Figure 2.9 View of an interior of a typical peasant cottage in South West Sweden, looking towards the entrance and kitchen area with the 'beggar's beam' stretching from the fireplace to the wall. Hörsåstugan, Halland's Open Air Museum, Halmstad

Appropriately for the festive period in which these paintings were displayed, themes from everyday life and the bible were selected to reflect the occasion. Particularly important for Christmas was Nativity with the Shepherds and the Three Wise Men, and for a time of year in which many peasant weddings took place due the abundance of food and free time, the wedding at Cana. A closer observation of these paintings reveals how the biblical themes have been interpreted by the peasants in a way which reflected their way of being in the world, which combined Christianity with pre-Christian beliefs, and a daily concern with subsistence agriculture.¹⁰¹ As we shall see, an animistic relationship with the cosmos was not, as Hall implies, entirely eradicated by Christianity.

¹⁰¹ Sigrid Holmwood et al., *Sigrid Holmwood*, ed. Anna Holmström, Makadam förlag, Gothenburg, 2013.



Figure 2.10 Abraham Clemetsson, *The Nativity with Shepherds and the Three Kings*, 1799, egg tempera on linen, (135cm x 370cm), Hallands Konstmuseum, HMO14798

The *Nativity with Shepherds and the Three Kings* by Abraham Clemetsson (1764 - 1841) of the Allbo-Kinnevald school of peasant-painting, painted in 1799, is a good example of a painting that reflects the syncretism of peasant culture (Fig. 2.6). This painting interprets the nativity as a story about fertility—not only of man and God, but also of animals and plants. Above the virgin Mary's head, to the left of the star of Bethlehem, is a representation of the ring of stars that make the Pleiades constellation which marked the beginning and end of the farming year, rising in spring when crops are to be sown and setting in autumn at harvest time. The Pleiades has been found as a motif in Northern European art as far back as the Bronze Age. Additionally, directly below the Baby Jesus, flanked by two shepherds playing trumpets, and under an angel declaring 'Gloria in excelsis Deo,' are two smiling sheep-a-shagging. The apparent transgression to modern eyes of placing shagging sheep so close to the Baby Jesus is made all the more pointed when one considers that they are also located at the high seat, the holiest area of the cottage. These paintings interacted with the architecture of the peasant cottage in a way that underlined the importance of space and place within and outside the image. The composition of Clemetsson's nativity, typical of these peasant-paintings, is designed so that the most important characters, Mary and the Baby Jesus, are located in the 'holy corner' - but this also includes the shepherds and the shagging sheep (see fig. 2.7). In contrast to Beham's shagging peasants, these shagging sheep are being celebrated. In Clemetsson's nativity we can see an interpretation of the biblical event in which the birth of God's son has been reduced to its most base material level of procreation, but which is joyous and triumphant. Indeed, the following exuberant

passage from Bakhtin aptly describes the tone and meaning of the painting, displayed at a time of year when nature had died back and there was a long wait for spring:

The unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and being born) is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects. It is cosmic, it represents the entire material bodily world in all its elements. It is an incarnation of this world at the absolute lower stratum, as the swallowing up and generating principle, as the bodily grave and bosom, as a field which has been sown and in which new shoots are preparing to sprout.¹⁰²



Figure 2.11 Detail of Abraham Clemetsson's Nativity, showing the shagging sheep, Hallands Konstmuseum, HM014798

¹⁰² Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*. p27

The Småland and Halland peasants' version of Christianity was one that included many pre-Christian beliefs and practices that were at odds with the modernising programme of Enlightenment thinking represented by the likes of Linnaeus. Theirs was a world full of other living persons, which included plants, animals and other beings which inhabited the forest, the barn, and the cottage. Extending personhood to beings such as animals and plants is an important counter to the restricted notion of humanity found in the Western modern self, and I will develop this further in the next chapter. Indeed, Bringéus quotes an account of 'pinning up Christmas' from a woman in Lidhult, born 1908, who told that her grandmother used to say that *Julpöjkarna* (the Christmas boys—which we can assume were some kind of invisible supernatural beings) would arrive when the paintings were hung up. When the paintings were taken down on St Knut's day, they would wish the 'boys' farewell and welcome back next year. The paintings were then stored folded in a chest until next year. This practice continued until 1940, showing that in some cases the paintings continued to be used long after they ceased to be painted.¹⁰³

Federici points out that “at the basis of magic was an animistic conception of nature that did not admit to any separation between matter and spirit, and thus imagined the cosmos as a *living organism*, populated by occult forces, where every element was in ‘sympathetic’ relation with the rest.”¹⁰⁴ This conception of an interconnected cosmos was not, however, predicated on anti-Christian beliefs as can be seen from Clemetsson's depiction of the Nativity, but rather a different conception of personhood and the body. As we have seen, for Federici, what was central to the capitalist strategy of appropriation of the peasant body was the creation of a conflict between the body and reason. The genocidal violence of the witchcraft trials was aimed at eradicating alternative ways of life. The fact that the witch hunts targeted women was because many of these non-modern knowledges and practices involved control of their reproductive capacities, such as contraception, midwifery, and healing. These practices stood in the way of capitalist efforts to discipline the peasant—especially female peasants—body to the ends of capitalism. The Småland and Halland peasants conceived of the body very differently to the individualised body that eventually came to be constructed through bourgeois images of the peasant and the savage.

¹⁰³ Bringéus, *Sydsvenska bonadsmålningar*. p24

¹⁰⁴ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*. p141

Jacqueline van Gent's study of the eighteenth-century Swedish witchcraft trials, *Magic Body and the Self* (2009), shows how the magical practices of Swedish peasants persisted despite the Great Witch Hunts of the previous century and formed an important part of their everyday life, and gives us an insight into how peasants experienced the body.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, Sweden never suffered such extensive witch hunts as continental Europe, and those that did occur took place a century or two later. Bengt Ankarloo suggests that this is because the war of independence with Denmark, the Reformation, and later on Thirty Years war occupied the attention of the spiritual and secular powers leaving them little time to pursue witchcraft cases.¹⁰⁶ However, it might also be because there was not the same oppression of the peasant class in Sweden as other European nations. Eva Österberg highlights that what stands out in international comparisons is that the Swedish peasants had parliamentary representation in the political committees set by Gustav I Vasa in 1527 in a system which lasted until 1865. Parliament was formed of four assemblies, representing the nobility, the clergy, the burghers, and the yeomen peasants.¹⁰⁷ This meant that, in contrast to the rest of Europe, Sweden had relatively fewer peasant uprisings as they had channels of negotiation to a high level through the representatives that they sent to parliament.¹⁰⁸

Van Gent focuses on the witchcraft trials at the appellate court and local assizes of Götaland, the geographical area covering the South of Sweden, which includes Småland and Halland. The Swedish legal system was based on an accusatory system, which means that they were centred on witness testimonies rather than conducted through an inquisitorial system.¹⁰⁹ This resulted in detailed records that reveal the variety of popular magical beliefs and practices, told in the words of the peasants themselves. By this time, capital punishment for witchcraft in Sweden was exceedingly rare, with only three death sentences carried out between 1700 and 1779.¹¹⁰ During the first half of the eighteenth century, the trials mainly functioned as a public arena in which the dramas of neighbourly

¹⁰⁵ Gent, *Magic, Body and the Self in Eighteenth-Century Sweden*, Brill, Leiden, 2009.

¹⁰⁶ Bengt Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige*, Ser.1, Rättshistoriskt bibliotek, Institutet för rättshistorisk forskning, Stockholm, 1984.

¹⁰⁷ Landless peasants were not represented directly at parliament but had to rely on the yeoman peasants to represent their interests. Also, important to note, is that Halland was a part of Denmark until 1658, when it was ceded to Sweden through the treaty of Roskilde.

¹⁰⁸ Eva Österberg, *Mentalities and Other Realities: Essays in Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavian History*, Lund University Press, Lund, 1991. p184

¹⁰⁹ Gent, *Magic, Body and the Self in Eighteenth-Century Sweden*.

¹¹⁰ Gent. p55

conflicts were played out. The accusations generally came from fellow members of the peasant community and consisted of *maleficium* (harmful magic), however the crimes were rather mundane - magic rituals and charms were used to inflict illness in humans and animals in the course of trying to secure a marriage proposal, to increase the milk yields of cows at the expense of the neighbour's cows, or to exact revenge. As van Gent points out this daily application of magic reveals very few cases of a presupposed pact with the Devil or flight to the Sabbath. These were features associated with the Great Witch Hunts, which peaked around 1590 – 1630 in most of Europe but were less severe in Sweden and reached their apex later, from 1668-1676.¹¹¹

What these trials reveal is that in contrast to the individualised bourgeois self, which separates mind and body, social conflict was inscribed on the peasant body - "in magic, the body is both matter and meaning."¹¹² Spiking a man's food with period blood in order to make him fall in love could result in him becoming weakened, but equally anger directed at a person over a perceived slight could result in that person becoming gravely ill. The emotions were as material as bodily fluids:

Magical discourse and practice reflected the permeability of the body's borders and the social regulation of exchanges between bodies. Conflicts between neighbours were made visible by misfortune which befell the bodies of people and animals in the households concerned.¹¹³

Van Gent describes the Swedish peasant self as a fundamentally fluid self which combined older notions of personhood, marked by a close relation between humans, animals and the cosmos, in combination with Christian symbols and piety.¹¹⁴ These older Nordic understandings of selfhood include an interplay between *hug*, the inner self, and *hamn*, the physical appearance of the body, or an outer 'skin,' which also conveyed the concept of a social role.¹¹⁵ The *hug*, inner self, was not bounded by the body, and persons with a particularly strong *hug* could transcend their body to affect others with their emotions. Similarly, using magical rituals, one could shape-shift into another's *hamn*,

¹¹¹ Gent. p5

¹¹² Gent. p7

¹¹³ Gent. p89

¹¹⁴ Gent. p59

¹¹⁵ Gent. p73

“going in somebody's skin,” which van Gent points out had a predominately negative moral meaning and was associated with harmful magic.¹¹⁶ Moreover, the Swedish peasants did not restrict these notions of personhood to what Western modernity came to categorise as the human. As the cases of shape-shifting demonstrate, a *hug* was also ascribed to animals and spirits: “all magical practice, whether malevolent or benign was based on the social character of the self, and the social self extended also to animals.”¹¹⁷ Indeed, animals were considered part of the family to the extent that the drying up of a cow's milk was not just considered an attack on the cow's body, but on the body of the whole household.¹¹⁸ We can therefore see why Clemetsson's interpretation of the Nativity extends the celebration of fertility of God, to include that of animals and plants, and how hanging up the paintings for Christmas might involve welcoming other beings into the home at the same time.

As is clear from van Gent's study, during the eighteenth century the Swedish peasants did not share the bourgeois concept of the individualised body that we saw emerging in the disciplining of bodily functions through the image of the peasant. In keeping with Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque bodily principle, the body, and especially bodily fluids such as blood, urine, faeces and milk, were carriers of social meaning, emotion and a permeable personhood - not something to be politely put out of sight. Van Gent asserts that “the Enlightenment postulation of a dichotomous body and psyche was not accepted by the majority of the eighteenth-century Swedish population.”¹¹⁹ She goes on to suggest that even Linnaeus, the epitome of Cartesian Enlightenment thinking, was not completely devoid of popular thinking. Although he ridiculed popular belief in magic as superstition, he believed the healing power of plants stemmed from their divine origin, reflecting an interconnected micro- and macrocosmos.¹²⁰ He also viewed bodily fluids as powerful, having saved his little sister from a feverish illness in 1731 by placing her inside a recently slaughtered sheep's carcass.¹²¹ Nonetheless, during a visit to the appellate court in Jönköping, Småland in 1741, as part of his journey to Öland and Gotland, he made fun of the collection of witchcraft charms and instruments such as black-books, magic knots, a hornpipe which had been used to conjure forth spirits and a rod which was used to milk another

¹¹⁶ Gent. p73

¹¹⁷ Gent. p86

¹¹⁸ Gent. p124

¹¹⁹ Gent. p5

¹²⁰ Gent. p135

¹²¹ Karl Robert Villehad Wikman, ‘Lachesis and Nemesis. Lachesis and Nemesis: Four Chapters on the Human Condition in the Writings of Carl Linnaeus’, Almqvist & Wiksell, Stockholm, 1970. p45

person's cow. He wrote "We blew on the magic hornpipe without devils appearing, and we also used the milking rod to no avail."¹²²

This dismissal of popular beliefs amongst the educated people of Sweden reflects an increasing separation between the elites and the peasant class which became more pronounced during the second half of the eighteenth century. In 1734 there was a reform of the witchcraft laws that now meant that the court had to prove superstition in order for the prosecution to be successful, rather than only *maleficium*, (harmful magic). This resulted in a dramatic increase of non-harmful magic, such as healing, or the reversal of harmful magic, eventually outnumbering the cases of *maleficium*. The plaintiff was increasingly a member of the secular authorities, such as the bailiff, the sheriff, and the local clergy, bringing cases based on village gossip. Van Gent points out that "non-harmful magic such as healing, treasure-finding, and the recovery of lost or stolen goods, did not concern interpersonal conflicts but instead signified conflicts between lay people and the clergy with regard to spiritual authority... In this period the court was less a stage for the playing out of social conflicts within the local community, and more an arena for the expression of conflict between the individual and the early state."¹²³ It is also the period that saw the flourishing of peasants painting in Småland and Halland, and it is worth considering why exactly this might be so.

Why did peasants paint?

The type of paintings made by the peasants of Småland and Halland are believed to have their roots in the medieval and renaissance church and wall paintings that were once widespread around Sweden. The oldest existent paintings in a similar style are a nativity dating from 1630-40 housed in Växjö museum (figure 8) and another nativity dated 1685 from Hackeryd, now in the Nordiska museum in Stockholm.¹²⁴ There was, however, around the mid-eighteenth century a transference between a form of church and decorative painting practiced by professional painters trained in guilds to the peasant-painting that proliferated informally through families and neighbours in Småland and

¹²² Carl von Linné, *Öländska Och Gothländska Resa På Riksens Högloflige Ständers Befallning Förrättad Åhr 1741*, Hos Gottfried Kiesewetter. Stockholm and Upsala 1745. p330, quoted in Wikman p68

¹²³ Gent, *Magic, Body and the Self in Eighteenth-Century Sweden*. p27

¹²⁴ Uno Hernroth, *Sydsvenska bonadsmålare 1750-1850: deras miljö och sociala bakgrund*, Nordiska museet, Stockholm, 1979; Bringéus, *Sydsvenska bonadsmålningar*

Halland. In the case of the painting practiced in Western Småland, centred around Unnaryd, this transmission has been traced to the itinerant church-painter, Anders Sillman (1700 -1747), who was trained in the Kinnekulle area, Västergötland. It is also known that he painted *bonad*-type wall hangings on the side of church-painting, with around ten known to still exist (see figure 2.9). In 1738 he was commissioned to paint the vestibule of the South Unnaryd church, and although there is no record, it is believed that during his stay there Sillman taught Nils Lindberg (1719-88), a soldier based in the village, how to paint wall hangings (see figure 2.10).¹²⁵ From this transference, the practice spread widely in Western Småland and developed into many of the currently known schools and styles. Lindberg himself went on to teach other peasant-painters, including Nils Svensson (1727 – 1802) (figure 2.11), the father of the highly regarded Johannes Nilsson (1757 - 1827) (figures 2.12, 2.13 and 2.14), and is considered the founder of the Unnaryd school of peasant-painting. Nils Svensson and his son, Johannes Nilsson worked together in Gyltige, Breared, until Nilsson eventually developed his own distinctive style, founding the Breared school. He in turn, is known to have taught Anders Pålsson (figure 2.15) and influenced the Femsjö group.¹²⁶ A separate school of peasant-painting formed in south-eastern Småland called the Allbo-Kinnevald school was founded by Clemet Håkansson (1729-95), the father of Abraham Clemetsson (1764-1841) (see figures 2.16 – 2.21). This school also clearly stems from church-painting, although it is unknown which, if any, guild-trained painter might have been involved.

¹²⁵ Hernroth, *Sydsvenska bonadsmålare 1750-1850*. p27. A soldier might not sound like part of a peasant community, but during this time all villagers were required to support a soldier on a *torp* (croft) in case of conscription. The soldier himself, would come from among the landless peasants, so was therefore very much part of the peasant community. Although he did not have any land other than the small area that came with the croft, he had a certain social status because they wore a uniform in church and had their own pew.

¹²⁶ Elisabeth Berglin, *En bonadsmålare och hans värld: Johannes Nilsson i Breared*, Etnologiska institutionen med Folkklivsarkivet, Lunds Universitet, Lund, 2000.



Figure 2.12 Anonymous, *Nativity with Three Wise Men* (ca 1650). Egg tempera on linen (67cm x 330cm). Kulturparken, Småland, M 3974 This is one of the earliest existing paintings made using the same technique and subject matter as South Swedish Peasant painting. Bringeus dates it to the 1630s or 1640s on the basis of the clothes depicted.



Figure 2.13 Anders Sillman, *Nativity with the Three Wise Men, and the Wise and Foolish Virgins*, 1733, egg tempera on linen, Nordiska Museet, NM.0092542 photo: Bertil Wreting



Figure 2.14 Nils Lindberg, *Nativity with the Three Wise Men, and the Wise and Foolish Virgins*, 1775, egg tempera on linen (98cm x 317cm) Nordiska Museet, NM.0053444, photo: Bertil Wreting. The composition is very similar to his teacher Ander Sillman's version of the same motif, but the style is perhaps more graphic and buoyant.



Figure 2.15 Nils Svensson, *Nativity with the Three Wise Men, and the Wise and Foolish Virgins*, 1792, egg tempera on linen (89cm x 322cm) Nordiska Museet, NM.0067946, photo: Bertil Wreting.



Figure 2.16 Johannes Nilsson, *The Nativity with Three Wise Men, and the Wise and Foolish Virgins*, 1820, egg tempera on linen (144cm x 186cm), Nordiska Museet, NM0067956. photo: Bertil Wreting.

Depicting the same motif, and almost the same composition as his predecessors, Johannes Nilsson developed a distinctive and recognisable style. The graphic qualities we saw emerge with Nils Lindberg are emphasised through Nilsson's use of stencils of figures to achieve repetition and patterning. The soft 'clouds' used to fill white space in the paintings by Sillman, Lindberg, and Svensson, have become more defined 'balls,' while the application of paint is thicker and more layered. Johannes Nilsson was one of the few painters who lived entirely from painting and is considered the founder of the Breared school.



Figure 2.17 Johannes Nilsson, *Various Crafts*, 1802 (detail), egg tempera on linen (two parts: 42cm x 138cm and 37cm x 400cm). Nilsson developed other motifs beyond the biblical, depicting scenes related to everyday peasant life such as the crafts, with a painter shown at work decorating a dresser while smoking a pipe. Nordiska Museet, NM.0048061A-B, photo: Bertil Wreting.



Figure 2.18. Johannes Nilsson, *The Farming Year* (detail showing haymaking), ca 1811-15, egg tempera on linen (32cm x 327cm), Hallands Konstmuseum, HM019337. This is a detail of a very long thin painting that depicts the farming in year in seasonal tasks rather than four seasons.



Figure 2.19. Anders Pålsson, *Wedding Procession* (detail), after 1801-before 1849, egg tempera on linen, (69cm x 450cm), Nordiska museet, NM0058191A, photo: Bertil Wreting. Painted wall hangings were used to celebrate weddings, as well as Christmas. Here we can see the influence of Johannes Nilsson in the patterning, and circles used to fill space.



Figure 2.20 Clemet Håkansson, Nativity with three Wise Men, Shepherds and Shagging Sheep, 1780, egg tempera on linen (150cm x 450cm), Nordiska museet, NM0143553, photo: Bertil Wreting. Håkansson is considered the founder of the Allbo-Kinnevald school of peasant painting. Although there is no known transfer of from a trained church painter, the influence of medieval church painting is clearly visible in the palette, the rounded arches, and the animals from the medieval bestiary such as the pelican and the elephant.



Figure 2.21 Abraham Clemetsson, Nativity with Three Wise Men, Shepherds and Shagging Sheep, 1815, egg tempera on linen (160cm x 375cm), Kulturparken Smålands museum, M 1625, photo: Kerstin Petersson. The signature indicates that it was painted by Clemetsson in December, a time of year with little farmwork. It seems that father and son sometimes worked collaboratively, with both signatures found on works even after Håkansson's death. Ingallil Nyström has found that the same stencils were used in works by Håkansson and Clemetsson.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Ingallil Nyström, *Bonadsmåleri under Lupp : Spektroskopiska Analyser Av Färg Och Teknik i Sydsvenska Bonadsmålnings 1700-1870*, Göteborgs universitet, Gothenburg, 2012



Figure 2.22 Left, Clemet Håkansson, Fragment of a painting depicting the shepherds visiting the baby Jesus, with shagging sheep, 1786, egg tempera on linen, (130cm x 60cm), Kulturparken/Smålands museum, M 14832-b; Right, Abraham Clemetsson, detail of figure 2.17. Shagging sheep, as seen earlier, were a particular feature of the Allbo-Kinnevald school, and the nearby Blekinge group.



Figure 2.23 Abraham Clemetsson, The Deer, 1814, egg tempera on linen (88cm x 157cm), Nordiska museet, NM.0094537, photo: Bertil Wretling. This unusual painting depicts farm work and hunting, with a quote from psalm 42 "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God."



Figure 2.24 Clemet Håkansson, 1763, the ascension of Elijah, the majesty of God, St George and the Dragon, egg tempera on linen (174cm x 237cm), Nordiska museet, NM.0016176B, photo: Bertil Wreting.



Figure 2.25 Abraham Clemetsson. Sermon on the mount, the ascension of Elijah, the majesty of God and the Last Supper, 1790, egg tempera on linen (104cm x 190cm), Kulturparken/Smålands museum, M136, photo: Kerstin Petersson. In both this painting and the version by Håkansson, above, the Pleiades constellation which marks the farming year is depicted in the heavens.

It is worth considering that the blossoming of painting amongst the peasants of Småland coincides with the increasing whitewashing of the churches. This was not something that had happened dramatically with the onset of the Reformation, as in England, but was rather a gradual process. As we have seen, the peasant Christianity was syncretistic — it fused pre-Christian, Catholic, and subsequently Lutheran Pietist influences. The village church had long been viewed as belonging to the community, and villagers wanted to make it as rich and beautiful as possible, which was organised by the *sockenstämman*, the parish assembly. The first intrusions of the state onto village life occurred during the sixteenth century, when Gustav Vasa (1496- 1560) broke apart the Catholic church, confiscating treasures from the churches and whitewashing walls. This caused Nils Dacke, the leader of peasant revolt known as the Dacke Feud (1542 - 43), to bitterly complain “it was soon as sweet to walk in a desolate forest as in a church.”¹²⁸

Although the sixteenth century Reformation transferred powers away from the church to the state, it took a long time to change church life in the country churches, and clearly new church paintings were commissioned well into the first half of the eighteenth century. The parish assembly was a robust institution along with the *byalaget* (village community assembly), which organised village relations such as the apportioning of strips for farming. In *När Byarna Sprängdes* (1979), (When the Villages were Blown Apart), Alf Åberg asserts that the parish assembly and the village assembly, with competing and overlapping roles, led to the development of a strong sense of self-governance and collaboration among the Swedish peasants. The village priest functioned as the chairman of the parish assembly, and as the villagers' representative and defender before the authorities and during the seventeenth century the parish assembly was able to reassert its power against the encroachments of the state.

As we have touched upon, however, there was eventually an increasing separation between the elites and the peasant class during the eighteenth century that saw the parish priest instigate more and more court cases against non-harmful magic in order to assert the church's spiritual authority. The village priest was more learned and spent more time in urban centres; he no longer belonged to the peasants but was now considered part of the burgher class.¹²⁹ Van Gent argues that the suppression

¹²⁸ Åberg, *När byarna sprängdes*.p29. “det var snart så ljuvt att gå i en öde skog som i en kyrka” (my translation)

¹²⁹ Åberg. p45

of magical practices during the second half of the eighteenth century was not an isolated issue, but part of a wider net of informal control of the peasantry in which superstition was perceived to be one of their many moral deviations. Echoing the sixteenth century criticisms of the undisciplined peasant class in Germany and the Low Countries, “the Lutheran Church predominantly criticized activities such as drinking, music, and dancing in church, sexual behaviour, and 'superstition'”¹³⁰ Österberg links this to Elias' thesis of the development of self-discipline by the middle classes in *The Civilising Process*.¹³¹ It is under this net of control that we see the proliferation of whitewash in the village churches, with Ödestugu church whitewashed sometime just before 1750, and Hagshult church whitewashed in 1753 – both churches had paintings with formal links to the eventual development of peasant-painting in Småland.¹³² It is perhaps under the decline of church-painting that guild-educated professional painters started to do commissions for painted wall-hangings on the side, but it is also reasonable to suppose that the reason why these paintings took off amongst the peasants of Småland and Halland was partly in response to disappearance of the richly coloured paintings in their churches. If the churches were now as cheerful as walking through a desolate forest, they might have decided to take the colour into their own homes, out of reach from the authorities.

Since the white-washing of the churches took place all over Sweden, this does not entirely explain why Småland and Halland in particular should see such an explosion of peasants painting. To understand this better, we must look to the situation of these peasants in the context of a changing rural social structure and land reforms. Unlike Skåne to the south, and Västergötaland to the north, which are both made up of large expanses of fertile flat land, Småland and east Halland is a poor, rocky, and forested landscape. This has led many scholars to suggest that the practice of painting came out of a need for poorer peasants to supplement their income by painting for the wealthier peasants.¹³³ Uno Hernroth has found that painting was generally a secondary job for the autumn months when there was less farm work, and that most painters did not live from painting alone. Painters were either farmers, soldiers or *torpare* (crofters), and included men and women. They were not particularly high up in the social rankings having a similar social status to musicians who played at

¹³⁰ Gent, *Magic, Body and the Self in Eighteenth-Century Sweden*. p41

¹³¹ Österberg, *Mentalities and Other Realities*, 1991.

¹³² Hernroth, *Sydsvenska bonadsmålare 1750-1850*. p24

¹³³ Berglin, *En bonadsmålare och hans värld*. p21

weddings.¹³⁴ Johannes Nilsson (figures 12- 14), who became a very successful painter was originally a landless farmhand; Anders Pålsson (figure 15), on the other hand, was a landed farmer's son that also did well out of painting; Clemet Håkansson (figures 16 and 20) was described as impoverished, and as we have seen, Nils Lindberg (figure 10) was a soldier.¹³⁵ It is difficult to judge the price commanded for the paintings at the time, and there seems to have been some variety. Hernroth quotes an account of the prices given in 1885 by the by then retired Sunnerbo peasant-painter, Sven Nilsson i Betlehem (1804-1890) (figure 22) in an interview with P.G. Wistrand:

The large gable wall paintings on linen, when one provided the linen oneself, were paid up to 30 daler or 5 crowns in today's money. A full-time farm maid at the time in question, 1820 -30, received not much more in wages.¹³⁶



Figure 2.26 Sven Nilsson i Betlehem, Jacob's dream, Abraham's sacrifice, Joseph's story, Jonas' Sermon on the Mount, after 1824 before 1890, egg tempera on linen, Nordiska museet, NM009195, photo: Bertil Wreting

Elsewhere, in estate inventories paintings are valued at a man's full day wage, and Hernroth writes that although this will have been a conservative estimate, it is unlikely they were worth much more.¹³⁷ On the other hand, in some cases the paintings are valued at around the cost of a heifer or even a bull.¹³⁸ It is clear that given the cost of production, most painters did not make a large income from the activity otherwise there would have been more painters would have been able to live off painting alone. Nonetheless, initially the paintings were expensive enough to be only found in the

¹³⁴ Hernroth, *Sydsvenska bonadsmålare 1750-1850*. p36

¹³⁵ Hernroth. p38

¹³⁶ Hernroth. p42 'De stora gavelbonaderna på väv betalades, då man själv släppte till väven med ända till 30 daler eller i vår mynt 5 kr. En helårspiga vid den ifrågavarande tiden, 1820 - 30 talen, hade knappt mera i penninglön.' (my translation)

¹³⁷ Hernroth. p41

¹³⁸ Bringéus, *Sydsvenska bonadsmålningar*. p38

more well-to-do peasant households and would have functioned as a status symbol within the community.¹³⁹

The linen support would have constituted a large proportion of the cost, and households frequently provided the linen. In order to keep costs down often an old worn-out textile was reused, and it is very common to find repairs in the fabric on the backs of the paintings. Around the turn of the nineteenth century paintings started to be made on paper, which dramatically brought the prices down, enabling poor peasants including the landless crofters to afford paintings. Skeen's paper factory was near to Sunnerbo parish, and the school of painting that developed here is recognisable by the quick, economical style of painting on paper as well as linen.

The Sunnerbo school of painting is believed to have its roots in the work of Per Nilsson (also known as Per i Lusshult) (1741-1820) (figure 23), who was a follower of Nils Lindberg, in Unnaryd (figure 10). Some thirty of his children and grandchildren became painters in Sunnerbo, including his son Nils Persson (1772-1836) (figures 24 and 25), and his daughters Bengta Persdotter (1792-1866), Catarina Persdotter (1785-1851) (figure 26), Johanna Persdotter (also known as Jönsson, 1778-1844) (figure 27).¹⁴⁰ While the earlier paintings on linen would have been painted on commission by itinerant painters, later paintings, especially those on paper, also began to be painted speculatively as can be attested by prices found on the backs. Paintings were taken to markets and sold door to door by travelling salespeople, which Bringéus describes as consisting of a mixture of the painters themselves and intermediaries who bought paintings from the painters for resale.¹⁴¹ He gives an account from Vrå, in Sunnerbo parish where paintings were often made on paper that shows how painters operated both speculatively and by commission:

The old man often went out to sell what his old lady had painted, during which he also took down commissions that were to be delivered the next winter. Apart from bonader one would also take along some other small things such as butter dishes etc., for sale. If there was someone with limited means who wanted to buy

¹³⁹ Berglin, *En bonadsmålare och hans värld*. p20

¹⁴⁰ Sven Lundström et al., *Inzoomning: Bonadsmåleri, Årsbok För Kulturhistoria Och Hembygdsvård i Hallands Län*, Läns museet Halmstad, 2009.

¹⁴¹ Bringéus, *Sydsvenska bonadsmålningar*. p37

something, it would be put on credit until the next time one passed by, or else they would come with the money during winter, between Christmas and spring. One would mostly go out towards Enslöv and Kyibulle parishes in Halland for sales, but all painters had their favourite districts where they had started to visit and would then continue to visit, year after year.¹⁴²



Figure 2.27 Attributed to Per Nilsson (Per i Lasshult), Jonah, Abraham's sacrifice, Bethlehem, Elijah and the angel, 1782, egg tempera on linen, Nordiska museet, NM.0087578, photo: Bertil Wretling



Figure 2.28 Nils Persson, Jesus with the eleven apostles before ascension (detail), 1806, egg tempera on linen (33cm x 425cm), Nordiska Museet, NM.0068005, photo: Bertil Wretling. Nils Persson, was the son of Per Nilsson, and his children also painted, including Sven Nilsson i Betlehem (1809-1897) (see figure 22), Gudmund Nilsson (1809-1897)(see figure 29), and Anna Johanna Nilsson (1814-1851).

¹⁴² Bringéus. p37



Figure 2.29 Nils Persson, Jesus with the eleven apostles before ascension (detail), before 1836, egg tempera on paper (27cm x 231cm), Nordiska museet, NM.0190191, photo: Bertil Wreting. This same motif as above, but painted on paper instead of linen.



Figure 2.30 Catarina Persdotter, The Angel Gabriel appears to Joseph, 1826, egg tempera on linen (17cm x 380cm), Nordiska museet, NM.0053598, photo: Bertil Wreting.



Figure 2.31 Johanna Persdotter, The parable of the great banquet (detail), 1818, egg tempera on paper (42cm x 377cm), Hallands kulturhistoriska museet, VMF000768



Figure 2.32 "Johanna i Myrevad" (Johanna Jönsson?), Gethsemane, Maria and the baby, Jonas, early 19th century, egg tempera on paper (38cm x 245cm), Nordiska museet, M.0228889. Johanna i Myrevad may refer to Johanna Jönsson (1778-1837), also a daughter of Per Nilsson, otherwise, stylistically it is very similar to Bengta Persdotter (1792-1866).



Figure 2.33 Gudmund Nilsson, the ascension of Christ, and other scenes (detail), after 1839 before 1897, egg tempera on paper (52cm x 230cm), Nordiska museet, NM.0073816, photo: Bertil Westring. Gudmund Nilsson was the son of Per Nilsson and painted with a broad range of colours and intense patterning. The acquisition notes by the ethnologist Per Gustaf Wistrand from 1892 state "Such paintings, which were painted in Hyalt., Vrå parish, Småland, were circulated and sold by rag-gatherers and were called by the common people "Hyalta trifles" because of their lack of art."



Figure 2.34 Ingrid Johanna Strömblad, the apostles (detail), 1818, egg tempera on paper, Nordiska museet, NM.0024747A-B, photo: Bertil Wreting. Ingrid Johanna Strömblad (1804-1888) was the daughter of the peasant painter Pernilla Persdotter (1769-1844) who in turn was the daughter of Nils Persson. Ingrid was also a part-owner of Skeens paper factory which provided the paper for the Sunnerbo painters. Her sister Anna Strömblad (1804-188) was also a painter and was known as "Målar Anna" (Painter Anna).



Figure 2.35 Painting by an unknown Sunnerbo painter, the healing of the daughter of the Canaanite woman (detail), 19th century date unknown, egg tempera on paper, Nordiska museet, NM.0266539, photo: Bertil Wreting. The majority of Sunnerbo paintings were unsigned.



Figure 2.36 Painting by unknown Sunnerbo painter, Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem (detail), 19th century date unknown, egg tempera on paper, Nordiska museet, NM.0050826A, photo: Bertil Wretling



Figure 2.37 Unknown Sunnerbo Painter, the whore of Babylon (detail), 1819, egg tempera on paper, (52cm x 244cm), Hallands Konstmuseum, HM007445.



Figure 2.38 Unknown Sunnerbo painter, unknown date in 19th century, *Cocks and flowers*, egg tempera on paper (52cm x 182cm), Hallands konstmuseum, HM003752. Another motif of the Sunnerbo painters was the more decorative “cock painting.” Anna Johanna Nilsson (1814-1897), daughter of Nils Persson was said to have only painted cocks.¹⁴³

Some scholars have described the spread of the paintings across all social classes as going hand in hand with a decline in quality. Elisabeth Berglin cites Sigurd Erixon's division of southern Swedish *bonad*-painting into three distinct periods, the first period which is dominated by the inheritance from the older wall and tapestry painting found in churches, a middle period of innovation as peasants developed new motifs and styles, and a period of degeneration as the paintings became cheaper, quickly executed and more wide-spread.¹⁴⁴ Although I would agree that the peasants certainly innovated and developed the inherited form, I cannot agree that the cheaper paper paintings represent a degradation of style. I find the lively, abstracted, and fluent manner of painting an exciting elaboration of the genre. Certainly, after the advent of modernist painting in the twentieth century, speed would no longer be considered a signifier of a lower quality. One cannot help wondering if this attitude towards the cheaper paintings on paper displayed by past scholars and ethnologists betrays a hierarchy that equates the social status of painter and patron with quality. It is notable, for instance, that although many painters were women, the number of named male painters outnumbers the named female painters. For those women painters whose names are known, the vast majority are from Sunnerbo, the area associated with the cheaper paintings on paper.

Indeed, I would argue that the social spread of these paintings is in fact an indication of why this practice of painting might have developed among the peasants living in precisely these areas of Sweden, and not throughout the country. The period between 1750 – 1850 was a time of increased social stratification in rural Sweden, due to breakthroughs in agrarian capitalism and population

¹⁴³ Lundström et al., *Inzoomning: Bonadsmåleri*. p119

¹⁴⁴ Berglin, *En bonadsmålare och hans värld*. p20

growth. Landed peasants became wealthier as there was an increase in the rural poor.¹⁴⁵ The poor were crofters, small holders or soldiers whose modest cabins were built on the outskirts of the village land, or on land colonised from the forest, and it was the duty of the village to look after and maintain the poor through the *sockenstämman*, often building them dwellings to live in. Although relations between the landed farmers and the crofters were generally good, by the late eighteenth century the crofters and soldiers were no longer allowed to take part in the *byalaget*, village assembly, or the *sockenstämman*, parish assembly and were sometimes required to pay a fee for access to common meadows and pastures.¹⁴⁶ This was also the period that saw the introduction of a series of land reforms which Åberg describes as being responsible for 'blowing apart the villages' and breaking up the collaborative spirit of community life.

The first land reform known as *storskiftet*, the great reform, came in 1757, followed by the *enskiftet* reform in 1807, and finally the *laga skifte* reform in 1827, which continued until 1928. These reforms were aimed at increasing productivity by consolidating land that had been divided up into many narrow parcels under the strip-farming system. Under the strip-farming system, the landed-villagers each received a portion of good and bad land spread around the village terrain.¹⁴⁷ The management of the strips, and the apportioning of fines for encroachment onto neighbouring strips were administered by the *byalaget*, the village assembly, which made decisions communally. It was argued that the proliferation of strips hindered agricultural progress, and that reform was necessary to feed the rising population. Following the series of land reform laws, consolidation of the village land could be carried out at the instigation of one individual farmer, reversing the traditional subordination of the individual to the village assembly. A surveyor would be called, who would apportion the land, giving larger parcels of land to those who received poor soil in recompense.¹⁴⁸ In reality, this was hardly an adequate compensation as a larger parcel of poorer soil required more man hours to work it. Not only was the collaborative community spirit broken by the land reforms, but the physical village was also split apart. Farmers were moved out of the central village and had to build new houses on their isolated plots of land. The bitterness and conflict that this process provoked within

¹⁴⁵ Österberg, *Mentalities and Other Realities*, 1991. p61

¹⁴⁶ Åberg, *När byarna sprängdes*. p84

¹⁴⁷ Gadd, Carl-Johan, *Det Svenska Jordbrukets Historia*, Natur och kultur, Stockholm, 2000.

¹⁴⁸ Åberg, *När byarna sprängdes*.

village communities was devastating. Åberg quotes Sigurd Erixon's account of the reform in the Östergötland village of Kila in 1917:

For over twenty years the yeoman litigated with each other, and the authorities. One farmer lost his mind, and hanged himself. All saw themselves as more or less cheated, many grieved deeply and felt abandoned by the law. In the exodus they had to take both land and house with them, and thus build entirely from scratch. It became too onerous for many, some were also ruined. When the time came to move, one became fully aware of how strong the old ties once were.¹⁴⁹

Despite the socially destructive consequences for village life, the land-reforms have generally been viewed as a necessary evil to feed the increasing population with a rising landless poor. The geographer Ulf Sporrang, however, argues for a more nuanced reading of the land reforms that reflects the diversity of the situation in Sweden. Far from being a block to agricultural progress, strip farming was perfectly capable of feeding the population in certain landscapes. Sporrang asserts the land reforms might well have been beneficial in areas such as Skåne and Östergötland, which followed the medieval feudal tradition of primogeniture, meaning that the eldest son took over the farm, leaving the rest of the family landless. These were also areas with large numbers of noble estates. In parts of Western Sweden and Dalarna however, a very different and much older inheritance system operated, called *realarv*, in which all the children had to share the land, although the boys usually got double. This was based on a variety of strip fields that were changed and merged through inheritance and marriage, creating a 'moving' pattern of land ownership, with fields changing from generation to generation. This pattern of agriculture was able to adequately feed the local population, countering the myth of the inefficiency of strip farming. In his research on Leksand parish, in Dalarna (1734—1820) – the other region of peasants painting in the north – Sporrang, and his co-author Elisabeth Wennersten, found that most of the peasants were landowners and belonged to the same social class. Dalarna was in fact a socially and economically sustainable society, and financially it compared favourably with other parts of the country even though the land was unreformed.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, they

¹⁴⁹ Åberg, p78

¹⁵⁰ Ulf Sporrang and Elisabeth Wennersten, *Leksands Sockenbeskrivning. D. 10, Marken, Gården, Släkten Och Arvet : Om Jordägandet Och Dess Konsekvenser För Människor, Landskap Och Bebyggelse i Tibble Och Ullvi Byar, Leksands Socken 1734-1820*, Kommunen, Leksand, 1995.

argue that land-reforms presented a problem rather than a solution for Dalarna and other areas such as Småland. When the land became permanently drawn on maps as a result of the first reform, *storskiftet*, it was no longer possible to share, merge and change ownership in a fluid manner. It was this that led to increasing land division and fragmentation of the previously working farms, as the strips were less and less of each inheritance.¹⁵¹

As it was, the pattern of land-reforms in Sweden was variable, with most taking place in the flat fertile areas such as Skåne, which also had a large number of tenant farmers working on noble estates. In many areas of Sweden, including Småland and Halland, the original villages remained, and the land was not reformed until much later. It is perhaps the persistence of village community spirit and social relations in the face of the nation-wide threat of land reforms that best explains why peasants that painted should have flourished in the areas that they did. As Elisabeth Berglin points out, the peasant painter Johannes Nilsson's home village of Gyltige remained unchanged during his lifetime and was not reformed until 1861.¹⁵² It also seems that Unnaryd, the centre of the western Småland painting, did not in fact have large numbers of rural poor or such a stratified society. In an interview given to the ethnologist Nils Djurklou in 1874, Lasse i Lassaberg, a villager born in 1808 (figure 35), gave an account of the economic situation in Unnaryd at the beginning of the nineteenth century:

People were generally well, few were in debt [...] Around half of homesteads were inhabited by 3 people (while now there are 7 wretches). There were few crofters, which meant that when the local judge Lemchen came to oversee the demolition of the old church and to organise the budget for building the new church, including specifying the food provision for day workers, it caused him to exclaim: "It's a shame that not even the whole of Unnaryd's congregation has as many crofters as I alone have on my homestead Hinsekind..."

...The poor contribution within Unnaryd parish consisted yearly of 2 sacks of mixed rye and oats, along with 8 riksdaler, from every homestead. With a change of assistant priest in Jälluntofta, the new appointment came from a parish where the

¹⁵¹ Fredrik Bergman and Lars Erik Tobiasson, 'Bilderna Av Skiftet Måste Nyanseras', *Populär Historia*, no. 6, 2003.

¹⁵² Berglin, *En bonadsmålare och hans värld*. p44

poor provision was big. Without finding out about the local situation in which he had arrived, he established regulations for the provision of the poor, which he had divided into 4 categories, so that at his first assembly with the congregation he could hold it up as some kind of proof that he was experienced at taking care of the needy. But what happened? Well, when the poor were supposed to be divided up into their categories it turned out that there were not more than 3 kinds within the congregation, so one category was left empty. The chairman was deflated by the situation.¹⁵³

One thing that comes across in Lasse's account is that he certainly enjoyed seeing authority figures from outside the community being taken down a peg or two. The small number of crofters in Unnaryd is lamented by judge Lemchen because they were seen as a convenient source of day labour, but for Lasse it is a source of pride. The new priest tries to impress the congregation with his experience at looking after the poor but is humiliated to discover that Unnaryd does not have as many as his last parish. Lasse projects a vivid impression of a proud independent community, where people were generally well off. As he attests, the number of landed peasants actually increased during this time as tenant farmers were allowed to buy the land they leased from the crown at a cheap rate. This was part of a larger selling of the crown's land during 1705 – 1805 in order to raise funds for wars, which gave priority to the tenant farmers. In 1700 of all the land in Sweden, 31.5% was owned by yeomen, 35.5% was owned by the crown, and 33% by the nobility. By 1825 land owned by yeomen had risen to 54.5%, the crown land had dropped to 12.5% and tenanted land had remained constant at 33%.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Lasse i Lassaberg Andersson, *Unnarydsborna. Lasses i Lassaberg anteckningar om folklivet i Södra Unnaryd vid 1800-talets början.*, Nordiska Museets handlingar. no. 68., Stockholm, 1967. p78 (my translation)

¹⁵⁴ Alf Åberg, *När byarna sprängdes.* p90-91



Figure 2.39 Lasse i Lassaberg in his bridegroom clothes, 1875, reproduced in *Lasse i Lassaberg Andersson, Unnarydsborna* (1967), photo S. Angel

While there was clearly a social hierarchy operating in Småland and Halland peasant villages, as indicated by the beam beyond which beggars could not pass into the cottage, there was also a strong spirit of social responsibility and cooperation. As we have seen from van Gent's study of witchcraft trials during the eighteenth century, the peasants saw their own bodies as permeable to others and socially inscribed. If Lasse's account of Unnaryd is typical of the other parishes in the area that also painted, it seems that the communities had a greater degree of equality and skepticism of the authorities. I would therefore argue that the spread of the paintings across all social classes in Småland and Halland, rather than representing a decadence, demonstrates a cohesive community that had thus far escaped the ravages of modernisation. This is not to say that the peasants that painted in Småland and Halland were an isolated relic from a former time. The fact the paintings changed and developed into a variety of local schools shows that the peasants were not merely working uncritically within the confines of an inherited tradition.

Österberg argues that since there was parliamentary representation and not as many peasant uprisings in Sweden as in the rest of Europe, we should look to other more peaceful alternatives to revolt that might have been practiced by the peasants, as an adjunct to the established channels to central government. As well as the carnivalesque gestures of vulgar jokes, grotesque ridicule and caustic satire, she also suggests refusal to work, dodging onerous obligations, criminality as a sort of unconscious, vaguely formulated rebellion, silence, apathy, and passivisation as ways of communicating discontent to the authorities.¹⁵⁵ Non-communication can also in itself be a form of resistance, and Österberg elaborates on this point by drawing on the idea of 'eloquent silence' from studies on Amerindians who found themselves in situations of great social uncertainty. I would argue that the Småland peasants' practice of painting can be seen as a similar expression of resistance - not one that aims to communicate directly with the elites, but rather one that confirms and enacts a spirit of community and an interconnected peasant cosmology in the face of the coloniality of Western modernity.

¹⁵⁵ Österberg, *Mentalities and Other Realities*, 1991. p169

The pigments of peasants' painting



Figure 2.40 Pigment grinding stone once used by the Sunnerbo painters Nils Persson and his daughter Anna Johanna Nilsson – the cock painter; muller once used by Henrik Nilsson, Björsgård farm, Asige, collected by the painter Severin Nilsson (both from the collection of Hallands konstmuseum). Brushes made by myself using fur from pine marten, ferret, roedeer, badger, and fox hunted by my cousin, Gustav Carlander. Pigments made by myself from tansy, yarrow, lady's bedstraw, surprise webcap mushrooms, and blood red webcap mushrooms. Part of an installation at an exhibition at Hallands konstmuseum in 2013.

Turning our attention towards the materials with which they painted, we may see how the Småland peasant-painters were physically working at the borderlands between a globalising Western modernity and an independent localism. They were implicated in the patterns of colonialism *within* and *outwith* Europe through the very pigments with which they painted. Up until recently, many scholars that have studied the Småland and Halland *bonad*-paintings have emphasised that the peasants used mostly local materials, reflecting an interpretation which views the practice more as a continuation of old ways than as a specific response to the changing times.¹⁵⁶ However, in the light of recent technical analysis of some paintings, we can see a mixture of pigments that reflect Europe's

¹⁵⁶ A notable exception is Berglin's analysis of Johannes Nilsson's practice which emphasises his development of an individual style, reflecting an awareness of the wider world and the location of his home village on the cross roads of routes between large towns. See Berglin, *En bonadsmålare och hans värld*.

colonialism of Asia and the Americas, technological advances in chemistry, *and* local ecologies and peasant knowledges.

Hernroth primarily looks to the plants used for dyeing textiles, as the most likely source of pigments for the paintings, excluding inorganic pigments such as earths and mineral pigments. He lists candidates from the native dye-plants described by Linnaeus on his various journeys around Sweden such as cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*) for green, squinancywort (*Asperula cynanchica*) for red, and various lichens and mosses. A similar list of materials shows up in an account of the dye-stuffs used in South Unnaryd, from Dean Carl Lindström's 1819 description that claims that the peasants of Unnaryd did not cultivate dye plants, but rather foraged them from the forest. Hernroth does also cite Lasse i Lassaberg's vivid description of Unnaryd housewives' indigo vats, and the terrible stench which Lasse claims he could still smell in his mind, but he places such an emphasis on the home-made nature of these vats and other dye materials that he rather glosses over the fact that the indigo would have been imported from tropical slave plantations. Hernroth accentuates the idea of materials based on isolated local traditions living on in these more old-fashioned communities.¹⁵⁷

Bringéus has a more nuanced approach, and includes both local and nonlocal materials, noting that some painters would travel to Halmstad, the costal port town, to buy pigments that they would then sell on to other painters. He quotes Johannes Visslander, son to the peasant-painter, Katarina Johansdotter (1805 – 1877) from Vrå, Sunnerbo, describing the materials that his mother used:

One made the majority of colours, along with brushes, oneself. The colours used were: *brazilwood, schiet yellow, ordinary red, yellow ochre, red lead, chalk, Cassel brown, lamp black, Prussian blue and ultramarine*. The main ingredients that one used to make colours from scratch were *birch leaves* and *birch bark*. Additionally, one used animal hide glue which one obtained from tanneries.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Hernroth, *Sydsvenska bonadsmålare 1750-1850*.

¹⁵⁸ Bringéus, *Sydsvenska bonadsmålningar*. p27. 'De flesta av sina färger, samt penslar och borstar, gjorde målarna själva åt sig. Färgerna som användes voro: Färnebock, sitthjälb, vanlig rödfärg, gulläker, mönja, krita, kasselbrunt, kimrök, pariserblått och marinblått. De huvusakligaste ingredienserna som man helt tillverkade färger av var björklöv och björknäver. Dessutom användes limläppar, avfall man fick från garverier.' (My translation)

The painter Sven Nilsson (Sven i Betlehem) (figure 2.22), interviewed by P.G. Wistrand in 1885, lists his pigments as including orpiment, an undefined blue colour (probably Prussian blue), brazilwood, red lead, bone black and, if necessary, lamp black.¹⁵⁹

These lists of materials include locally sourced pigments and pigments that would have had to be purchased at an apothecary in a market town. There are long established sources of colour, such as earths and plants, and some of the latest pigments to come out of developments in chemistry, such as Prussian blue (invented in the eighteenth century) and ultramarine (invented 1828). Some plant stuffs would have been found locally, especially birch leaves and bark, and possibly the buckthorn berries and weld used to make schiet yellow — although the latter pigment might have been purchased ready made rather than made into a pigment by the peasants themselves. On the other hand, brazilwood, which was also used by the women of Unnaryd to dye their skirts, came from Central and South America.¹⁶⁰

Ingalill Nyström has been the first researcher to undertake any technical analysis of these Southern Sweden *bonad*-paintings, publishing her results in 2012. Her study confirms that far from being restricted to local materials, the peasants used did indeed use a mixture of local and imported, plant, earth, and synthetic pigments as reflected in the quotes cited by Bringéus — depending on the painter's financial resources. They did not exclusively use dye-plants, nor did they use lichens and mosses as Hernroth suggests, but rather a select few dye plants were deployed for some key colours. This is understandable, since it makes little sense to use a moss or a lichen to make brown, when a more lightfast and opaque earth pigment would serve much better. Plant colours were only used when it was hard to obtain that colour or brightness from a more stable source, when transparent glazing colours were desired, or when it was significantly cheaper. The indigo used for blue came from either European woad, which was the cheapest, or imported tropical indigo, while more well-to-do painters could afford Prussian blue, and later ultramarine blue when it became available. In addition to the duller tones of yellow ochre and orpiment, a bright glazing yellow was made mainly from birch leaves, along with schiet yellow made from buckthorn berries and/or weld. The other key pigment

¹⁵⁹ Nyström, *Bonadsmåleri under Lupp*. p183

¹⁶⁰ Bringéus, *Sydsvenska bonadsmålningar*. p27

used by all the peasant painters was red lead, a cheap to produce metallic pigment with a long history.¹⁶¹

Although there are several references to brazilwood, Nyström's study did not find any confirmed instances of its use, apart from a red lake (that is, a pigment made from a dye) from an unknown source in a painting by the Allbo-Kinnevald painter, Pehr Hörberg.¹⁶² It is important to note however, that Nyström's study was restricted to signed and firmly attributed paintings so that her results could be used to back up future attributions. Given that the majority of *bonad*-paintings are unsigned, and that those that are would be likely to be made by the more successful painters, this might skew her results towards a greater use of modern synthetic colours, and less of the cheaper plant-based pigments. It is clear from her results that the poorer painters used more earth and plant colours even if their own words sometimes implied otherwise — and within the category of plant colours the imported materials were more valuable than those locally sourced. In his sketch book, the Femsjö-group painter Johannes Jönsson (1799-1853) lists with a flourish: Prussian blue, red lead, yellow ochre, brown red, sinoper and the exotic turmeric... however, Nyström's analysis of his paintings has found a considerably more modest and local palette of woad-indigo, birch leaf yellow, red ochre, red lead, and lamp black (figures 2.38 and 2.39).¹⁶³



Figure 2.41 Page listing pigments from Johannes Jönsson's sketch book, Hallands kulturhistoriska museum, VMA 3445, "Färger: Berlin blåt, Rö mönia, Galloker, brunrot, Gurkomeia, Sinob, med många andra"

¹⁶¹ Nyström, *Bonadsmåleri under Lupp*.

¹⁶² A 'lake' is the term for an insoluble pigment made from a dye, generally by precipitating it using alum and potash or soda ash.

¹⁶³ Nyström, *Bonadsmåleri under Lupp*. p169



Figure 2.42 Johannes Jönsson, *Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Death of Absalom, David complaining to God*, 19th century unknown date, egg tempera on linen (98cm x 170cm), Hallands konstmuseum, HMO12910. Found to contain woad-indigo, birch leaf yellow, red ochre, red lead, and lamp black.

Brazilwood, Rasphuis and the Spinnhuis.

As we can see, far from fulfilling a romantic ideal of an 'authentic' tradition, in which the Småland and Halland peasant-painters kept exclusively to a range of local and ancient materials, these painters were as much a part of the global trade of dyestuffs and scientific technological development as the bourgeois painters of their time. New synthetic pigments were highly prized, and exotic plant matter was valued over local plants, as we can see by Johannes Jönsson listing turmeric in his sketch book rather than the birch leaves he actually used. The peasants of Småland and Halland may well have painted as an expression of a self that was social and interconnected with the wider cosmos, but this did not mean that they were not materially connected to the colonialism of Western Europe, both as victims and beneficiaries. Rather, it might be precisely because these peasants sat between two worlds that this painting practice flourished. It is particularly through the case of brazilwood that the colonisation of being within Europe, and outside of Europe comes together and is made manifest.

Brazilwood is a tree, growing in Central and South America, and is in fact what gives the country Brazil its name. The heartwood produces a strong red dye and became a very important import to Europe in the sixteenth century in a devastating example of bioprospecting. A massive felling operation over the proceeding centuries decimated the brazilwood populations, and the failure of replanting efforts, has meant that the tree is now endangered.¹⁶⁴ Meanwhile, in Europe brazilwood was very much implicated in the disciplining of a new proletariat. As Federici has pointed out, the displacement of peasants in the wake of agrarian capitalism meant that many moved to urban centres and became beggars and vagrants. Federici, like Österberg, views petty criminality as a form of resistance. Rather than succumbing to the bondage of wage labour, some chose deliberately to be vagabonds and beggars.¹⁶⁵ In response, the authorities in Amsterdam, set up a new form of prison that used forced labour to discipline and reform these vagrants of rural origin. In 1596 the *rasp-* and *spinnhuis* was established and functioned until 1815. Here, male inmates were set to work rasping brazilwood for the dye and pigment industry, while women were forced to spin and weave textiles.¹⁶⁶

Although the labour was forced, the prisoners did receive a wage. The intention was to discipline the prisoners towards wage-work as a redemption in itself and the focus was on the individual body itself. Foucault writes about the *rasphuis* as one of the major early models of penal detention in which a “strict time-table, a system of prohibitions and obligations, continual supervision, exhortations, religious readings, a whole complex of methods 'to draw towards good' and 'to turn away from evil' held the prisoners in its grip from day to day.”¹⁶⁷ This model was eventually spread to Germany, Denmark, and Sweden. In 1698, the King Karl XII issued a royal charter to establish a *rasp-* and *spinnhus* in Stockholm to deal with the “immoral men and women, who are of healthy limb and not so incapable that they cannot work, but only out of laziness and self-violence turn to begging and under the guise of poverty cover their ignorance and lies.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Cardon, Dominique, *Natural Dyes : Sources, Tradition, Technology and Science*,. Archetype, London, 2007.

¹⁶⁵ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*.

¹⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New Ed edition, Penguin, London, 1991; Hermens, Erma and Wallert, Arie, ‘The Pekstok Papers: Lake Pigments, Prisons and Paint-Mills’, in *Looking Through Paintings: The Study of Painting Techniques and Historical Research*, ed. Hermens, Erma, Archetype, London, 1998.

¹⁶⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. p121

¹⁶⁸ Gunnar Rudstedt, *Långholmen : Spinnhuset Och Fängelset under Två Sekler*, Skrifter Utgivna Av Institutet För Rättshistorisk Forskning, Grundat Av Gustav Och Carin Olin. Serien 1, Rättshistoriskt Bibliotek, 0534-2716 ; 18, Stockholm, 1972. p6

The *rasp-* and *spinnhuis* were meant to be self-sufficient. They therefore entered into arrangements with the dye and textile industries. In Amsterdam members of the dyer's guild would buy the dyewood that was to be rasped, ensuring the quality of the raw product. The dyers would then take rasped brazilwood as they needed it and a bill drawn up at the end of the year, which included the initial price of the wood, plus the wages for the rasping, and other expenses, and an additional tax.¹⁶⁹ Although the brazilwood rasped in the *rasphuis* was generally destined for the textile industry, it seems that some of it was also used for artists' pigments. Erma Hermans and Arie Wallert have examined the Pekstok papers, belonging to a family of painting materials manufacturers active in Amsterdam, which include recipes from making lake pigments from brazilwood. The recipes were likely to have been originally written by Willem Pekstok and date to the seventeenth century, and would therefore have used brazilwood rasped in the *rasphuis*. The pigment was known as *kogel-lak* (ball-lake), as it was shaped into little balls or 'bullets.'¹⁷⁰ Brazilwood has not commonly been found in the technical examination of paintings, but as Hermens and Wallert point out, the relatively small numbers of paintings analysed means one cannot exclude the possibility of brazilwood being extensively used.¹⁷¹ Moreover, it may reflect a division between finer, expensive commissions using cochineal and madder, and cheaper, more decorative applications using less lightfast brazilwood.¹⁷² The Pekstok recipe is certainly for making very large quantities of pigment, indicating that there must have been demand despite it being rarely found in technical examinations of paintings.¹⁷³

From the beginning of the seventeenth century, the *rasphuis* of Amsterdam and Haarlem had a monopoly on the sales of rasped brazilwood in the whole of Holland and Western Friesland, and dyers were forbidden from purchasing any rasped wood from a different source. Around the same time, however, several patents were granted for machines designed to process the dyewoods, on the condition that the machine not be used inside Holland.¹⁷⁴ Hermens and Wallert point out that this would have been difficult to control and dyers would have certainly been attracted to the more

¹⁶⁹ Hermens, Erma and Wallert, Arie, 'The Pekstok Papers: Lake Pigments, Prisons and Paint-Mills'. p278

¹⁷⁰ Hermens, Erma and Wallert, Arie. p275

¹⁷¹ References to both Brazilwood and *kogel-lak* (ball-lake) are in the accounts of the Royal Colour Chamber (Det kongelige Farvekammer) in Copenhagen, which date 1610 – 1626.

¹⁷² Hermens, Erma and Wallert, Arie, 'The Pekstok Papers: Lake Pigments, Prisons and Paint-Mills'. p289

¹⁷³ In fact, the recipe is not exactly a true lake, which would involve the creation of a metallic salt complex using alum and potash or soda ash. This results in aluminium hydroxide in which the colourant – in this case brasilein – has formed a strong bond with the aluminium. This recipe uses chalk rather than potash or soda ash, which would make it less lightfast.

¹⁷⁴ Hermens, Erma and Wallert, Arie, 'The Pekstok Papers: Lake Pigments, Prisons and Paint-Mills'. p279

economically produced machine-milled brazilwood. Moreover, since this process involved milling chopped wood in a windmill, it resulted in a finer ground product than the hand-rasped wood from the rasphuis, from which more colourant could be extracted. Consequently, Hermens and Wallert trace a clear development in the Amsterdam rasphuis from rasping as an important activity in the early years of the institution, towards a greater emphasis on cloth production, until the eventual abolition of rasping in 1766.¹⁷⁵



Figure 2.43 The Amsterdam Rasphuis. From Melchior Fokkens' *Beschrijvinge der wijdt-vermaarde Koop-stadt Amstelredam*, 1662

The Swedish proposal for *rasp-* and *spinnhuis* followed a similar model to that of Amsterdam, with the collaboration of commercial interests in the textile industry seen as a way to make them self-sufficient. The location of another *rasp-* and *spinnhuis* in Norrköping was due to it being another

¹⁷⁵ Hermens, Erma and Wallert, Arie. p280

centre of textile production. The spun wool was badly needed, as the poor pay meant free women were reluctant to undertake the work - or perhaps one should say that manufacturers were not willing to pay properly, and happy to take advantage of forced labour.¹⁷⁶ As it was, the brazilwood rasping aspect of the charter never came to fruition. There was a delay between the issuing of the charter in 1698 and the actual founding of the *rasp-* and *spinnhuis* on Långholmen island in 1724, and by that time nobody knew the large rasps and the logs of brazilwood that had been purchased in 1698 had disappeared.¹⁷⁷

The fact that only *spinnhuis* were set up in Sweden, despite plans for *rasphuis* may well be because by the beginning of the eighteenth century it was no longer economically feasible due to the availability of milled brazilwood. However, Gunnar Rudstedt suggests that it may also have been due to very few of the inmates being men, and of those most of them were young boys or old men who could not work. The protocol for the incarceration of inmates given in 1724 place a far greater emphasis on women saying that “all lazy and unemployed people, as well as all loose women people, who, contrary to the frequent bylaws, run with their basket around the streets and in the houses” should be disciplined in the *spinnhuis*.¹⁷⁸ Anyone without their own property, or a master, without stable employment was to be sent to the *spinnhuis*. This naturally affected women more - as landless peasants moved to the city, there was less respectable work for single or widowed women to find. The reference to the basket was a suggestion that women pretended to sell fruit, when in fact other things were on offer.

The *spinnhuis* in Sweden are representative of what Federici calls the increasing criminalisation of the poor, and the control of women’s sexuality and reproductive capacities.¹⁷⁹ An inspection during the early years of the *spinnhuis* in Stockholm found that inmates were mostly made up of “loose women” that had lost their work, old and fragile beggars, the children of soldiers and sailors that had been caught begging, old wives that through “drunkenness, swearing, and fighting” had frittered away their property and instead survived on “fornication, robbery, and theft,” and lastly, women that had been

¹⁷⁶ Rudstedt, *Långholmen*. p9

¹⁷⁷ Rudstedt. p22

¹⁷⁸ Rudstedt. p14

¹⁷⁹ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*.

condemned to corporal punishment for graver crimes (most likely abortions and child murder).¹⁸⁰ In the 1730s there was also a case of several women from a radical pietist sect, *gråkoltarna* (the grey collars) that had been sent to the *spinnhuis* as part of a crackdown on these religious movements. *Gråkoltarna* believed that God forbade them from working, and they resolutely stuck to their beliefs, refusing to work in the *spinnhuis* despite starvation rations and confinement in the dark.¹⁸¹

By the time the Swedish peasant painters were using brazilwood pigment in their paintings, it would no longer have been made by prisoners rasping brazilwood, but more likely processed in windmills. However, as the *spinnhuis* in Stockholm was active until 1825, landless peasants, especially women, that were drawn to the cities were in danger of ending up in a *spinnhuis*, disciplined through forced labour. The *rasp-* and *spinnhuis* embodies the Europe's inward coloniality, while connecting it to its outward coloniality through brazilwood as a colonial commodity.

The early modern period was a time of upheaval in the wake of the crisis of feudalism, that brought the possibility of more egalitarian futures imagined by peasant-movements, only for them to be crushed using counter-revolutionary tactics such as the Great Witch Hunts, and the *rasp-* and *spinnhuis*. At the same time, the emergence of the image of the peasant as a genre of western European painting is inextricably linked with the beginnings of capitalism, the development of the speculative art market, and the construction of the disciplined bourgeois self. In contrast, paintings by peasants, such as those by the peasants of south west Sweden, demonstrate an alternative concept of the self – permeable and socially inscribed, interconnected with the wider cosmos. I have argued that rather than being a relic from the past, this practice came out of a resistance to the forces of modernity that threatened the cohesion of village community. The pigments themselves demonstrate the complex worlds in which these peasants lived, at once local and ancient, but also new and exotic, connected to colonialism and globalisation. In the next chapter I shall follow these colonial trajectories of plant pigments from the Americas and attempt to learn from Amerindian perspectives on painting, plants, and pigment-making.

¹⁸⁰ Rudstedt, *Långholmen*. p15

¹⁸¹ Rudstedt. p40

Chapter two

From the garden to the plantation, and back again

This chapter picks up from the meeting of the European peasant and the indigenous Amerindian through the materials of painting, by following the trajectories of certain dye-plants uncovered in my practice-based research involving the construction of a pigment garden in Almería, Spain. Building on the last chapter's exploration of the inward coloniality of Western modernity, this chapter addresses its outward coloniality. It serves to elucidate the exploitative relationship towards plant and human life developed through bio-colonialism and the plantation system, which reduced non-Europeans to enslaved labour, and plant life to resources. My practice-based research has determined the historical and theoretical direction of this written thesis. I shall follow the search for blue from woad, one Europe's earliest cash-crops, to the tropical indigo of Central America. In tracing these connections, we shall see that there are also things that remain outside networks - in particular, the indigenous Mesoamerican technology for making a pigment called Mayan blue from indigo. A highly significant pigment, made in a unique way, the knowledge of how to make it seems to have been lost in the early colonial period. Drawing on Londa Schiebinger's concept of colonial 'agnotology' - the study of ignorance - I argue that this indigenous technology was both overlooked by the Spanish, and deliberately concealed by indigenous people.¹⁸² The indigenous perspective on indigo and Mayan blue was so unlike that of the Spaniards, that they could not comprehend the significance of it and made no attempt to learn the technology. It was also a sacred pigment, attached to pre-Columbian practices - as such its significance may have been intentionally withheld. By attempting to retrieve this pigment-making technology for making Mayan blue, which was 'lost' in the wake of colonialism, I hope to demonstrate that it reveals alternative genres of the human, plant-human relationships, and theories of painting. In turn, by connecting this to Viveiros de Castro's characterization of Amerindian perspectivalism, I will suggest a way of expanding painting into its networks, *decolonially*.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2007.

¹⁸³ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics* 1st edition, Univocal Pub, Minneapolis, MN 2014.; Joselit, 'Painting Beside Itself,' *October* 130, October 2009: 125–34.

The construction of the pigment garden in the mountains of the Sierra María los Vélez, in Andalusia, Spain, has allowed me to trace Spain's colonisation of the Americas, and to think through the difference between the peasant garden and the slave plantation. Researching possible plants for a 'peasant-painter's' pigment garden involves encountering many of the same practical issues as have been encountered in the past. In this sense, it is a form of reenactment – something which I develop as a research method in the next chapter. While there are a number of good sources of yellow dye to be found growing locally that have a history of usage - from plants such as *aliaga* (see figure 1.) or *espino de tintes* - sources of good, lightfast reds and blues are more rare. For this reason, the procurement of new sources of dye were historically one of the major motivations of trade and colonialism. During my first visit to the site, it was clear that Spain's colonial history was inscribed onto the very landscape.



Figure 3.44 *Aliaga* growing wild near the site of the garden, and a lake pigment made from it.



Figure 3.45 Pads of prickly pear infected with cochineal collected from near the site of the garden.

In lower elevations, there are an abundance of prickly pear cacti (*Opuntia*), the majority of which are infected with cochineal insects (see figure 2.). This plague has caused considerable distress amongst locals, with regional television advising landowners of their responsibility to wash their cacti with soap and water to prevent their spread. However, there also seems to be a certain amount of amnesia regarding the origins of the cacti which some assume to be native to Spain, rather than originating from Central America. A news report on Canal Sur, broadcast on the 16th September 2013 referred to the cacti as native plants, “typical of the region,” and claimed that the Ancient Egyptians used the cochineal as a dye.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴Manuel Carretero. Periodista Canal Sur RTVA, *Una Plaga Afecta A Las Chumberas De Almeria.Mpg*, 1.29 minutes, 16th September 2013,, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4nLATfSXak>. The journalist appears to be confusing the cochineal with madder, which has famously been found in Ancient Egyptian textiles. Furthermore, cochineal contains the same dye stuff, carminic acid, as kermes – an insect which infects oaks in the Mediterranean region. Kermes was used as a dye until cochineal began to be imported from the Americas. Cochineal contains considerably more carminic acid, and can be harvested several times a year, as opposed to once, as is the case with kermes.

It became clear to me that the use of terms such as ‘native’, ‘non-native’, and ‘invasive’ when it comes to plants, as in other forms of life, is complex. Indeed, in recent years these terms have been debated in the scientific community. Although they have been useful as a method of describing harmful effects on ecosystems, there has also been a recognition that these terms are loaded and do not always accurately describe relations. As a result, there have been increasing calls to use more neutral terms, or terms which solely focus on behaviours rather than on origins.¹⁸⁵ While the prickly pear may only have arrived in Spain after the colonisation of the Americas, they were now naturalised and loved by locals who viewed them as an integral part of the Almerian landscape. Not only are its fruit eaten, but it is also used as windbreaks on the edges of fields and to prevent erosion. Similarly, far from being considered a pest, the cochineal insects, which produce a crimson red dye, were once an extremely lucrative import from Spain’s colonies, second only to silver (see figure 3.). So important was the trade in cochineal, that Spain maintained an embargo on the transportation of the live insects for over 250 years and tightly controlled the production of the dye.¹⁸⁶ In 1572 the post of *Juez de la Grana* (judge of the cochineal) was created in the colony of New Spain, which was a prestigious post that regulated the quality and methods of processing of the cochineal for export to Spain. Later on, in 1580, a decree was issued which forbade ‘negroes and mulattos’ from trading in cochineal, with only the indigenous servants of Spaniards being permitted to engage in the activity. The regulation of cochineal even extended to the consumption of cochineal dyed cloth within Mexico. In 1620, an order of the Audiencia of Nueva Galicia, Diego de Medrano, forbade “female slaves, negroes and mulattoes” from wearing clothes dyed with cochineal, revealing how the colonial matrix of power was expressed through colour.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Laura N. H. Verbrugge, Rob S. E. W. Leuven, and Hub A. E. Zwart, ‘Metaphors in Invasion Biology: Implications for Risk Assessment and Management of Non-Native Species’, *Ethics, Policy & Environment* 19, no. 3, 1 September 2016: 273–84

¹⁸⁶ R. A. Donkin, ‘Spanish Red: An Ethnogeographical Study of Cochineal and the Opuntia Cactus’, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, 67, no. 5, January 1977, : 1–84; Raymond L. Lee, ‘Cochineal Production and Trade in New Spain to 1600’, *The Americas* 4, no. 4, April 1948: 449–473.

¹⁸⁷ Lee, ‘Cochineal Production and Trade in New Spain to 1600’. p462

III. ESTAS SON NUEVAS PLANTAS

tas puestas de las
que se han podado
a n sede poner por di
ciembre y febre
ro para que
con la prima
vera. Rebo
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III.
A QVI SE
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nuevas plantas para que
se crien y mas que se
plantaron. La semi
lla se pone en marzo ya
bril a los arboles bijos
que a los nuevos es bien
no ponerla hasta que
tengan mas edad
de seis meses O



Figure 46.3 Memorial de Don Gonçalo Gomez de Cervantes, *Relación de [lo] que toca la Grana Cochinilla*. circa 1599. Otherwise known as the *Cochineal Treatise*, this manuscript is a report on the silver mining and cochineal production in New Spain. © The Trustees of the British Museum

The choice of plants and pigment-making techniques for the garden are, therefore, an opportunity to highlight these colonial trajectories rather than to construct a cosy fantasy of localism using only so-called 'native' plants. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the peasant painters of Southern Sweden used both locally produced and imported plant pigments. Each of these plants have their own characteristics, stories, and technologies surrounding them that disclose different aspects of the histories of capitalism and colonialism. Cochineal, or rather *nocheztli* as it is called in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, was a highly valued resource in Amerindian societies. It was used as tribute payments from conquered peoples to Moctezuma II prior to the *conquista*. When the Spanish first arrived, they simply took over this system of tributes before developing and regulating the cultivation and trade of cochineal. The story of indigo blue, on the other hand, reveals how the Europeans may have quickly recognised the value of a native botanical resource, yet their Eurocentrism and sense of superiority could lead them to overlook indigenous knowledge and technologies connected with plants.

Woad to xuihqúlitl

Although there are some thirty to forty species of unrelated plants world-wide that contain indigo, before the colonial period in Europe the main source was woad (*Isatis tinctoria*).¹⁸⁸ While indigo in the form of blocks of dry pigment from *Indigofera* plants in the East occasionally found its way to Europe through trade routes, it was a rare and precious commodity. Indeed, there was some confusion as to what it was, mineral or plant. It was not understood that it was chemically the same blue that was extracted from woad, which was the only indigo-containing plant that could be cultivated in Europe. Woad is adaptable to marginal lands and capable of growing in the arid conditions of Andalusia, making it the obvious choice for a blue-producing plant in the garden (see figure 4.).¹⁸⁹ However, beyond these practical considerations, it is also a plant that has played an

¹⁸⁸ Cardon, Dominique, *Natural Dyes*.

¹⁸⁹ Recent genetic analysis shows that woad has wide in-population variation in its genome, indicating that it has never undergone intensive population breeding, leading to its adaptability. See: Giorgia Spataro, Paola Taviani, and Valeria Negri, "Genetic Variation and Population Structure in a Eurasian Collection of *Isatis Tinctoria* L.," *Genetic Resources and Crop Evolution* 54, no. 3 (2006): 573–84.

important role in the development of agrarian capitalism in Europe, and which travelled across the Atlantic with early colonisers.



Figure 3.47 Woad seedlings growing at the garden in Almería

Questions of scale are important when considering the impact of plant cultivation.¹⁹⁰ Woad's adaptability to a wide range of European climates and soils made it suitable for small-scale cultivation back to the Neolithic, and evidence of woad dyed textiles and woad plant remains have been dated to the early iron age (c.700 BC) and have been found in Austria, Germany, and Denmark.¹⁹¹ Ancient Britons were famously described by Roman classical writers, including Julius Caesar, Properitus, Pomponius Mela, and Pliny the Elder, as painting their bodies with woad, as we saw illustrated in

¹⁹⁰ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2015.

¹⁹¹ Cardon, Dominique, *Natural Dyes*.

engravings produced by Theodor de Bry in the previous chapter.¹⁹² Mel Gibson's anachronistic decision to depict the thirteenth century William Wallace wearing woad blue face paint in the film *Braveheart* (1995) demonstrates how in popular culture woad has become associated with 'indigenous Pict' resistance to colonialism, whether Roman, or English. By the middle ages, however, as the textile industry expanded, woad was far from being a colour belonging to tribes on the periphery of Europe, but rather had become an important cash crop. The biggest centre of production was in France, in Normandy, Picardy, and Languedoc, but other important woad producing areas were the three hundred villages surrounding the five *Waidstädte* (woadtowns) in Thuringia in Germany, and Tuscany, Lombardy, and Piedmont in Italy.¹⁹³ Networks of trade stretched across Europe, and woad merchants displayed their wealth with opulent houses. Luther complained about the greed of the peasants, who in addition to using the majority of their grain to brew beer instead of make bread, also used arable land for woad, which is an exhaustive plant and has the tendency to impoverish the soil if grown many years in succession:

...the farmers in noble Thuringia, where the land is very fertile, have learned the rascality of growing woad where good and noble grain used to be cultivated, and this has so burned and exhausted the soil that it is beyond all reason.¹⁹⁴

In the sixteenth century the cultivation of woad began to spread to other regions of Western Europe outside of these woad centres, as it began to be seen as a lucrative alternative crop.¹⁹⁵ Indeed, Woad was so attractive as a cash crop that the mythical 'Land of Cockaigne', the peasant fantasy of the land of plenty, is believed to get its name from the French for woad balls, *cocagne*.¹⁹⁶ Interestingly, an often overlooked detail of Brueghel's famous painting of *The Land of Cockaigne* is a prickly pear cactus - the host for cochineal. The green verdigris with which it was painted has turned brown with age, and it sits on the right edge of the composition, but an engraving after the painting attributed to Pieter Van Der Heyden clearly depicts its spines so there is little doubt in its identification (see figure

¹⁹² Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo*, British Museum Press, London, 1998. It is worth noting that some contemporary historians are doubtful about the accuracy of this description, with some thinking it may be a mistranslation of the latin.

¹⁹³ Balfour-Paul.

¹⁹⁴ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*. Concordia, Saint Louis, 1955., 54:132

¹⁹⁵ Joan Thirsk, *Alternative Agriculture: A History: From the Black Death to the Present Day*, OUP, Oxford, 1997.

¹⁹⁶ John Edmonds, *The History of Woad and the Medieval Woad Vat*, Lulu.com, Morrisville, NC, 2006.

5.). It is certainly a strange plant to be depicted in a Flemish peasant scene, given it cannot possibly be cultivated there. While the title of the painting in Flemish is *Het Luilekkerland* (the lazy-luscious land), it is possible that Bruegel was aware of the French word *cocagne*, or the Italian, *cuccagna* and its potential connection to woad. Nonetheless, even if we cannot know if Bruegel was commenting on the connection between woad as a commodity crop and the wealth of the Land of Cockaigne, by depicting a prickly pear cactus, Bruegel certainly seems to be making reference to the Americas as a land of plenty, and a source of new pigments and dyes for painting. As we shall see, the mass appropriation of land and labour under the *encomienda* system in the Americas also presented an opportunity for the Spanish Empire to attempt to enter the woad market on a larger scale.¹⁹⁷



Figure 3.48 Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Land of Cockaigne* (1567). The prickly pear cactus is on the right of the painting and would have originally been green but has turned brown due to the discolouration of verdigris. The detail from an engraving attributed to Pieter van der Hayden, a made shortly after the painting's completion (right), supports my argument that it is indeed a prickly pear cactus.

In 1535 an *asiento* was granted by Charles V of Spain to a group of entrepreneurs to found woad plantations in the area around Jalapa, Vera Cruz in New Spain, under the *encomienda* system.¹⁹⁸ The *encomenderos* benefitted from forced labour from the local indigenous population, and a monopoly in the trade to Spain, in return for a percentage cut of the eventual profits accruing to the King.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷The *encomienda* system was a legal apparatus by which the Spanish crown distributed indigenous people as 'wards' of grant holders called *encomenderos*, but were in reality treated as enslaved labour.

¹⁹⁸ An *asiento* was a trading contract which granted a monopoly over a given product or route.

¹⁹⁹ Jean-Pierre Berthe, 'El Cultivo Del "Pastel" En Nueva España', *Historia Mexicana* 9, no. 3, January 1960: 340–67.

The choice of location Vera Cruz was governed by the desire to be close to the ports and with easy access to Europe. However, the local climate was highly unsuited for the production of woad and the project was beset by problems. While the *encomenderos* blamed the epidemic of 1545 for drastically reducing the labour force of the indigenous population, and the local monasteries for taking the little labour that remained, a more convincing explanation, according to Jean Pierre Berthe's study of the accounts, is that the woad was simply not of good enough quality to compete with the woad from prime cultivation areas such as Languedoc. The very humid climate in Vera Cruz resulted in inferior woad balls and much of the stock remained unsold.²⁰⁰

It was not until 1561 that the viceroy Martín Enríquez reported to the King that a native indigo had been 'discovered,' *añil* in Spanish, *xuihqúilitl* in Náhuatl, the language of the Aztecs.²⁰¹ This plant produced a much finer indigo than that of woad. The king accordingly granted an *asiento* to Pedro Ledesma, the apparent discoverer, giving him a monopoly on the cultivation and trade in indigo from New Spain. The demand from Europe for this new indigo was so high that Ledesma's *asiento* was dissolved in 1572 so that the production of indigo could be expanded.²⁰² Thus, Spain succeeded in introducing a new source of indigo blue to Europe. Plantations of *xuihqúilitl* - which is classified according to plant taxonomy as *Indigofera suffruticosa*, a close relative of Indian indigo, *Indigofera tinctoria* - eventually spread to French and British colonies in the West Indies and up to South Carolina. Much has been made of the threat that Indian indigo posed to European woad cultivation as more began to make its way to Europe in large quantities - first via Portuguese traders and the Cape route, and later through the Dutch and English East India Companies - however the indigo coming from the Americas was the first to be produced under the radical change of scale and labour relations that was the plantation system.

These indigo plantations enacted the violence of the colonial racialisation and the construction of hierarchies according to skin colour.²⁰³ The colonial processing of indigo entailed an increase in capacity from small-scale indigenous production. Instead of aerating smaller sized indigo vats with

²⁰⁰ While woad cultivation was unsuccessful in Central America, it is so adapted to the North American climate that it is now classed as a noxious weed in Utah and Colorado.

²⁰¹ To use another colonial tool of classification, its latin binomial name is *Indigofera suffruticosa*

²⁰² Berthe, 'El Cultivo Del "Pastel" En Nueva España'.

²⁰³ Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

paddles, the indigenous labourers, were required to physically get into the large tanks and aerate the bath by stamping up and down. The skin lesions that the exposure to the vats produced caused them to be known as the 'devil's vats', and it was reported that the workers were falling ill - leading even to death. This provoked a series of labour laws, prohibiting the use of the indigenous workers in the vats. Although many *encomenderos* found ways of inducing them to work 'voluntarily' in spite of the restrictions—such as by selling them overpriced textiles meaning that they had to pay off their debts through work – ultimately other sources of labour had to be found.²⁰⁴ Consequently, as Manuel Rubio Sánchez points out, while on the one hand this meant that indigo cultivation contributed to the development of laws protecting the indigenous population, it was also an important factor in the proliferation of enslaved Africans in Central America.²⁰⁵

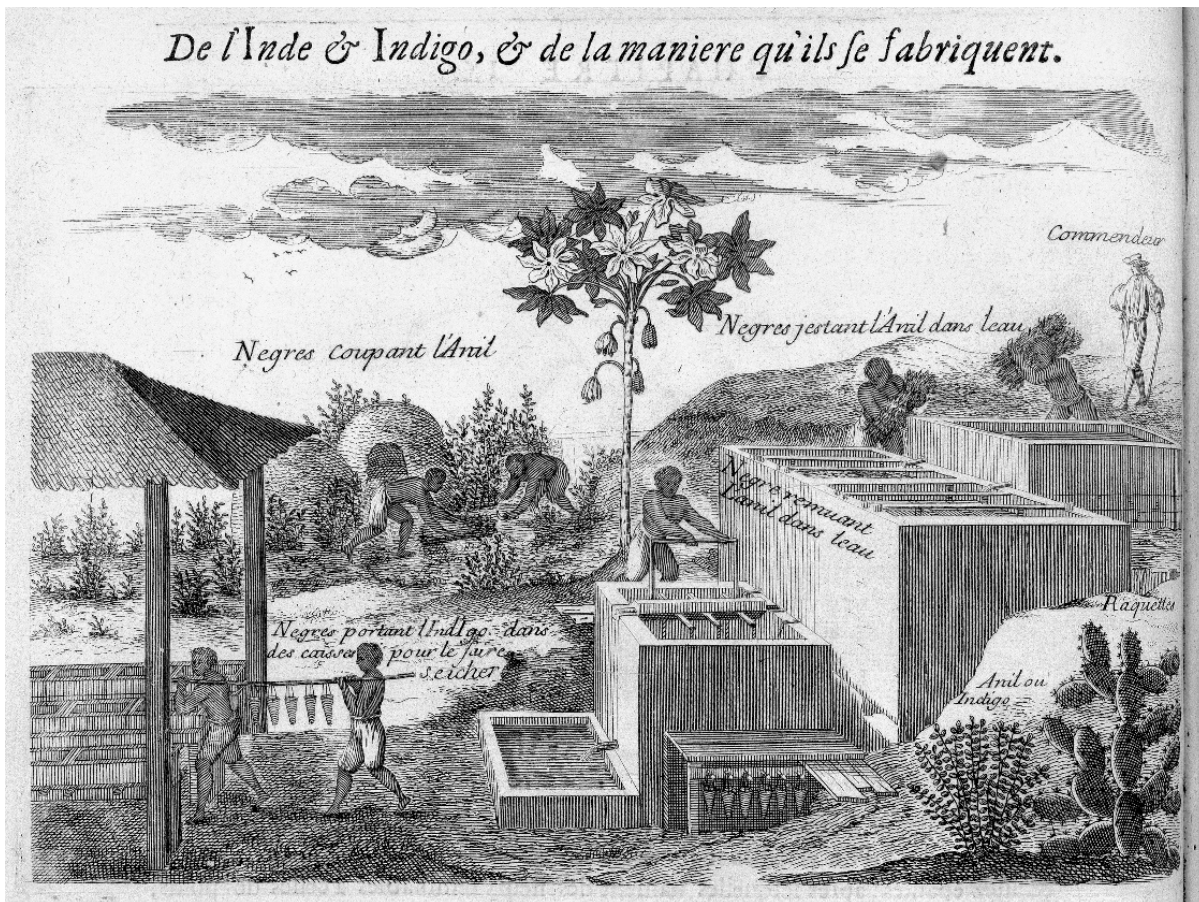


Figure 3.49 Indigo production using enslaved labour in the West Indies or Central America. Illustration from *A Compleat History of Drugs* by P Pommet (1725). In the bottom right you can see the indigo (añil) plant, and a prickly pear with cochineal.

²⁰⁴ Manuel Rubio Sánchez, *Historia del añil o xiquilite en Centro América*, Ministerio de Educación, Dirección de Publicaciones, El Salvador, 1976.

²⁰⁵ Rubio Sánchez.

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing sees the large-scale colonial plantations as models for future industrialisation and the creation of factories and abstract labour. The use of an imported isolated labour force made them easier to alienate and control, as they were removed from their social networks.²⁰⁶ Silvia Wynter argues that the plantation system, which began with the forced labour of Amerindians under the *encomienda* system and progressed to the dehumanisation and reduction of multi-tribal Africans into commodities as slaves, is the basis of the hegemony of the Western bourgeoisie and of capitalism. She contends that the later large-scale dehumanisation of the European working class was preceded by the negation of the black as human, and that for the white proletariat to properly understand itself as a proletariat, rather than 'white', it should "see its own struggles in every slave revolt."²⁰⁷

Wynter sees resistance not only in the slave rebellions but also in their cultural re-invention. Enslaved workers in the Caribbean were often given 'provision ground,' small plots on which they could cultivate food for their own subsistence. These small plots offered a completely different relationship to plants and the earth, which stood in contrast to the alienation of the large plantations. Here, as Wynter says, "his relationship with the land remained that of the peasant."²⁰⁸ Indeed, while she identifies a process of the reduction of the value of 'native' labour, as opposed to 'free, skilled' labour, within the capitalist system, the process of 'nativisation' was also an opportunity for cultural renewal:

The slave, in relation to his provision ground, was a farmer to farmers everywhere, "plants are as important as people." To a native farmer every plant, wild or cultivated has a name or use. This naming, this classifying of the biological environment in the new condition of their exile, centered about the cultural traditions related to the growing of yams in Africa and were now transferred to Jamaica.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*.

²⁰⁷ Sylvia Wynter, 'Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World', manuscript, circa 1970, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York. p137

²⁰⁸ Wynter. p51

²⁰⁹ Wynter. p89

Here the Yam Festivals of Africa could be continued and adapted, and knowledge of new medicinal and edible plants, learned from Amerindians, expanded and incorporated into a new cultural inheritance - a “religious concept of the earth as the base of the community” rather than the private property of individuals.²¹⁰

As we saw in the previous chapter, the peasant worldview also offers an alternative conception of the self. In the case of the Swedish peasants who painted, it was a body that was permeable and socially inscribed, rather than the individualised, disciplined bourgeois subject. In the New World, this land that they had been brought to was a source of deep ambivalence for the enslaved, at once the site of the brutal and alienating plantation, but also the provider of the peasant plot - their area of escape that, in Wynter’s reading, offered an alternative world view to that of the dehumanised and routinised labour of the plantation.²¹¹

At the same time, as enslaved African bodies were reduced to pure labour power by the plantation system, their knowledge was appropriated by the white planters. Many of the enslaved included the Yoruba of Benin, the Manding of Mali, and the Hausa of Kano, who were (and are) experts in indigo-extraction and dyeing, using indigo-bearing plants found in Africa such as other species of *indigofera* and the shrub *elu-aja* (*Lonchocarpus cyanescens*). Andrea Feeser argues that the colonial indigo production processes owe much to African expertise, yet even today, as scholars rely on the written observations of white planters rather than the practical experience of the enslaved, their knowledge and skill continues to be overlooked in their reduction to pure labour.²¹² Wynter points out that part of the capitalist extractive tactic was to reduce enslaved labour and ‘native’ labour to ‘unskilled’ labour in the colonies involved in the production of raw materials, while ‘white’ skilled labour in the factories of Europe refined and finished these materials. This became especially pronounced after emancipation in the southern states of the US, as formerly enslaved workers were not allowed to compete for work in highly skilled, or better paid, areas of work under Jim Crow laws after reconstruction.²¹³

²¹⁰ Wynter. p72

²¹¹ Wynter.

²¹² Feeser, *Red, White, and Black Make Blue: Indigo in the Fabric of Colonial South Carolina Life*, University of Georgia Press, Athens, GA, 2013.

²¹³ Wynter, ‘Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World’.

Yet without the enslaved Africans' knowledge and skills around indigo extraction the plantations could not have been successful. Evidence of West African traditions around indigo can be found in Winti, an Afro-Surinamese religion that developed out of the syncretisation of religious practices of enslaved Akan and Fon peoples. Babies were washed in baths containing indigo, as well as other ingredients such as sesame-seeds, corns of Guinea-pepper, seven pieces of chalk, seven pieces of unrefined salt, a plant called sneki-wirwiri (snake-plant) and copper coins, in order to ward off the evil eye.²¹⁴ Since the disappearance of indigo plantations, Reckitt's laundry blue is used instead - a commercial colourant used to optically brighten white laundry, which has been made from indigo in the past, but these days is generally a synthetic ultramarine.²¹⁵ West African traditions of using indigo to ward off evil are also found in the Gullah practice of painting porches "haint blue" in the Southern United States, a colour that was originally made from the indigo grown in the plantations of South Carolina. Somewhat ironically, the use of blue paint on porch ceilings has now spread to the well-to-do homes that would have belonged to plantation owners.²¹⁶

British textile artist, Lucille Junkere, is currently undertaking a Leverhulme fellowship in Jamaica, researching the colonial legacies of indigo on the island. Here the colonial authorities banned the practice of African spiritual religions, recognising it for what Wynter says it was - a resistance to enslavement and a method of organising rebellions. Junkere was shocked to discover that the ban has never been repealed, and consequently identifying with African heritage and the history of slavery is viewed negatively. Nonetheless, many African spiritual practices survived camouflaged as Christianity. She is visiting old plantation sites and collecting indigo plants she finds growing wild there, for identification and cultivation on an organic farm. In turn, she is running workshops for the local community in Yoruba indigo dye methods that she learnt on a research trip to Nigeria. Junkere is

²¹⁴ Charles J. Wooding, 'Traditional Healing and Medicine in Winti: A Sociological Interpretation', *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 9, no. 3, 1979: 35–40; Tinde van Andel et al., 'What Makes a Plant Magical? Symbolism and Sacred Herbs in Afro-Surinamese Winti Rituals', in *African Ethnobotany in the Americas*, ed. Robert Voeks and John Rashford, : Springer, New York, 2013, 247–84.

²¹⁵ Sofie Ruysschaert et al., 'Bathe the Baby to Make It Strong and Healthy: Plant Use and Child Care among Saramaccan Maroons in Suriname', *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 121, no. 1, 12 January 2009: 148–70.

²¹⁶ Shoshi Parks, 'What the Color "Haint Blue" Means to the Descendants of Enslaved Africans', *Atlas Obscura*, 14 January 2020, <http://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/what-haint-blue-means-to-descendants-enslaved-africans>.

thereby hoping to restore a sense of pride and connection to the Yoruba knowledge and expertise in indigo technologies, while acknowledging the extreme suffering that took place on the plantations.²¹⁷

My own research has been sparked by the task of constructing a pigment garden in Andalusia, in a landscape that signals the Spanish colonisation of the Americas through the presence of prickly pear cacti and their cochineal. As such, the need for blue has involved connecting the history of woad as a European cash crop to the so-called ‘discovery’ of a new source of tropical indigo in Central America and the horrors of the plantation system. I am therefore interested to discover what indigenous knowledges of indigo were silenced by the Spanish colonisation of Central America. Given that the Swedish Peasant-paintings discussed in the previous chapter reflect an alternative conception of the body, the self, and our relationship with the world to that of the individualised bourgeois subject, what other kinds of ways-of-being-in-the-world are revealed in the way indigo was used in Amerindian painting?

Mayan blue

To turn from the plantation back to the garden, I attempt to retrieve the indigenous perspective on indigo— or to use the Mayan word, *ch’oj* —and the remarkable pigment the Mesoamericans made from it. Mayan blue is a bright turquoise pigment, which is outstandingly stable, made from indigo by a process unique to Mesoamerican Amerindians. It is believed to have been invented around 600-700 CE by the Mayans and was eventually used across Mesoamerica by other indigenous groups such as the Aztecs and the Mixtecs. However, the practice of making the pigment seems to have been lost during the colonial period.²¹⁸ It seems that although the Spanish took an interest in exploiting *ch’oj*, they were not aware of the process of making Mayan blue. As I mentioned earlier, this may be an example of what Londa Schiebinger terms agnotology, an unintentional cultural ignorance resulting from radically different value systems that prevents the transfer of knowledge. Schiebinger argues that studying ignorance is as important as studying knowledge, as it is often the outcome of a political or cultural struggle. She views the knowledge or ignorance of plants, in particular are often

²¹⁷ Lucille Junkere, Interview, telephone, 18 May 2020.

²¹⁸ Constantino Reyes-Valerio, *De Bonampak al Templo Mayor: el azul maya en Mesoamérica*, Siglo XXI, Mexico, 1993.

overlooked in grand historical narratives yet are often entangled in high-stakes politics.²¹⁹ Mayan blue may have been overlooked by the Spanish because they could not appreciate the significance of the pigment, it did not fit into their ideas about colours. It could be that it did not occur to them that this indigenous technology could be in any way superior to European methods of pigment-making. Alternatively, it could be that the process was intentionally concealed by the indigenous people because it had a sacred meaning. Indeed, it is possible that this colonial agnotology played into the hands of the colonised, allowing them to simply not offer information for which they had not been asked.



Figure 3.50 Blue-painted sacrifices. Film stills from *Apocalypto* (2006) showing indigenous sacrificial victims daubed in Maya blue, and *Braveheart* (1995) showing William Wallace, who ends up hanged, drawn, and quartered, painted with woad. Arguably these are contemporary and anachronistic versions of John White and Theodor De Bry's comparisons between Amerindians and Picts seen in the previous chapter.

The Spanish certainly did witness Mayan blue being used in a sacred context. In his *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán* (Description of Yucatan) (1562), Fray Diego de Landa - who was responsible for the destruction of thousands of Mayan codices - described various festivals in which human sacrificial victims, objects and houses were all painted with the same blue colour as the priests' holy books.²²⁰ De Landa's descriptions are evidently the inspiration for the scenes of blue-painted sacrificial offerings graphically depicted in Mel Gibson's *Apocalypto* (2006), which came out a decade after woad-painted *Braveheart* (figure 7). While the historical accuracy of *Apocalypto* - and its overall intentions - have been criticised, de Landa's description has been corroborated by archaeological finds at Chichén Itzá, Yucatán. When the sacred *cenote* (a natural well formed by a sinkhole) was dredged at the beginning

²¹⁹ Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*.

²²⁰ Diego de Landa, *Yucatan Before and After the Conquest*. Courier Corporation, North Chelmsford, MA, 2012. p 48-49; 72;75

of the twentieth century, a fourteen-foot-thick layer of blue sediment was found from the painted sacrifices thrown into the water in honour of the rain god Chaac.²²¹ These finds from Chichén Itzá, and other sites, include balls of copal and an incense burner covered with flecks of Mayan blue pigment (see figure 8). Copal, the resin from the copal tree, is viewed as the foodstuff of the Gods by contemporary Mayans, which they imbibe by inhaling the smoke as it burns. Copal also burns with a long sustained heat necessary for the production of Mayan blue, therefore it has been theorised that these finds indicate not only the ritual usage of Maya blue, but also its ritual fabrication.²²² Indeed, the sacred connotations of Mayan blue are further indicated by its continued use in early Indo-Christian art of the sixteenth century before its mysterious disappearance, such as the cycles of the Apocalypse painted in 1562 by the indigenous painter Juan Gerson for the Franciscan church of Tecamachalo, Puebla,²²³ and, in all likelihood, the renowned Virgin of Guadalupe, as we shall see later.²²⁴



Figure 3.51 A Maya three-footed pottery bowl dating from about 1400 A.D, dredged from the sacred cenote at Chichen Itzá. It contains copal and traces of indigo and palygorskite, Field Museum, Chicago; and murals with Maya blue at Bonampak, 790 C.E., Chiapas, photo Arian Zwegers.

²²¹ Dean E. Arnold et al., 'The First Direct Evidence for the Production of Maya Blue: Rediscovery of a Technology', *Antiquity* 82, no. 315, March 2008: 151–164.

²²² Arnold et al.

²²³ Reyes-Valerio, *De Bonampak al Templo Mayor*.

²²⁴ Clara Bargellini, 'The Colors of the Virgin of Guadalupe', in *Colors Between Two Worlds: The Florentine Codex of Bernardino de Sahagún*, ed. Joseph Connors and Gerhard Wolf, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Max-Planck-Institut, Villa I Tatti, Florence, 2011, 3–26.

Mayan blue has been through a process of retrieval by techno-science during the twentieth century, since it was first identified in the finds at Chichén Itzá in 1931.²²⁵ Analysis by X-ray diffraction in 1957 determined the presence of a clay called palygorskite, while further research during the late 50's suggested that an organic compound might be responsible for the blue colour.²²⁶ It was only in 1966 that a sample similar to Mayan blue was reproduced by H. Van Olphen by mixing a synthetic indigo, in the form of indoxyl acetate in an alkali solution, with palygorskite clay and then roasting the mixture at 105 - 150°C.²²⁷ However, it took until the 1990s for the Mexican scholar Constantino Reyes-Valerio to recreate something closer to the original indigenous method using the fresh leaves of *ch'oj*.²²⁸ In more recent years there has been considerable excitement in the scientific community to better understand the nanotechnology responsible for making such a unique hybrid between an organic and inorganic compounds.²²⁹ All this published research, in combination with local knowledge, has ultimately enabled the Mayan artist and teacher, Luis Manuel May Ku to finally return the practice of making Mayan blue back to the Mayans, making his first batch of pigment from locally cultivated *ch'oj* and locally sourced clay in November 2019. I shall look more closely at the remarkable story of Maestro May Ku's work further on in this thesis, but first I shall focus on the evidence for Mayan blue in the early colonial period and how it escaped the attention of the Spanish colonisers.

In his attempt to reconstruct the indigenous method for making Mayan blue in the 1990s, Reyes-Valerio looked to 16th century early colonial documents, in order to reconstruct the indigenous method for making Mayan blue. These included Francisco Hernández' *Four books on the nature and virtues of plants and animals for medicinal purposes in New Spain* (1615) and Fray Bernardino Sahagún's *General History of the Things of New Spain* (1575-77), otherwise known as the Florentine Codex. Hernández was the Spanish court physician, sent by King Phillip II to New Spain in 1570 in order to study the medicinal plants and animals used by the indigenous people – an early instance of

²²⁵ Antonio Doménech-Carbó et al., "'Maya Chemistry' of Organic-Inorganic Hybrid Materials: Isomerization, Cyclization and Redox Tuning of Organic Dyes Attached to Porous Silicates', *RSC Advances* 3, no. 43, 2013: 20099.

²²⁶ G.W. Brindley, *Index to the X-Ray Powder Data File (Minerals Section)*. American Society for Testing Materials, Philadelphia, 1957; Rutherford J. Gettens, 'Maya Blue: An Unsolved Problem in Ancient Pigments', *American Antiquity* 27, no. 4, 1962: 557-64.

²²⁷ H. van Olphen, 'Maya Blue: A Clay-Organic Pigment?', *Science*, New Series, 154, no. 3749, November 1966: 645-46.

²²⁸ Reyes-Valerio, *De Bonampak al Templo Mayor*.

²²⁹ Doménech-Carbó et al., "'Maya Chemistry' of Organic-Inorganic Hybrid Materials'; Antonio Doménech-Carbó et al., 'Isomerization and Redox Tuning in "Maya Yellow" Hybrids from Flavonoid Dyes plus Palygorskite and Kaolinite Clays', *Microporous and Mesoporous Materials* 194, August 2014: 135-45

imperial bioprospecting. His account of the extraction of blue from *ch'oj* is relatively detailed and includes what seems to be the roasting process. He describes the indigo pigment being strained through hemp bags and then formed into 'tortillas' that are hardened by being roasted on plates or pots over the fire.²³⁰ He then goes on to say that he believes this plant could be cultivated in Spain, especially in hot areas such as Andalusia, or other coastal regions.²³¹ Hernández does not, however, mention the addition of clay at any point and it is possible that the cakes were made of pure indigo and that the roasting process merely to dry them out. Certainly, indigo that has been combined with palygorskite clay cannot be used for dyeing, and a large part of indigo production must have been for textile dyeing as much as pigment making. Hernández mentions its use as a medicine, but also to dye hair black, so it might be that he did not witness the manufacture of Mayan blue at all. The Spanish text of the Florentine codex offers even less information, saying only that a 'juice' is squeezed from the leaves and left to settle and dry in pots.²³²

Unfortunately, the conjecture Reyes-Valerio used to reconstruct the method for making Mayan blue reveals the persistence of Western-centric notions of knowledge and progress. Due to the lack of textual evidence, rather than entertaining the thought that information was intentionally withheld by the Nahua or overlooked by the Spanish, Valerio-Reyes concludes that the inclusion of the palygorskite clay in the manufacture of Mayan blue was an accident of using turbid river water in the process of the indigo extraction. He presumes that the indigenous people were "obviously far from reasoning as we do" and that being "practical" people they simply used what they had to hand, unaware of its properties.²³³ It is disappointing that such recent scholarship continues in the denigration of non-Western knowledge. Moreover, it is clearly contradicted by Dean Arnold's research which has succeeded in identifying the ancient sites where palygorskite was mined for the fabrication of Mayan blue, and still is mined today by the contemporary Maya who call it *sak lu'um*,

²³⁰ Hernández, *Cuatro libros de la naturaleza y virtudes de las plantas y animales de uso medicinal en la Nueva España*. Chapter 13, Third Part of Book 1, Biblioteca Digital Hispánica, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid;

²³¹ Indeed, an attempt to grow *Indigofera suffruticosa* in Valencia was made by Vicente Alfonso Lorente, the director of the botanical gardens, at the end of the 18th century. While he claimed that the indigo grew with the same vigour as back in its native Mexico, it never became a commercial crop in Spain. See Vicente Alfonso Lorente, "Relación del cultivo de la indigofera tinctoria en Valencia y de la extracción del añil por el Dr. D. Vicente Alfonso Lorente." *Archivo de la Real Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País de Valencia*, 1807, c'47, I, Agricultura, n. 10., fol I.

²³² Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, 'General History of the Things of New Spain by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún', manuscript, 1577, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence. Book XI, Chapter XI, second paragraph.

²³³ Reyes-Valerio, *De Bonampak al Templo Mayor*. p 56

and use it for use in medicine and ceramics.²³⁴ Arnold's field work with Mayan ceramists at Ticul in the 1960s details how they used *sak lu'um* as a temper in their work, and skilled ceramicists could differentiate a good temper made with *sak lu'um*, from an inferior one lacking in sufficient quantities through touch and its appearance when wet and dry.²³⁵ During his search for the ingredients for Maya blue, Maestro May Ku visited the mines in Ticul and Dzan where the workers taught him to distinguish palygorskite, known as *sak lu'um* in Mayan, from other types of clay.²³⁶

Indeed, while it may seem that the Florentine codex offers little detail about indigo and Maya blue, despite having an entire chapter devoted to the fabrication of pigments from plants, in fact there is much more to be found in its pages if one looks beyond the Spanish text. Written in collaboration between Fray Sahagún and an anonymous group of indigenous Nahua *tlacuilos* (painters/scribes), it is considered to be the world's first ethnographic work. The information it contains was compiled over a period of thirty years from questionnaires about Nahua culture and religion that Sahagún sent out to the indigenous 'wise old men,' called the *principales*, of a number of towns in Central Mexico who responded in Nahuatl pictograms. The information was then expanded, translated, and written up by Sahagún and the *tlacuilos* into a bilingual Spanish and alphabetised Nahuatl twelve-volume illustrated account of the daily life, religious and political customs of the Nahua and the natural history of animals, plants and minerals of Mexico. The process of writing up took place in 1575 -77 and was, as Diana Magaloni Kerpel puts it, "a race against death" as in August 1576 a devastating epidemic swept through the Valley of Mexico killing more than eighty percent of the indigenous population.²³⁷

Like Hernández's project, it can be seen as a tool of bioprospecting and colonial domination, yet the collaboration of the Nahua *tlacuilos* allows their voice to come through giving it a markedly different character. While this work is clearly an evangelical tool on the part of the Franciscans, it is worth bearing in mind that this was in the context of the debate that took place throughout the 16th

²³⁴ Arnold et al., 'The First Direct Evidence for the Production of Maya Blue'. *Antiquity* 82, no. 315, March 2008: 151–64

²³⁵ Dean E. Arnold, 'Sak Lu'um in Maya Culture: And Its Possible Relationship to Maya Blue.', *University of Illinois, Department of Anthropology Research Reports No. 2*, 1967

²³⁶ Conversation with Luis Manuel May Ku, 2nd March 2021

²³⁷ Diana Magaloni Kerpel, 'Painters of the New World: The Process of Making the Florentine Codex', in *Colors Between Two Worlds: The Florentine Codex of Bernardino de Sahagún*, ed. Joseph Connors and Gerhard Wolf, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Max-Planck-Institut, Villa I Tatti, Florence, 2011.

century as to whether or not the Amerindians had a soul. Those who believed that the indigenous people did indeed have a soul and were free and equal to the Spanish wanted to end the *encomienda* system, while those who wanted to continue the exploitation of the indigenous people, argued that they did not in fact have souls and were therefore incapable of conversion to Christianity, thereby justifying their virtual enslavement. Sahagún created the *Historia General* because he wanted to demonstrate the sophistication of the Aztec people as well as because such an encyclopaedic knowledge of their culture would aid in their conversion. For the Nahuatl *tlacuilos*, on the other hand, it was a chance to record their knowledge and customs in the face of the catastrophic epidemic, and as we shall see, their contribution was not always addressed to the Spanish but was rather a fight for survival directed towards other Nahuas. The meaning and materiality of the colors of the Florentine codex, especially Mayan blue, were an important part of this.

Chapter XI of book XI, is devoted to the fine colours for painting and dyeing obtained from plants, and includes a drawing of an indigenous man extracting the liquid of from *ch'oj*, called *xiquilitl* in Nahuatl, alongside the written descriptions in Spanish and alphabetised Nahuatl. As we have seen in the introduction to this thesis, Mignolo argues that the materiality of semiotic systems has a role in determining their conception and their recognisability between cultures. The pre-Columbian *amoxtli*, being concertina folded sheets of 'paper' made from bark, were similar in materiality to books, but the Spanish could not accept their pictographic images as forms of semiotic communication equal to, yet different from letters, and capable of properly recording history and facts. In this context, the Florentine codex, with its alphabetised Nahuatl, was an attempt by Fray Bernardino Sahagún to record Nahuatl knowledge in the apparently more accurate medium of letters. Unbeknownst to the Friar, however, within the pages of the codex there was another, Nahuatl, mode of making knowledge appear at work - *in tllili in tlapalli*, the black ink, the colours, of the images.

The expression *in tllili, in tlapalli*, is generally translated as meaning 'the collected wisdom of the Nahuatl people' and appears in the Dialogues (Colloquios y Doctrina Christiana) of 1524, the transcripts of one of the earliest recorded meetings between the Nahuatl and the Franciscans, later translated from the Nahuatl by Fray Bernardino Sahagún in 1564.²³⁸ The phrase is often directly translated as 'the

²³⁸ Diana Magaloni Kerpel, *The Colors of the New World. The Colors of the New World: Artists, Materials, and the Creation of the Florentine Codex*. Getty Publications, Los Angeles, 2014.

black ink, the red ink', but a more accurate direct translation would be 'the black ink, the colours'. The word *tlapalli* does indeed mean red, used for the finest red from *nocheztli* (cochineal), but at the end of chapter XI, book XI, of the Florentine codex, which is devoted to the manufacture of pigments, it is made clear that the word *tlapalli* also refers to all colours.²³⁹ Indeed, this is similar to the way 'colorado' in Spanish can mean both 'coloured' and 'coloured red' specifically. Therefore, we should assume that the black ink and the colours of the images within the codex are not mere decorations, or illustrations accompanying the text, but are rather another mode of communication in itself. The Florentine codex should perhaps be seen as trilingual, rather than bilingual, with the pigments constituting another form of communication.

The majority of the paintings of the Florentine codex are largely based on European renaissance models of image-making. Educated in the College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, the first European-style university in the Americas, the *tlacuilos* would have had access to a range of European prints. However, Nahua pictograms are often mixed into compositions, and figures such as the old Gods are depicted in ways that combine European and Nahua modes of depiction. Indeed, of the four highly-trained masters identified by Magalioni Kerpel (using Morelli's method of attending to incidental stylistic features) one is referred to as "The Master of Both Traditions."²⁴⁰ Towards the end of the codex, from folio 331r, the *tlacuilos* seem to have run out of colour due to disruption in trade and infrastructure caused by the epidemic. At this point Nahua pictographic concepts are employed within European style compositions to convey the missing colour. In particular, the chapter on precious stones, which would be meaningless depicted in black and white, uses combinations of Nahua pictograms. Maglioni-Kerpel points out one example of a rock alongside a tomato, drawn in a European botanical manner, denoting *tlapalli* (red), indicating that the rock is *tlapalteoxihuitl* (ruby). In another, a long feather next to a black stone simultaneously denotes the visual combination of the blue-green of the quetzal bird and the shiny luster of *iztli* (obsidian), while also constructing the name of the precious stone, *quetzalitzli* (jade).²⁴¹ Bearing this in mind, we can see what seems to have been overlooked hitherto by scholars, including Magaloni-Kerpel - that is that the image

²³⁹ de Sahagún, 'General History of the Things of New Spain by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún'. Book XI, end of chapter XI

²⁴⁰ Magaloni Kerpel. 2011, The others are 'The master of Three-quarter profiles, The Master of the Long Noses, and The master of the Complex Skin Tones.'

²⁴¹ Magaloni Kerpel, 'Painters of the New World: The Process of Making the Florentine Codex'.

accompanying the description of *xiquilitl* does indeed communicate the roasting process in making Mayan blue after all. Next to the man squeezing the juice from the leaves, I have identified Tortilla-shaped cakes of pigment stacked on top of a pictographic image of a flame with smoke (figure 9). The fact that this has gone unnoticed for so long demonstrates that the Western European epistemological hierarchy which places letters over images persists.²⁴²

The *tlacuilos* appear to have loaded the images in the Florentine codex with information meant for those who shared their concepts of representation. I would therefore argue that the omission of detail in the text could have been intentional. If, as we have seen, this pigment had a sacred role in pre-conquista Mesoamerica, then its concealment may be part of the resistance to a colonial campaign against indigenous practices. Drawing on the work of Irene Silverblatt, Federici points out that just as the persecution of witches in Europe was an integral part of the transition to capitalism so the Spanish launched campaigns against devil worship, idolatry, and witchcraft in the New World.²⁴³ This sent many indigenous practices underground, or even hidden in plain view. Serge Gruzinski describes how objects such as stones shaped like hearts or a woman's skirt and blouse could be used to stand in for Nahua Gods and Goddesses, enabling their continued worship under the noses of the Spanish.²⁴⁴ The manufacture of Mayan blue might therefore have been considered a sacred act in itself that went unnoticed and unrecognised by the Spanish.²⁴⁵ Indeed, while the precise process for making Mayan blue is not explained in the text, the pigment itself was used in a heavily codified way in the very images that the *tlacuilos* painted in the Florentine codex.

²⁴² Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*.

²⁴³ Irene Silverblatt, *Moon, Sun, and Witches: Gender Ideologies and Class in Inca and Colonial Peru*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1987.

²⁴⁴ Gruzinski, *Images at War: Mexico From Columbus to Blade Runner (1492–2019)*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2001.

²⁴⁵ A recent analysis of a clay bowl collected from the cenote Chichén Itzá shows it to contain sacred copal along with the ingredients for Mayan blue, which has been interpreted as an indication of the ritual significance of making the pigment. See: Arnold et al., "The First Direct Evidence for the Production of Maya Blue."



Figure 3.52 (Top) A detail of the image accompanying the description of extracting blue from *xiquilitl* in Chapter XI, Book XI of the Florentine Codex. To the right is a pictogram which I argue depicts the roasting of ‘tortillas’ of pigment to make Maya blue, with glyphs of fire and smoke at the bottom. (Below) Images which appear underneath the description of *xiquilitl*, and also have the glyphs of fire and smoke, along with stone. They accompany a description about a ‘yellow earth’ called *tecozahuitl*. It is possible that this refers to a yellow ochre, which as an iron oxide can be roasted to modify the colour to red. Alternatively, it has been suggested that it refers to a yellow pigment made using plant dyes and clay in the same way as Maya blue.²⁴⁶ Either way, they support my argument that they depict the roasting process. The Florentine Codex, (ca. 1575-77), ms. Med. Palat. 220, f. 371r. Florence, The Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana.

²⁴⁶ Élodie Dupey García, ‘El color en los códices prehispánicos del México Central: identificación material, cualidad plástica y valor estético’, *Revista Española de Antropología Americana* 45, no. 1, 2015: 149–66; Antonio Doménech-Carbó et al.,

Magaloni Kerpel's analysis of the pigments used in the codex, which she combines with anthropological research, gives us an insight into the indigenous cosmology and their theories of painting, plants, and pigments.²⁴⁷ She has discovered that they did not only record their culture through the texts, and as we have seen, through pictograms, but also in the way they deployed their pigments in the images. The knowledge communicated through these pigments and images can only have been meant for other Nahua. Indeed, the influence of Erasmus on the Franciscans led to a preference for black and white imagery as a way to avoid accidental idolatry and to keep images strictly educational. This meant the *tlacuilos* were generally exposed to monochrome European prints at the College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco. As such, they received very little influence from European concepts around colour and meaning, so one can assume that their use of colour in the Florentine codex was primarily according to indigenous ideas.²⁴⁸ The technical analysis of the paintings has revealed a heavily codified use of pigments. A particularly striking example that Magaloni-Kerpel gives is the image which tells the story of the conquistadors killing Moctezuma and Itzcuahtzin and tossing their bodies into the grand canal (figure 3.10). Analysis has revealed that the red jacket of the Spaniard to the right is painted with minium, that is red lead, a pigment from Europe unknown in pre-Columbian times, while the purple red edging of Itzcuahtzin's cape is painted in *nochetzli* (cochineal). The blue of the armoured Spaniard is rendered in indigo blue from the *xiquilitl* plant, while the blue royal cape of Moctezuma is also painted with indigo, but in such muddy tones that it is hard to identify it as blue with the naked eye. As victors, the colours used for the Spaniards are vibrant and strong, while Moctezuma, already dead in the canal is painted in diluted tones.²⁴⁹ This clear division of pigments into Spanish and indigenous is repeated elsewhere in the book, with combinations of the two being used to denote the new colonial era.

'Isomerization and Redox Tuning in "Maya Yellow" Hybrids from Flavonoid Dyes plus Palygorskite and Kaolinite Clays', *Microporous and Mesoporous Materials* 194, August 2014: 135–45.

²⁴⁷ Kerpel, *The Colors of the New World*.

²⁴⁸ Gruzinski, *Images at War*.

²⁴⁹ Kerpel, *The Colors of the New World*.



Figure 3.53 Conquistadors killing Moctezuma and Itzcuahtzin and tossing their bodies into the grand canal. *The Florentine Codex*, (ca. 1575-77), ms. Med. Palat. Bk 12, fol. 447v, Florence, The Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana.

Magaloni-Kerpel argues that the codification of the pigments goes further through the entwinement of their material origins and qualities with the Nahua cosmology. Pigments can be categorised into two groups – the organic and the inorganic. In a scientific context inorganic pigments are those from earths, minerals, and metals, while organic pigments are defined as containing carbon compounds - that includes pigments from plants and insects, but also pigments made from fossilised plants, that is to say petroleum. In the pre-Columbian Mesoamerican context, the organic similarly includes pigments from plants and insects, and the inorganic, consists of earths and minerals (but, as we have seen with the case of red lead, they did not synthesise pigments from metals). However, Magaloni Kerpel points to this ordering of pigments being reflected in the organisation of the Nahua cosmos into the telluric: underground, dark, damp, and feminine world where the moon and the stars live, and the solar; luminous, hot, dry, and masculine world of the sun.²⁵⁰ Interestingly, this is an inversion of European notions, where the organic is generally associated with the feminine and the inorganic with the masculine. Indeed, beyond the mental associations that their material origins might conjure, the handling qualities of organic and inorganic differ. Organic pigments tend to be bright and transparent, having a glowing property over light grounds, while inorganic tend to be more opaque and solid, with a duller tone. Supporting her hypothesis that these distinctions are significant with respect to the Nahua cosmology, are the instances where two pigments of a similar colour but different material origin have been used together. For example, one image of the goddess Coatlicue, was painted with a mixture of hematite from the earth and *achiotl* (annatto) plant dye (figure 11). Since the two pigments are of a similar reddish orange colour but with differing opacity, Magaloni Kerpel speculates that the main motivation for combining them was for conceptual reasons rather than to modify the colour. Certainly, the bright transparency of the *achiotl* pigment would be cancelled out by mixing it with earthy hematite so there is no obvious visual reason for the combination. It would seem that motivation is to do with bringing the telluric and the solar together to represent Coatlicue - the Goddess who gave birth the moon and the stars, and also to Huitzilopochtli, the God of the Sun and War.²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ Kerpel.

²⁵¹ Kerpel.



Figure 3.54 Coatlicue, from the Florentine Codex, (ca. 1575 – 1577), bk. 1., fol. 18v. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana

Mayan blue is unusual because it is a mixture of indigo from *xiuquilitl*, (organic/solar) with palygorskite clay (inorganic/telluric), making it what chemists call an organic/inorganic hybrid - something they find rather exciting. Indeed, Magaloni Kerpel speculates that it is this hybridity of Mayan blue, combining the telluric and the solar, that made the pigment so significant for the Nahua and other Amerindians. Her technical analysis has shown that where Mayan blue is absent is as

significant as where it is present. For example, it is generally used to colour the diadems denoting the Aztec lords, but in the image of Moctezuma and Itzcuahtzin being murdered by the conquistadors their diadems are left uncoloured. It is as if this absence of Mayan blue denotes the power leaving the vanquished leaders.²⁵² Similarly, in Book One, which is devoted to the old gods (the *tlacuilos* had converted to Christianity), none of the gods are coloured with pure Mayan blue. For instance, the image of Paynal lacks Mayan blue (apart from as a mixture to make green for his headdress of quetzal feathers), despite the fact the Nahuatl text which accompanies the image describes a shield inlaid with turquoise as one of the God's accoutrements (revealingly, the Spanish text does not even mention the shield). Paynal's shield is left uncoloured and his cape a muted grey. It is reminiscent of the depiction of the dead Moctezuma with his uncoloured diadem and muddied cape. In contrast, the pictograms of the Old Gods found in the source materials from the ethnographic questioning of the *principales* used as the basis of the Florentine codex, shows Paynal with his shield and cape both in bright Mayan blue (figure 12).²⁵³



Figure 3.55 Left, Paynal, the ixiptla of Huitzilopochtli, depicted without Maya blue in the Florentine Codex (ca. 1575 – 1577), bk. 1., fol. 10r. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana. Right, Paynal and Huitzilopochtli, depicted with Maya blue in the Primeros Memoriales/Codices Matritenses, (ca 1558) manuscrito II/3280 fol. 261r, La Real Biblioteca, Madrid.

²⁵² Kerpel.

²⁵³ Bernardino de Sahagún, 'Primeros memoriales / Codices matritenses', manuscrito II/3280 fol. 261r, La Real Biblioteca, Madrid, ca 1558.

It seems that the Christianised *tlacuilos* of the Florentine Codex may have intentionally withheld the usage of Mayan blue in the images of the old Gods in order to show their loss of power. In contrast, Mayan blue is present in an image denoting the new era as a blue sky with a sun and moon, which also includes the European pigment *minium* as if to show the mixing of two worlds.²⁵⁴ On the other hand, it may also be that the motive was to prevent the Gods from becoming present. Magaloni Kerpel links the usage of the pigments in the Florentine codex to the concept of the *ixiptla*. This word is generally translated as ‘image’, ‘representation’ or a ‘representative’ in the sense of ‘standing for someone.’ For example, the annotation of the image of Paynal describes him as the *ixiptla* of the god Huitzilopochtli, that is, he is the same god in another form. Book two of the Florentine codex describes rituals in which captured enemy warriors were chosen to become the *ixiptla* of various gods. Dressed in the accoutrements of the god, they would spend a year being worshiped as the living god made manifest before being sacrificed. A painting of a god was similarly also an *ixiptla* - the god made present through the power of colour.

This takes us to the possibility that, if Mayan blue was sacred enough to make an old God present, and therefore intentionally withheld in the Florentine codex, could it have been used elsewhere in order to continue pre-Columbian practices under the guise of Christianity during the colonial period? Certainly, the turquoise blue veil of the famous Virgin of Guadalupe is very suggestive (figure 13). This miraculous image, inextricable from the Mexican national identity, has been theorized by Grunzinski to be a conflation of the indigenous concept of the *ixiptla* with the Catholic Marian image - a Catholic *ixiptla*.²⁵⁵ It ‘appeared’ around 1555 in the sanctuary on the hill of Tepeyac, in the North of Mexico City. In pre-Columbian times it was a site devoted to the worship of the Nahuas own mother goddess, Tonantzin - which means “Our Sacred Mother.” Tonantzin was of course an *ixiptla* of Coatlicue, who is depicted in a mixture of solar *achiotl* and telluric hematite in the Florentine Codex. A hermitage was built on the site at an unknown date some time before 1548 by early Franciscan evangelisers as an act of substitution, replacing the workshop of the old mother Goddess with the Christian Virgin Mary.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Kerpel, *The Colors of the New World*.

²⁵⁵ Grunzinski, *Images at War*.

²⁵⁶ Rodrigo Martínez Bracs, ‘Fuentes sobre la primitiva ermita del Tepeyac’, in *De sendas, brechas y atajos: contexto y crítica de las fuentes eclesíásticas, siglos XVI-XVIII*, ed. Berenise Bravo Rubio and Doris Bieñko de Peralta, Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Bogotá, 2008, 211–53.

Very little is known about the early hermitage, but in 1555 the archbishop of Mexico, Alonso de Montúfar (archbishop from 1551 to his death in 1572) ordered a remodel of the sanctuary which seems to have included the commission of the painting of the Virgin from an indigenous painter, named Marcos.²⁵⁷ While no technical analysis has ever been carried out on this painting (for reasons which will become obvious), superficial observations have revealed it to be painted in a form of distemper on indigenous woven cloth, with pigments which include almost certainly *nocheztli* (cochineal) for the Virgin's tunic, and Mayan blue for her turquoise veil.²⁵⁸ Painted with these powerful indigenous colours, could the indigenous worshippers have viewed this image as an *ixiptla* of the Virgin, in turn the *ixiptla* of Tonantzin?

²⁵⁷ Bargellini, 'The Colors of the Virgin of Guadalupe'.

²⁵⁸ Bargellini.



Figure 3.56 Our Lady of Guadalupe, Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Tepeyac Hill, Mexico City

This new image was an instant success among the indigenous and *criollos* alike, which created friction between the Franciscans and the Dominican Montúfar. The Franciscans, influenced by the writings of Erasmus, were suspicious of images in general and their propensity to foment idolatry. Montúfar, on the other hand, was born in Lonja, Andalusia, shortly after the ‘*reconquista*,’ in 1492 and Gruzinski suggests that being brought up in what was arguably another colonial context gave him a feel for negotiating cultural difference and a sensitivity to harnessing traditional popular forms.²⁵⁹ On the 6th of September 1556, Montúfar preached in favour of the image of the Virgin, claiming it was already performing miracles.

²⁵⁹ Gruzinski, *Images at War*.

Two days later, in response Fray Francisco de Bustamante, the provincial of the Franciscan order in New Spain, delivered a furious sermon denouncing Montúfar's promotion of the image, arguing that far from being miraculous it was 'painted by an Indian' and it risked encouraging idolatry amongst the native population. As Clara Bargellini points out, the mere fact that it was painted by an indigenous painter would have probably been sufficient to denigrate its power in the minds of his Spanish audience.²⁶⁰ Fray Bernardino Sahagún similarly inserted a personal note into the pages of the Florentine codex criticising the popular veneration of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and the risk that it promoted idolatry. In the section on mountains, he talks about the sanctuary on the mountain of Tepeyac, and how he suspects that the native population are really continuing to worship their old mother Goddess Tonantzin through the image of the Virgin de Guadalupe. Above all, he takes issue with the preachers intentionally using the Nahuatl name for 'Our Mother', Tonantzin, when referring to the Our Lady the Virgin Mary, thereby encouraging confusion between the two.²⁶¹

Near the mountains, there are three or four places where they were accustomed to perform very solemn sacrifices and they came to them from very distant lands. One of these is here in Mexico where there is a small mountain they call Tepeyacac. The Spaniards call it Tepequilla; now it is called Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. At this place they had a temple dedicated to the mother of gods whom they called Tonantzin, which means Our Mother. There they performed many sacrifices in honor of this goddess. And they came to them from more than twenty leagues away, from all the border regions of Mexico, and they brought many offerings. Men and women, youths and maidens came to these feasts. There was a great conflux of people on these days, and they all said: "We are going to the feast of Tonantzin." And now that a church of Our Lady of Guadalupe is built there, they also call her Tonantzin, being motivated by the preachers who called Our Lady, the Mother of God, Tonantzin. It is not known for certain where the beginning of this Tonantzin may have originated, but this we know for certain, that, from

²⁶⁰ Bargellini, 'The Colors of the Virgin of Guadalupe'.

²⁶¹ Yongho Francis Lee, 'Our Lady of Guadalupe in Bernardino de Sahagún's *Historia General de Las Cosas de Nueva España*', in *New Frontiers in Guadalupan Studies*, ed. Virgilio Elizondo and Timothy Matovina, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR, 2014, 1–18.

its first usage, the word means that ancient Tonantzin. And it is something that should be remedied, for the correct [native] name for the Mother of God, Holy Mary, is not Tonantzin but rather Dios inantzin. It appears to be a Satanic invention to cloak idolatry under the confusion of this name, Tonantzin. And they now come to visit this Tonantzin from very far away, as far away as before, which is also suspicious, because everywhere there are many churches of Our Lady and they do not go to them. They come from distant lands to this Tonantzin as in olden times.²⁶²

It seems very likely that early indigenous pilgrims treated the Virgin of Guadalupe as an *ixiptla*, that is to say, as the Goddess herself made manifest through the materiality of the pigments. As Gruzinski puts it, “the *ixiptla* was the container for a power; the localizable, epiphanic presence; the actualization of the power infused into an object; a ‘being-here.’”²⁶³ They may well have seen the Virgin Mary as the *ixiptla* of Tonantzin, Coatlicue, the Nahua Mother of Gods, as Sahagún feared.

Gruzinski argues that the Virgin of Guadalupe was indeed the apparition of an *ixiptla*, “in the sense that the manifestation of a divine presence devolved from the manufacture and presentation of the religious object.”²⁶⁴ For the indigenous worshippers there was no need for an image to be separated from its status as a human-made object for it embody the divine and become an *ixiptla*. Indeed, while the Franciscans believed images should only fulfill didactic purposes, the practice of popular Catholicism, then and now, regularly attributes divine presence to images despite their obviously man-made origins. It is not obvious that the *criollos* saw the Virgin so differently, despite the consternation of the Franciscans who sought to play down her miraculous powers. As W.J.T. Mitchell points out, it is problematic to attribute the conflation of signifier with signified to non-Western people without recognising the ambivalent relationship to images that exists in the West. While ‘moderns’ may profess to know that representations are not the same as the thing they represent, there are many instances when they are treated just as if they are. Mitchell’s compelling thought experiment to demonstrate this is to challenge students to cut the eyes out of a photograph of their

²⁶² de Sahagún, ‘General History of the Things of New Spain by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún’. Book XI, Chapter XII, annotations to paragraphs 6 and 7

²⁶³ Gruzinski, *Images at War*. p51

²⁶⁴ Gruzinski. p100

mother.²⁶⁵ Certainly, my Andalusian Grandmother-in-law keeps her bank book squeezed between two photographs of different polychrome sculptural Virgins and claims to have the Lord *present* in her entrance hall in the form of a figurine of Jesus.

Nonetheless, over time, the indigenous painter Marcos was squeezed out of the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe just as indigenous painters got squeezed out of the art market in Mexico. It is not known who exactly Marcos was, but Bargellini suggests he may have been Marcos Cipac, also known as Marcos Tlacuilol, who lived in the Indian barrio of San Juan Moyotlan and was one of thirty-six indigenous painters mentioned in the Annals of Juan Bautista (1564 -1569). Or he may have been Marcos Griego who appears in official records when he registered ownership of a house in the barrio of Santa Maria Cuepopan and identified himself as a painter. Or he may have been Marcos de Aquino mentioned by the old conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo in his True History of the Conquest of New Spain (1555-1568) as one of three famous indigenous artists in New Spain who have “reached to such great proficiency in the art of painting and sculpture, that they may be compared to an Apelles, or our contemporaries Michael Angelo and Berruguete.”²⁶⁶ Whichever Marcos it was, or even if these different Marcos are the same Marcos, Bargellini recounts that he would have seen great changes in his professional working life as more painters came over from Europe and constructed a guild mechanism that served to regulate and limit indigenous painters’ access to commissions.²⁶⁷

Gradually, the role of Marcos, as the painter of the Virgin of Guadalupe was forgotten, to be replaced by a miraculous story of the image’s creation that removed it from human hands. The story was first put into writing by Miguel Sánchez in 1648, but by then was already an oral tradition. The narrative centres on an indigenous man, Juan Diego, albeit in a more passive role as receiver of the apparition, rather than the more active role as Marcos, painter of the apparition. The story goes that in 1531 (before the Archbishop Montúfar’s time) Juan Diego was walking on the mountain of Tepeyac when the Virgin appeared to him and spoke to him in Nahuatl asking him to gather flowers from the hill.

²⁶⁵ Mitchell, W. J. T., *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, Chicago and Bristol, 2005.

²⁶⁶ Bargellini, ‘The Colors of the Virgin of Guadalupe’; Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Memoirs of the Conquistador Bernal Diaz Del Castillo, Vol 1 (of 2) Written by Himself Containing a True and Full Account of the Discovery and Conquest of Mexico and New Spain.*, trans. John Ingram Lockhart, J. Hatchard and son, London, 1844. p249

²⁶⁷ Bargellini, ‘The Colors of the Virgin of Guadalupe’.

The virgin arranged the flowers in his tilma (cloak) and he went to see the then archbishop of Mexico, Zumárraga. When he opened his tilma in front of the archbishop, the flowers tumbled to the floor, revealing that the image of the virgin was left behind on the fabric.²⁶⁸ Perhaps this new narrative was necessary for the image to gain acceptance with religious authorities, and to reconfigure the popular devotion to the image in a way which absolved it of idolatry. Perhaps it was an attempt to erase memories of Tonantzin. Either way, the miraculous attribution of the image means that it has never been subjected to technical analysis to determine if the blue used is indeed Mayan blue even if the distinctive turquoise shade suggests that it is.

Despite this erasure of Marcos from the history of the Virgin of Guadalupe, indigenous painters remained central to the spread of the image. In 1675, when the recently arrived Italian Jesuit Juan Bautista Zappa wanted to acquire a copy of the Virgin to send back to dona Violante Lomelino Doria in Genoa, he was advised by the padre rector don Pablo de Salzedo to seek out “the Indian painter who possessed the gift for painting the Virgin of Guadalupe.” He was told that whenever the Indian who had this gift died all the indigenous painters would gather at the church and take communion. They would then each paint a copy of the Virgin of Guadalupe and decide amongst themselves who had inherited the gift.²⁶⁹ Writing in 1688 Francisco de Florencia said that it was generally the case that the copies of the Virgin of Guadalupe “that are less imperfect and most accurate are all by Indian painters... And it is an established opinion in Mexico City that only Indian painters have felicity and talent in copying this holy image” although he did not mention a specific painter.²⁷⁰ It is unknown how long this tradition had been going on, but in Zappa’s time the painter with the gift was Luis de Tejeda (or Texeda), and his father was also said to have possessed the gift (figure 14). Therefore, Bargellini suggests that it is possible that the tradition dates back to the sixteenth century, and that the role of Marcos ‘el Indio pintor’ seems to have become a collective role.

²⁶⁸ Bargellini; Gruzinski, *Images at War*.

²⁶⁹ Bargellini, ‘The Colors of the Virgin of Guadalupe’; Elisa Vargaslugo, ‘El Indio Que Tenía “El Don...”’, *Anales Del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 27, no. 86,31 October 2012: 203–15.

²⁷⁰ Bargellini, ‘The Colors of the Virgin of Guadalupe’. p21



Figure 3.57 A copy of Our Lady of Guadalupe, second half of 17th century, by Luis de Tejada (signed Texeda), which came up for auction at Artes Subastas, Bilbao in 2018. The virgin's mantle is clearly not painted with Maya blue.

Nonetheless, as Bargellini also points out, no surviving copies by Tejada, or indeed anyone else, capture the turquoise blue of the Virgin of Guadalupe's veil - none of them seem to be painted with Maya blue. It could be that the Virgin of Guadalupe ceased to be the *ixiptla* of Tonantzin, or that the epidemics that ravaged the country destroyed the trade infrastructure that once brought the pigment from 'hot lands' to the city of Mexico. Either way, Maya blue seems to have disappeared from Nahua Indochristian art by the end of the sixteenth century. Intriguingly, however, technical analysis of decorative Cuban colonial wall paintings dating from around 1750 to 1860 has revealed that a pigment previously called 'Havana blue' is in fact Maya blue. Cuba had trade links with Campeche on the Yucatan peninsula, and reference has been found to blue pigment being imported from there to

Cuba.²⁷¹ This surprising discovery suggests that the Mayans continued to manufacture Mayan blue as recently as the middle of the nineteenth century, and that it is possible that accompanying meanings and rituals may also have survived.

It is clear with the expression in *tlilli in tlapalli*, the black ink, the colours, meaning the 'collected wisdom of the Nahuatl' that the paintings and pigments in the Florentine codex had a role in communicating knowledge, as Mignolo discusses. But more than that, the pigments had a role in making the signified *present* through the *ixiptla*. This assumption differs from a Western modern conception of painting, which especially since the enlightenment, has come to emphasise painting as more a site of aesthetic experience than a vehicle for communication. Indeed, as Mignolo points out, the perceived inarticulacy of the image in the view of the Spanish lay behind the colonial dismissal of the power of the *amoxtili* to record history. However, if we pursue further the way the pigments might 'represent' certain ideas, we will find ourselves questioning the very notion of representation itself and an alternative understanding of the body of painting, shifting us from an epistemological inquiry to the ontological.

²⁷¹ Alberto A. Tagle et al., 'Maya Blue: Its Presence in Cuban Colonial Wall Paintings', *Stud. Conserv.* 35, no. 3, August 1990: 156–159.



Figure 3.58 A captive as an *ixiptla* of the God Xipe Totec, Florentine Codex, (ca. 1575 – 1577), bk. 2., fol. 32r. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana. Xipe Totec was “Our Lord the flayed one” as indicated by the skin the captive is wearing. Here we can see the connection between the *ixiptla* and *xip*, meaning ‘skin’ or to ‘flay.’ Xipe Totec represented life, death, and rebirth, and was the God of Agriculture. He flayed himself to give food to humanity, symbolic of the way maize seeds lose their outer layer before germinating. During the ritual month of Tlacaxipeualiztli, “Feast of the Flaying of Men”, captive warriors from enemy tribes were chosen to become *ixiptla* of Xipe Totec, by wearing his accoutrements and performing certain rituals. At the end of the period they were sacrificed, and their body parts distributed and ceremonially eaten. Before they were dismembered, they were flayed and their skins worn by individuals who parades through the barrios, fought mock-battles, and collected gifts from the people.²⁷²

²⁷² David Carrasco, ‘Give Me Some Skin: The Charisma of the Aztec Warrior’, *History of Religions* 35, no. 1, 1995: 1–26.

Other genres of the human: from the *ixiptla* to *anthropophagia*

In order to better grasp the complexity of the *ixiptla* ('image,' 'representation,' 'representative') we must attempt to understand the Nahuatl metaphysics behind the concept. Firstly, it is helpful to look at the etymology of the Nahuatl: *ixiptla* is derived from the word *ixtli*, which means 'face, surface, eye, a bundle (as in a bundle of canes), general body surface and front of body' and the word *xip* which means 'skin' or 'to flay.'²⁷³ Therefore, we get the sense of an *ixiptla* as a type of skin, which can be worn as a costume, or which may be built through layers of pigment on the page (figure 15), but it is important to understand that the *ixiptla* is not a signifier that represents an absent signified, nor is it a material envelope or carrier for some otherworldly non-material divine spirit as it has often been characterised.²⁷⁴ Rather, we must understand the *ixiptla* in the context of a pantheistic, animist metaphysics in which all things are imbued with agency. Recent scholarship on ancient Aztec philosophy by James Maffie, has focussed on *teotl*, a concept which has commonly been translated as God, but which Maffie argues is better understood as a verb, a transformational process that is continuously making and remaking itself as the cosmos.²⁷⁵ *Teotl* is not a supernatural transcendent being that creates the world, it is immanent—it is the world. The multiple beings we encounter in the world are simply the many faces—*ixtli*—of the one and the same *teotl*. An *ixiptla*, rather than being a representation of an absent signifier, or an envelope or carrier of a sacred property, is in fact “teotl’s medium of presentation itself.”²⁷⁶ As Maffie points out, *teotl* is often imagined as a shaman who self-transforms into multiple beings, or as an artist who paints the world. Painting and plants are inextricably linked together with the creation of life. This is clearly shown in the use of painting and plant metaphors throughout the *Romances de los señores de la Nueva España* a collection of Nahuatl ritual poetry dated from the sixteenth century:

²⁷³ López Austin, *Cuerpo humano e ideología*, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, Mexico, 1980

²⁷⁴ López Austin, 'Cuerpos y rostros'.

²⁷⁵ James Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy. Understanding a World in Motion*, University Press of Colorado, Boulder, 2014.

²⁷⁶ Maffie. p113

You paint with flowers, with songs, Life Giver. You color the ones who'll live on earth, you recite them in colors, and so you're hatching eagles, jaguars, in your painting place. You're here on earth!²⁷⁷

The many faces (*ixtli*) of the one *teotl*, is reminiscent of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's work on the perspectivalism and multi-naturalism of Amazonian Amerindians. Like the Nahua, the Amazonian Amerindians conceive of the body as envelope which is also a perspective.²⁷⁸ In contrast to Western modern thinking that restricts the categorisation of humanity, and places humans, animals, and plants in a hierarchical relationship, the Amerindians construct a genre of humanity (or personhood) as universal. This is not the universal subject as in the Western liberal tradition, but an extended concept of personhood which posits a multi-naturalism, rather than multi-culturalism. It does not create a separation between culture and nature, or 'man' and nature. All beings have culture, but what varies are the perspectives articulated by the multiplicity of bodies—that which looks like blood to us, looks like beer to the jaguar; what we see as a mud puddle, is a grand ceremonial house for the tapir.²⁷⁹ Viveiros de Castro characterises the relationship between beings in Amerindian 'perspectivalism' in terms of hunter/prey, and since all things are human, this relationship is necessarily cannibalistic.

It is important to note that this is not to say that all entities are de facto human, but rather that everything has the potential to reveal itself as human through its intentionality.²⁸⁰ Viveiros de Castro points out that it is not a case of classifying entities as human or non-human, which would be a Western modern way of categorising and fixing knowledge. Rather, since we are all operating from our perspectives there is always the possibility for previously unknown perspectives to reveal themselves. In Amerindian perspectivism all entities are 'intensively and virtually' persons, in so far as they all have the ontological potential to reveal themselves as such. Any unknown entity might suddenly reveal themselves to be human. Indeed, Viveiros de Castro, claims that in the Amerindian world objects are merely insufficiently interpreted subjects.²⁸¹

²⁷⁷ *Ballads of the Lords of New Spain: The Codex Romances de Los Senores de La Nueva Espana*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2010. Song XXIX-A, folio 35, p149

²⁷⁸ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, 'Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4, no. 3, September 1998, : 469–88,

²⁷⁹ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*. p72

²⁸⁰ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, 'Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism' ,. p57

²⁸¹ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*. p63



Figure 3.59 Mural del hombre maíz, 600 – 900 C.E., Templo Rojo, Museo de sitio Cacaxtla. The leaves are painted with Maya blue.
[Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia de México.](#)

Viverios de Castro's research is based on Amazonian Amerindians, including the Tupinamba who were once involved in the Brazilwood trade, which I discussed in the previous chapter. One must be wary of homogenising diverse societies, nonetheless this 'cannibalistic' relationship to other beings is also a feature of Nahua metaphysics. Indeed, Viveiros de Castro points out that perspectivalism and cosmological transformation is a feature of various South American indigenous groups, and is also found in the far north of North America and Asia.²⁸² While the Nahua do not have perspectivalism modeled on the hunter/prey relationship, this agricultural society conceives of its relationship with plants as a form of cannibalism, and also practiced actual human cannibalism during pre-conquest times. This is apparent in the celebration of Xipe Totec shown in figure 15, in which the flayed God of agriculture is linked with the way the way maize seeds shed their skin, and the captives that have been transformed into the *ixiptla* of the God are sacrificed and ritually eaten. What Viveiros de Castro characterises as the universality of humanity or personhood to all things, is another way of conceiving of the universality of *teotl*. The Nahua extend personhood to plants and animals, and also to mountains and inanimate objects, however, they feel a specific affinity with plants as a result of their reliance on them. The Nahuatl word used to describe the human body as a whole, *tonacayo*, 'all our flesh,' is also used to describe plants, especially maize.²⁸³ In a sense, the human body and the plant body is of one flesh. A striking image of the personhood of maize is found in the murals of the Templo Rojo, in Cacaxtla (figure 16). Painted in Mayan blue sometime between 600 to 900 C.E. by the Olmeca-Xicalanca people, the ears of corn on the maize plant are depicted as human heads. The cannibalism that this then entails is clearly described by the contemporary Nahua shaman, Aurelio, interviewed by Alan Sandstrom, as a moral case for reciprocity:

We are living here and we are born here [on earth]. We sprout like young corn. It is born and sprouts here, and for us it is likewise [...] You already ate, you're full and you have been [so] all of your life. You've been drunk. Well, likewise the earth also wants its offering [...] Corn is extremely delicate. Corn is our blood.

²⁸² Castro, 'Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism'. p 471

²⁸³ López Austin, *Cuerpo humano e ideología*. p172

How can we grab [our living] from the earth when it is our own blood we are eating?²⁸⁴

The concept of cannibalism is of great significance for the Brazilian artistic response to Western European modernism since the nineteen twenties.²⁸⁵ The movement is known as ‘anthropophagia,’ (*antropofagia* in Portuguese), which is another word for cannibalism coming from the Greek for the ‘eating-of-men.’²⁸⁶ In 1928 the poet Oswald de Andrade and his circle published the *Manifesto Antropófago* (Cannibalist Manifesto) and the *Revista de Antropofagia*, which used cannibalism as a metaphor for the response of finding themselves always dependent on, yet always peripheral to, Western European Modernism. The intention was to create a truly Brazilian art movement by first cannibalising European culture in order to consume its strength, as the Tupinambá Indians did to their enemies. However, as Néstor García Canclini points out, the persistent problem of modernity in Brazil, and Latin America, has been how one could negotiate modernity in art and thinking in a socio-economic context which was not modernised.²⁸⁷ Anthropophagia is an art movement which has come back several times since the 1920s, including in the 60s with Helio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, and again today with Pedro Neves Marques.²⁸⁸ Viveiros de Castro is knowingly playing with this art historical association with his Cannibal Metaphysics, but takes it beyond the appropriation of other cultures. He calls Amerindian perspectivalism and multinaturalism an indigenous cosmopolitical theory - a form of politics in which the competing interests of all forms of being must be negotiated through diplomacy.²⁸⁹

Viveiros de Castro is drawing on Isabelle Stengers’ notion of cosmopolitics, which is emphatically *not* indebted to Kantian cosmopolitanism that seeks to include everyone into a universal civil society,

²⁸⁴ Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn Is Our Blood: Culture and Ethnic Identity in a Contemporary Aztec Indian Village*, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OA, 1991 p240

²⁸⁵ Oswald de Andrade and Leslie Bary, ‘Cannibalist Manifesto’, *Latin American Literary Review* 19, no. 38, 1991: 38–47.

²⁸⁶ Tate, ‘Anthropophagia – Art Term’, Tate, accessed 24 March 2021, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/anthropophagia>.

²⁸⁷ Nestor Garcia Canclini, ‘Strategies of Modernity in Latin America’, in *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America*, ed. Gerardo Mosquera, Institute of International Visual Arts and MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1996), 20–52.

²⁸⁸ Cynthia Canejo, ‘The Resurgence of Anthropophagy’, *Third Text* 18, no. 1, 2004: 61–68; Pedro Neves Marques, *The Forest & the School ; Where to Sit at the Dinner Table?*, Anagram books, Berlin, 2015.

²⁸⁹ In a similar move, New Zealand recently legally designated the Whanganui river a person after years of campaigning by local Maori, with India following suit by designating the status of living human entity to the Ganges and the Yamuna rivers.

governed by a set citizens' rights.²⁹⁰ The cosmos in Stengers' cosmopolitics is not a particular world, designed to encompass all, but rather "the unknown constituted by these multiple, divergent worlds and to the articulations of which they could eventually be capable."²⁹¹ Stengers' cosmopolitics is a call to bring into the sphere of politics that those things that have been separated off into the sphere of science. This political arena should be "peopled with shadows of that which does not have a political voice, cannot have or does not want to have one."²⁹² Bruno Latour similarly argues against the universal 'global' and refers Stengers' cosmos as being composed of the distributed agency of actants, "including all the vast numbers of nonhuman entities making humans act."²⁹³ In attributing agency to nonhumans one can see how Latour's Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) might have resonances with the Amerindian attribution of personhood to all things. Indeed, Stengers' cosmopolitics and what Viveiros de Castro has termed indigenous cosmopolitics are central to how Latour has countered certain criticisms of ANT.

Actor-Network-Theory has been perceived as being an extension of a liberal democracy sensibility that in its overarching inclusiveness fails to account for 'otherness.' Nick Lee and Steve Brown argue that "if we follow the ANT trajectory, we must conclude that no topic, no objects or areas of inquiry, can escape redescription or assimilation within it. In other words, ANT is so liberal and so democratic that it has no Other."²⁹⁴ Latour by contrast, argues against an overarching cosmos or a globe in which everything is peacefully assimilated as in a Kantian cosmopolitanism. He links Stengers' notion of cosmopolitics to Viveiros de Castro's *Cannibal Metaphysics* by citing an anecdote that Viveiros de Castro uses to illustrate the contrast between Amerindian multinaturalism and European multiculturalism.²⁹⁵ The anecdote is a retelling from Claude Levi-Strauss which recounts how, in 1550, while the Spanish set about debating whether or not the Amerindians had a soul in Valladolid, across the Atlantic in the Greater Antilles those same Amerindians were busy drowning white people they had captured in order to determine if their corpses were subject to putrefaction. Viveiros de Castro

²⁹⁰ Isabelle Stengers, 'The Cosmopolitical Proposal', in *Making Things Public*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2005, 994–1003.

²⁹¹ Stengers. p 995

²⁹² Stengers. p 996

²⁹³ Bruno Latour, 'Whose Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics?: Comments on the Peace Terms of Ulrich Beck', *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 3, 1 August 2004: 450–62, p 454

²⁹⁴ Nick Lee and Steve Brown, 'Otherness and the Actor Network: The Undiscovered Continent', *American Behavioral Scientist* 37, no. 6, May 1994: 772–90, p774

²⁹⁵ Latour, 'Whose Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics?'

argues that what this anecdote shows is that for the Spanish the question was whether or not the Amerindians were fully human, while for the Amerindians the humanity of the other was never in doubt, but rather their nature – whether or not they had a body subject to putrefaction. Herein is the contrast between a multiculturalism that assumes nature is universal, but cultures are multiple, and a multinaturalism that assumes personhood is universal, but natures are multiple.²⁹⁶ For Latour it demonstrates the impossibility of a unified cosmos. This anecdote reveals that not only are there different sides to any debate, but there are also different debates being had, and there are vastly more ways to be other than can be conceived. He claims not to be seeking a tolerant, peaceful inclusivity in his use of the term cosmopolitics, but would prefer war – “By war I mean a conflict for which there is no agreed-upon arbiter, a conflict in which what is at stake is precisely what is *common* in the common world to be built.”²⁹⁷

Marisol de la Cadena has observed how the indigenous cosmopolitics described by Viveiros de Castro has in recent years entered the national politics of various Latin American countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru. She points to the inclusion of what she calls “Earth-beings” – that is to say “other-than-humans” that have sentience and agency, and which include animals, plants, and the landscape – into the dominant political sphere.²⁹⁸ This is seen in the enshrinement of the rights of *Pachamama* into the national constitution in Ecuador and the way practices of offering libations to the earth entered the main quarters of the Bolivian State under Evo Morales.

De la Cadena argues that this is more than organised ethnic politics – indigenous people finally participating under the umbrella of liberal democracy – rather, the sudden appearance of these “Earth-beings” poses a conceptual challenge to the Western epistemological regime that has separated man from nature and thereby limited the political to human interactions and relegated nature to the purview of science. Drawing on Stengers’ call to “slow down” our reasoning, de la Cadena argues that “taking seriously (perhaps literally)” the presence of these “Earth-beings” in politics is an opportunity to provincialise the Western notion of politics, and even transform it:

²⁹⁶ Castro, ‘Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism’.

²⁹⁷ Latour, ‘Whose Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics?’ p 445

²⁹⁸ Marisol De La Cadena, ‘Indigenous Cosmopolitics In The Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond “Politics”’, *Cultural Anthropology* 25, no. 2, 2010: 334–70,

If we slow down, suspend our assumptions and the ideas that they would lead to, we may perceive how this emergence alters the terms of the political; it disrupts the consensus that barred indigenous practices from politics, assigned them to religion or ritual, and occluded this exclusion. We may use this historical opportunity to put our preconceived ideas at risk and renew our analytical toolkit, vocabulary, and framework alike.²⁹⁹

Key to this slowing down is to pay attention to the equivocations that emerge in the process of translating between perspectives from different worlds (rather than different views of the same world). De la Cadena recounts one such equivocation she experienced in 2006 at gathering in Cuzco by more than one thousand peasants from the villages at the foot of mount Ausangate – who they consider a sentient “Earth-being.” They were there to protest a proposed mine in the Sinakara, a peak in the mountain chain to which Ausangate belongs. Seeing a banner which declared “We will defend our cultural patrimony with our lives. No to the Mine!!” de la Cadena wondered if the use of the term “Cultural Patrimony,” a term frequently used to refer to Machu Picchu, was meant to refer to Ausangate’s status as an icon of regional cultural heritage and a tourist attraction. When she asked Nazario Turpo, a *pampamisayoq* (ritual specialist) and politician, if Michu Pichu and Ausangate were the same, his response was “No, they are different. I know Ausangate much better; I know what he likes, he knows me too. I sort of know Machu Picchu because I am going there with tourists now. I am beginning to know him. But I am not sure what he likes, so I do my best to please him.”³⁰⁰ De la Cadena points out that they were talking about the same things, but the equivocation lay in that in her world they were mountains, while Nazario’s world they were beings. Viveiros de Castro argues that good translation betrays the destination language rather than the source, allowing the foreign ideas to subvert the conceptual apparatus of the translator.³⁰¹ It is these sites of equivocation and conflict which have to potential transform:

“To translate is to take up residence in the space of equivocation. Not for the purpose of cancelling it (that would suppose that it never really existed) but in order

²⁹⁹ Cadena. p 360

³⁰⁰ Cadena. p 351

³⁰¹ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*. p 88

to valorize and activate it, to open and expand the space imagined not to exist between the (conceptual) languages in contact—a space in fact hidden by equivocation. Equivocation is not what prevents the relation, but what founds and impels it. To translate is to presume that an equivocation always exists; it is to communicate through differences, in lieu of keeping the Other under gag by presuming an original univocality and an ultimate redundancy—an essential similarity—between what the Other and we are saying.”³⁰²

Schiebinger points out that that ignorance, or disconnection, can be a consequence of political struggles, and that it is important to attend how things come to be excluded, disassociated, or simply un-noticed. More importantly, however, is to attend to nature of the equivocation and thereby, in the act of translation reveal the provinciality of our own thinking and to transform it. Chakrabarty raises a similar issue when he discusses the historian Ranajit Guha’s attempt to give an account of the Santal rebellion of 1855, which included the agency and point of view of the Santal’s themselves. The Santals were a tribal group Bengal and Bihar who revolted against British and nonlocal Indian colonial rule. Guha wanted to attend to the Santal “logic of consciousness,” rather than treat them as members of a peasant class responding to a cause external to them. Guha was to discover that the Santal peasants themselves claimed to have rebelled because their god Thakur had told them to do so and had assured them that the British bullets would not harm them. Chakrabarty argues that this reveals a tension inherent in Guha’s work, and the subaltern studies project in general. While Guha wanted to give the Santal agency, the Santal themselves, denied that they had any agency at all, having only obeyed their god. Although a democratically-minded historian would believe that they are subjects of their own history, the Santal do not believe that they are. Guha did not attempt to demystify their religion, presenting it as ‘their truth,’ nonetheless, the rules and procedures of the historical method, which include the maintenance of a critical distance, prevented him from giving equal agency to the god Thakur as he gave to the Santals.³⁰³ Consequently, while he may have failed to give equal agency to the god Thakur as he did to the Santals, their subaltern past reveals the limits of the historical method. Charkrabarty argues that historicising or anthropologising subalterns tends to create the classic distance between subject and object in which the subaltern remains dead, but at

³⁰² Viveiros de Castro. p 89

³⁰³ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

the same time, telling the stories of subaltern pasts in effect also “faces us as a way of being in this world, and we could ask ourselves: Is that way of being a possibility for our own lives and for what we define as our present?”³⁰⁴

In this chapter I have tried to attend to these exclusions and equivocations, although I inevitably speak from the position of a Western European white woman, raised in that epistemological and ontological regime. Moreover, I am a painter, educated in a history of painting which helped to construct modern individualized Man, separated from nature. However, this practice-based research project has confronted me with other histories of painting, and other conceptions of the self. It has challenged the framework in which I was educated, which I now understand to be provincial, and transformed what I think is possible. This chapter has followed the colonial trajectories of plants and pigments sparked by the construction of a garden in Andalusia, and the observation of colonial histories inscribed in the local landscape through the presence of cochineal-infested cacti. It has linked the development of cash-crops, such as woad, to the desire to appropriate land and plant-life in the New World using indigenous enslaved labour under the *encomienda* system. The ‘discovery’ of tropical indigo, *xuiquilitl/ch’oj*, led to the proliferation of plantations using enslaved African labour which exploited their expertise around indigo while dehumanising them through the construction of racial hierarchies. At the same time, the indigenous people had their own technology for processing indigo into Mayan blue, which was overlooked by the Spanish colonisers. This pigment was part of a complex system of practices and radically different ontological assumptions - a universal culture with a multi-naturalism. Through the use of Mayan blue to paint the *ixiptla*, Gods could be made present - or rather *teotl* could present itself in another form. Taking other histories of painting seriously is an important step in decolonising. Thinking *with* Amerindian perspectives on what is human - through plants, pigments, and the *ixiptla* - reveals the provinciality of Western European painting, and offers possibilities of transformation.

³⁰⁴ Chakrabarty. p108

Of course, as a practice-based project, this *thinking with* other perspectives is not only theoretical, but also happens through *working with* plants and pigments. The challenge of constructing a pigment garden in such an arid landscape, meant that I attended to both the needs of a complete palette of colour, and the adaptability of plants already present. Nonetheless, working with the local plants, did not mean using 'native' as an organising category. The histories and movements of the plant life in the area reflected the histories and movements of the people. Indeed, the fact that the prickly pear cacti in Almeria are dying because of the cochineal infestation, demonstrates that humans, or some other animal, are needed to harvest the insects and keep them in check. Practices, and the ceasing of practices, affect others. 'Nature' is not a resource that lies before 'Man,' rather, we are enmeshed in complex relationships and perspectives. The peasant clothes that I created for the project, were not some 'authentic' regional costume, but rather a painted and dyed *ixiptla* of sorts - in the sense that it is of a bundling of relations and the creation of a perspective, rather than a representation that points to a 'real' but absent peasant. I was shown esparto weaving by elderly local men, which I used to construct a bulbous cooling sun hat, and which I referred to in the patterns which I printed with dyes onto calico, in my paintings as weavings of colours. I used the pigment-making method of laking, that has a long history in Europe, but also the 're-discovered' technology of Maya blue – which was used in the Mesoamerican history of painting.³⁰⁵ It is a technology which allows me to make a lot of pigment from relatively few woad plants, but it also connects with a history of colonial agnotology. Finally, with these pigments from plants and insects that connect Spain and the Americas, I have used egg tempera in the way that the Swedish peasants in Halland and Småland used it, reflecting my own path and practices leading up to the project. In the next chapter, therefore, I will develop the centrality of practices in perspectivalism, and connect it to reenactment as a bodily-based method to think with others.

³⁰⁵ Laking is a method of making water soluble dyes into water insoluble pigment powders. It involves using potassium aluminium sulphate and an alkali, such as potash (potassium carbonate) or soda ash (sodium carbonate) to precipitate a pigment.



Figure 3.60 Video still of planting woad, *Cultivating Colour*, 7:08 mins, 2015

Chapter Three

From the human zoo to re-enactment as method

This chapter builds on the notion of different genres of the human and Amerindian perspectivalism, by linking the *ixiptla* - which is not only an image, but also a captive wearing the costume of the God - to the practice of reenactment. Reenactment is important in my own practice. I use it performatively to show aspects of my painting practice that could not be conveyed through a display of finished paintings alone.³⁰⁶ I adopt the performative mode of the living history museum interpreter, but as a clown with a nose made from papier maché cucumber, thereby using the comic mode to disrupt the hierarchies implicit in the museum. Using this persona, I demonstrate pigment-making - often including the harvesting of dye plants - while weaving together the various historical narratives in front of the public. The first section of this chapter looks at this form of reenactment as a spectacle. I trace its problematic history as a form of colonial display, and its relationship with the 'human zoo' and the development of living history museums for the display of European peasant culture. I also use reenactment away from the public gaze as a mode of researching gardening, pigment-making recipes, and painting techniques. The second and third sections of the chapter discuss reenactment as a method. First, as a way to construct a malleable self, and secondly as a form of knowledge in which working in collaboration with materials is both a way of being and knowing.

The three sections have a deep connection. While reenactment in the museum was undoubtedly used to construct notions of authenticity, it also has disruptive potential. Despite its problematic beginnings, the development of the more complete embodied experience of the living history museum also undermined the disinterested scientific gaze. Additionally, the live performance that comes with reenactment produces complex relations which are not always straightforwardly reducible to the colonial gaze. To this end, I also address the artistic response of James Luna to the museological display of Native American lives through his performance in the museum, as an example of work which uses clowning to produce a productive ambivalence. Luna's use of the reenactor-clown

³⁰⁶ Of course, this thesis is another 'output' which gives a form and a voice to my research through practice.

contextualises my activation of the carnivalesque comic mode through the peasant-clown in my performances.

This approach is then extended to reenactment as method where I tackle dominant academic criticisms of its epistemological capacities as circumscribed by its focus on individual experience. I contrast this Euro-centric conception of the individual self and reenactment with the practice of reenactment used by Tupi Amerindians. In particular, I consider the large-scale reenactment of the Brazilwood trade performed by visiting Tupi and Norman sailors for the grand entrance of King Henri II to the city of Rouen in 1550. In Amerindian perspectivalism, knowing and becoming are inseparable, as there is no essential self and personhood is ascribed to non-humans. After addressing how reenactment can unleash changing subjectivities that counter the modern self as 'individual', I discuss how it involves collaboration with non-human actants.

I use the idea of 'alchemy' to discuss the practice of reenactment within painting, in particular the practice of reconstructing pigment and paint recipes by conservation scientists. That conservators prefer to use the word reconstruction over the word reenactment reveals a nervousness around the status of embodied practices in relation to the apparent objectivity and repeatability of the scientific method. I argue that reenactment is an expansive practice which incorporates various forms of research, including the conjectural methods of historical investigation and anthropology, as well those deriving from embodied practices. As such it dismantles hierarchies of knowledges, replacing the disciplining of academic knowledge with an ecology of knowledges, ontologies, and materialisms. Reenactment expands painting into a wide network of cultural relationships. In the case of my use of reenactment as a research method in 'peasant-painting', the studio expands into the field of plants.

Reenacting indigeneity, Colonial display and the Living History Museum

On August 29th, 1911, a 'wild Indian' was captured trying to forage for food at an abattoir in Oroville, California. He had spent the past forty-four years in hiding around the foothills of Mount Lassen with his family and a small group of survivors of the 1865 Three Knolls Massacre, in which forty of their Yahi tribe had been killed. The number of survivors had dwindled, and he had spent the last three years alone. The story of the 'Last Wild Indian, untouched by civilisation' was front page news the

next day in San Francisco and across the country. Professor Alfred Kroeber, director of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, had him brought to the museum to be studied by Dr Thomas Talbot Waterman and himself. They soon worked out that he was a member of the previously thought to be extinct tribe of the Yahi, a southern relative of the Yana. They named him Ishi, which means 'Man' in the Yana language as he refused to give his own name, and they set about learning about how he lived before his contact with 'civilisation.' Ishi was asked to reenact various practices such as flintknapping, using a bow, fishing, and shelter-building in the museum both as a subject of research for the professors, and also to entertain and edify the visitors.³⁰⁷



Figure 4.61 Ishi demonstrating a Yana dwelling at Museum of Anthropology, Berkeley

³⁰⁷ Robert Fleming Heizer and Theodora Kroeber, *Ishi, the Last Yahi: A Documentary History*, University of California Press, Oakland, CA, 1981.



Figure 4.62 Nelly outside the cottage she lived in at the Hallands open-air museum, Halmstad, photo: Johan W Ingman, Hallands konstmuseum

A decade after Ishi's death from tuberculosis in 1916, the Swedish industrialist Alfred Wallberg founded an open-air museum in Halmstad which featured rural buildings from around the region of Halland, South West Sweden. In 2012, while working on an artist's residency and exhibition there in response to their collection of Peasant Paintings, I found out about Nelly, an elderly woman who Wallberg had installed in one of the small cottages. Like many of the rural poor, Nelly had supplemented her income by working in Wallberg's brick factory, but in her retirement, and without relatives, she had little choice but to live in the museum as directed. Her role was ostensibly to act as a caretaker and to tell traditional stories to visiting children. In fact, it seems the intention was that she serve as an 'extra' for the open-air museum - a living artefact of sorts. According to later interviews conducted with the son of the family who ran the museum cafe at the time, Nelly lived in the empty museum village very much against her will but did not dare protest.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁸ Läns museet Halmstad, *Friluftsmuseet Hallandsgården*, årsbok för kulturhistoria och hembygdsvård i Hallands län, Halmstad och Varberg Hallands län museer, Stiftelsen Hallands läns museer, Halmstad, 2001.

Both Ishi and Nelly ended up living in museums, reenacting their lives at the end of their lives. Ishi represented the radical other, displaced through time as a 'primitive' but also through race. His value lay in his rarity as a 'pure' Indian, 'untouched' by civilization. He was everything his public was not. Nelly, on the other hand, represented the public's own immediate past. She confirmed their sense of belonging through her links to the land, as well as their modernity as she represented a moment in the progress of history. She was a link to how the forebears of the visitors had lived. The way they were both framed in the museum, served to impose ideas of authenticity that obscured the hybrid worlds in which they actually lived.

Ishi was a celebrity. The biggest issue for the anthropologists was how to manage large crowds that wanted to see him at the museum - a terrifying prospect for Ishi, having grown up in hiding from the murderous white man. Dr Waterman, Professor Kroeber's protégé, ironically suggested that the only solution he could see was to place Ishi in a glass vitrine during opening hours so he could be seen but not touched.³⁰⁹ In the end, it was established that Professor Kroeber and Ishi would be available to the public every Sunday afternoon in one of the larger upstairs rooms of the museum. There Ishi would demonstrate making crafts, such as arrow heads to an enthralled audience of all ages. At other times, Ishi would help the anthropologists, Professor Kroeber, Dr Waterman, and the linguist Edward Sapir, with their research into his Yahi language and culture.³¹⁰

Much has been written about Ishi in what James Clifford calls a history of changing appropriations, but Theodora Kroeber's biography of him, *Ishi in Two Worlds*, is perhaps the key text. Second wife of Professor Kroeber, she never met Ishi herself, but told his story through Kroeber's recollections. Clifford is sympathetic to Theodora Kroeber's warm, humanising narrative, but he points to many blind spots that belie attitudes of the time. There is a tendency to emphasise Ishi as a "precious, uncontaminated specimen from an older California."³¹¹ The effort to argue for the purity of Ishi's

³⁰⁹ Theodora Kroeber, *Ishi in Two Worlds; a Biography of the Last Wild Indian in North America*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1961. p134

³¹⁰ It is worth noting that Ishi was not forced to live in the museum. At one point he was asked by representatives of the Bureau for Indian Affairs if he would like to live on a reservation with 'his own kind,' but he declined the offer. Of course, one could argue that this was not much of a choice. As Theodora Kroeber points out, he was the last surviving speaker of his Yahi language so he may have felt as isolated on an Indian reservation as in white company.

³¹¹ James Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2013. p107

concealment from the modern world leads to many contradictions in the text. At one point Theodora Kroeber says of the Yahis in hiding, "They wore capes of deer-skin and wildcat, occasionally of bearskin. And they slept under blankets of rabbitskins. Ethnologists are agreed that they pursued a way of life the most totally aboriginal and primitive of any on the continent at least after the coming of the white man to America."³¹² Yet a couple of pages later she recounts an incident in April 1885, in which during their many raids on surrounding cabins in the area, four Indians, one of them believed to be Ishi, were caught stealing three old jumpers and an overcoat. This small group of Yahis were not living some kind of 'authentic' pre-Columbian life - they were desperate and in hiding. Living in difficult to penetrate lands they were cut off from contact with other Indian tribes and trade possibilities. They raided settler cabins for food, clothing and other useful materials. With no local source of flint or obsidian, and unable to trade for them, Theodora Kroeber concedes that they used plate and bottle glass to fashion their arrow tips, something that Ishi continued to demonstrate later on during his reenactment demonstrations in the museum.³¹³

Clifford points out that the photographs in first editions of *Ishi in Two Worlds* never show Ishi doing Indian activities in Western dress, despite the fact that Theodora Kroeber mentions that he exclusively wore Western clothes at the museum. The images of him wearing only a breechclout all come from a trip to the foothills where he had lived in concealment with his family, undertaken in the summer of 1914 with the anthropologists Professor Kroeber and Dr Waterman, and his physician Dr Pope and his teenaged son. Theodora Kroeber describes the trip as as a Yahi '*fête champêtre*' - from the eighteenth-century French courtly practice of the 'pastoral festival' or garden party which involved outdoor entertainment and fancy dress.³¹⁴ Ishi 'reverted to a state of native undress,' wearing only a breechclout, and Alfred Kroeber, Waterman, Pope and his son joined him in stripping off. Ultimately, Ishi seems to have found the trip worthwhile as a way of documenting and explaining his lifeways, and Clifford argues that he enjoyed 'playing Indian' with the others, he however remained silent on matters concerning his family: 'His survivance, his way of living as an "Indian" in "civilization," was evidently a matter of selectively taking up new ways while refusing others, giving and holding back.'³¹⁵

³¹² Kroeber, *Ishi in Two Worlds*. p100

³¹³ Kroeber.

³¹⁴ Kroeber. p211

³¹⁵ Clifford, *Returns*. p135

Indeed, what is generally overlooked is that Ishi did not only practice reenactment directed towards his previous life, he also used it as a *method* of taking up certain new ways. Theodora Kroeber gives a telling account of when Ishi was invited to dine with Dr Waterman and his family the day after his arrival: "Ishi so closely watched his hostess, imitating her in her choice of fork or spoon, in her use of a napkin, and in the amount of food she put on her plate, that his exactly similar motions appeared to be simultaneous with hers."³¹⁶ This use of reenactment by Ishi as a way, to know, and - even further, to *become* - 'the other' will be developed further on in this chapter, as we move away from reenactment as a spectacle towards reenactment as method. However, for now it is interesting to note that the anthropologists 'playing Indian,' and Ishi's reenactment of flint-napping and archery in the staging of the museum, are subject to much discussion, yet Ishi's performance of certain aspects of modern Western culture are glossed over. I would argue that Ishi's reenactment of Native lifeways was no more a reenactment of past history than his reenactment of the eating manners of an American anthropologist's wife in San Francisco. And in both instances reenactment was being used as a way of knowing and becoming.

If we return to Nelly, we can trace the development of European living history museums in relation to the human zoo and the colonial gaze revealed in Ishi's story. Living history museums are the main site where images of the European peasant are constructed in contemporary Europe. They are also sites that I have used as source material, research, and as performance locations within my practice. Rather than taking them as neutral representations of a European past, it is important to pick apart the relationship between the outward colonial gaze of Western modernity directed at the 'Other' and its inward colonial gaze which makes use of the figure of the European peasant, which had also been subject to dispossession. They are also the site where contemporary practices of European and North American reenactment were developed. This changed the regime of gazes within the museum, replacing the spatial and visual hierarchy of the cage or vitrine with a complete embodied experience, prefiguring the expansion of amateur participation in reenactment.

³¹⁶ Kroeber, *Ishi in Two Worlds*. p138

Halland's open air museum was modelled after Skansen in Stockholm, widely considered to be the world's first open air museum, which was founded by Artur Hazelius in 1891. Hazelius' radical new approach was to attempt to display ethnographic artefacts in their contexts instead of glass cabinets. Whole village-milieus were created consisting of collections of rural buildings laid out in relation to each other, with their interiors, furniture, and everyday objects in situ. The buildings were complemented with heritage plants and even a zoo of domestic and wild animals native to Scandinavia. Skansen open air museum was set up to be a more popular, entertaining partner to the more academic Nordic museum which was dedicated to the ethnographic display of Nordic cultural history since 1523 - the date which marks the Reformation and the creation of the expansive national Vasa state.³¹⁷

When Skansen was first opened, real peasants and Samis were a part of the display. Indeed, Baglo has argued that Hazelius probably got the idea of creating an open-air museum of people and buildings when he took his ethnographic collection to Paris for the Universal Exhibition of 1878 and saw live displays of indigenous peoples not only at the *village indigène* (indigenous village) at the French pavilion, but also at Carl Hagenback's 'human zoo'. Hagenbeck put on displays of live "Laplanders, as well as Nubians, Eskimos, Kalmucks, Fuegians, and Sinhalese," in the Jardin d'Acclimatation, a zoological garden in Paris, during the period 1877 - 87, coinciding with the International exhibitions.³¹⁸ Hazelius also undertook a study tour of museums of Denmark and Germany the year that Skansen was inaugurated and Baglo suggests that it is very likely that he would have visited Hagenbeck's anthropological zoo in Hamburg, where he may have met Thomas Andersson, his son Johannes Tomasson, and members of their family, from Jämtland, who demonstrated their reindeer herding Sami life style at the zoo.³¹⁹

Daniel Alan DeGroff points out that if these Universal Exhibitions were opportunities for nation states to compete on the international stage, then France was displaying its imperial reach through the

³¹⁷ Aronsson, 'The Image of the Peasant within National Museums in the Nordic Countries,' *Societal Change and Ideological Formation among the Rural Population of the Baltic Area 1880-1939*, Studia Baltica. Series II, Södertörns högskola, Huddinge, 2008

³¹⁸ Baglo, 'Reconstruction as Trope of Cultural Display. Rethinking the Role of "Living Exhibitions"' *Nordisk Museologi*, no. 2, 2015: 49-68; p 53

³¹⁹ Baglo.

variety and exotism of its colonised peoples. Sweden, on the other hand, was displaying *its own* internal ethnographic richness in its regional variety while, of course, claiming Sapmi as a part of Sweden. While the figure of the peasant (in the form of a mannequin) was central for the display of cultural pride in the Swedish display (figure 3), the French peasant was entirely absent. For *la France une et indivisible*, an internal ethnographic variety was not desirable, instead their live displays of exotic colonial possessions were complemented with mannequins (notably not live people) dressed as ecclesiastics, magistrates, and jurists from the universities and academies of a centralised and Catholic France.³²⁰



Figure 4.63 Mannequins sculpted by C.A. Söderman, clothed in regional costume shown at the Universal Exhibition Paris, 1867, from left: hay girl from Skåne, a couple from Halland, two women from Blekinge. Nordiska museet, photo: Eurenus and Quist

DeGross argues that in contrast to the French ethnographic displays, Hazelius' peasant scenes were not used to construct the same notions of primitivism we see embedded in the French and English discourse of colonialism, but rather they reflected "the purest and most noble expression of the values of the national community."³²¹ It has been a particularly powerful narrative amongst Swedish historians that its unique path to political modernity was based in the enfranchisement of small

³²⁰ DeGross, 'Artur Hazelius and the Ethnographic Display of the Scandinavian Peasantry'. *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 19, no. 2, April 2012: 229–48.

³²¹ DeGross. p240

freeholder farmers, and their communitarian culture is what led to the development of an egalitarian and inclusive Scandinavian socialism.³²² Peter Aronsson notes that while in other European countries the discourse around 'the people' that were to be considered the proper enfranchised citizens was based on a virtuous middle class, in Sweden it already included peasants (that is to say small freeholders), and thus eventually readily 'the workers' through political alliances during the 1930s.³²³

However, Aronsson also points to the darker side of the use of the figure of the peasant in national museums. Not only does modernity construct stages of development to justify the colonisation of supposedly more 'primitive' peoples, it is also a form of geopolitics which is 'rooted' in Europe. As such, the figure of the peasant has been used in the construction of racial hierarchies and nationalisms which have been employed by colonialism at the same as the peasant has been used to represent the past. It is a rootedness in both time and landscape. Aronsson points out that Sweden had the dubious honour of leading the development of race-biology theories in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 1919 the Swedish Art Academy in Stockholm staged a photography exhibition called *The Swedish Folk-type* which subsequently toured the country, to Uppsala, Gävle, Visby and Göteborg. The photographs from the exhibition were published in 1919 as a series of seven volumes titled *Swedish folk types: image gallery*, arranged according to racial biology principles with an overview by the doctor Herman Lundborg (figures 4 and 5). The intention of the exhibition and publication was to generate interest in race-biology, and had the support of prominent intellectuals, scientists, politicians and artists, including the famed 'painter of peasants' Anders Zorn. It contributed to the subsequent foundation of the Institute for Racial Research In Uppsala in 1922 with Herman Lundborg as its first director.³²⁴ The institute was responsible for researching the racial constituency of the Swedish people and promoting practices of 'race-hygiene.'

³²² Peter Baldwin, *The Politics of Social Solidarity : Class Bases of the European Welfare State, 1*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 199).

³²³ Aronsson, 'The Image of the Peasant within National Museums in the Nordic Countries'.

³²⁴ Aronsson.

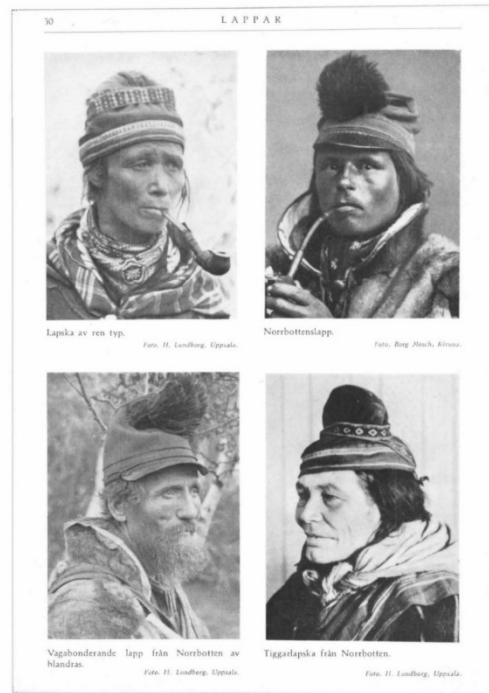
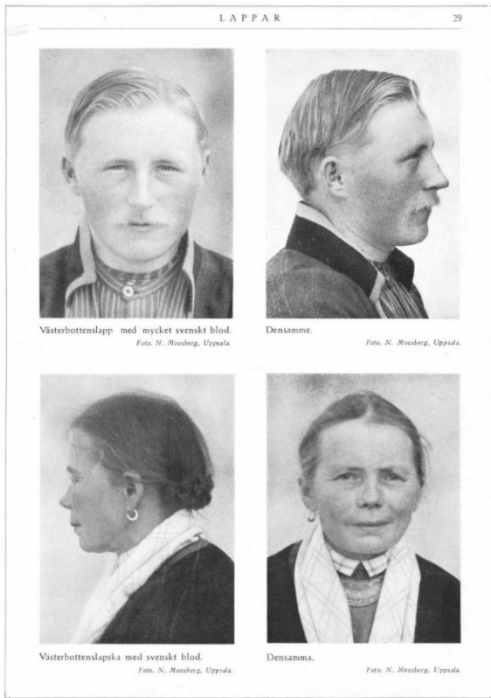


Figure 4.64 Pages from the book of "Swedish Folktypes", 1919. These images purport to show "Lapps mixed with Swedish blood," and a "vagabond Lapp of mixed race," a "begging Lapp," and "pure Lapps."

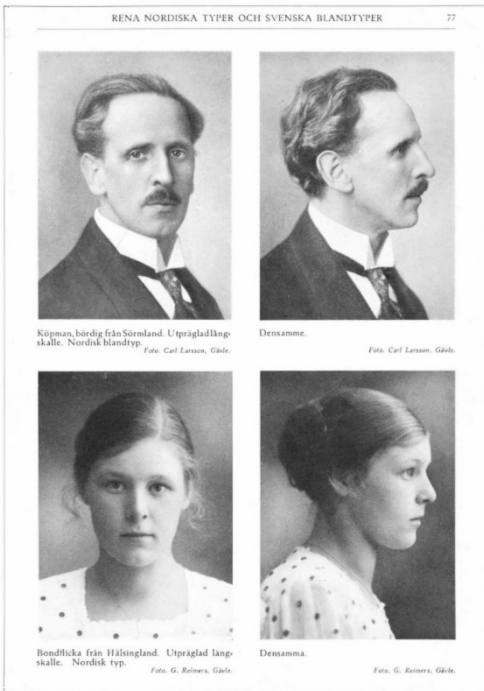


Figure 4.65 Pages from the book of "Swedish Folktypes", 1919. These pages purport to show "mixed and pronounced Nordic and Swedish types," with a merchant, a farmgirl, and servant girls.

The background to this interest in 'race hygiene' in Sweden came from a fear of immigration and thus a 'dilution' of the Swedish people. From the second half of the nineteenth century to 1930, 1.3 million Swedes had emigrated to the United States. Considering the population of Sweden in 1900 was 5.1 million, this was a significant proportion. The impetus towards emigration to the United States was due to a doubling in population during the nineteenth century. A series of potato famines in the 1860s caused by blight and bad weather, and the lack of jobs for the displaced rural poor due the underdevelopment of industry, contributed to a significant push. On the other side of the Atlantic, policies such as the Homestead Act of 1862 were specifically designed to encourage white European farmers to settle areas inhabited by Native Americans and thereby speed up the colonisation of the West and the displacement of the Native population.³²⁵ Swedes migrated in droves to the Midwest, especially Minnesota - where both of my Great Grandfathers on my mother's side went (although they were to eventually return).³²⁶ As industry eventually did develop during the early twentieth century, the mass migration to the States and falling birth rates led to a population and labour crisis back in Sweden. Consequently, the interest in 'race hygiene' came from a fear that immigration from groups with higher birth rates - such as Finns - would contribute to a further decline in the Swedish 'race.'³²⁷

Within the hierarchies of races developed by these theories of race-biology, the Samis were considered among the lowest and most primitive. Gunlög Fur has pointed out the parallels between Swedish images of Native Americans and Samis, and argues that they are used to construct a 'Swedish innocence' concerning the settler colonisation of both Native American land in the American Midwest and Sami land to the North of Sweden. Both were depicted in popular media as primitive races bound to become extinct under the inexorable progress of modernity. The more subtle process of settler

³²⁵ Paul Frymer, *Building an American Empire*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2017.

³²⁶ My mother's grandfather, Gustav, was born on a small *torp* in 1866. At the age of twelve his father told him that he ate too much, and that he could no longer support him. He would have to go and get a job as a farm hand. After some years working on a farm, the farmer told him that although he was a good lad, and a hard worker, he was too poor to marry his daughter. This made Gustav angry, and he slammed his fist on the table and declared that he didn't even want to marry his daughter but that he would earn money so that one day he could come back and buy his farm. He eventually emigrated to America where he initially worked on the railroads, which he found too hard, eventually returning to farmwork near St Paul's, Minnesota, where many Swedes settled. After suffering bad sunstroke, the doctor advised him to return to Sweden for his health. When he came back, he was wearing rubber boots - a new invention made from a material native to Mesoamerica, never seen before by the locals in Västergötaland, Sweden. He did indeed buy land, although not the land belonging to the farmer for whom he had previously worked.

³²⁷ Alva Myrdal and Gunnar Myrdal, *Kris i befolkningsfrågan*, 1934, repr. Digitala biblioteket, Stockholm, 2015.

colonisation in the United States - also employed by the expansive Swedish nation state towards Sami in the North - allowed Sweden to construct a morally superior 'innocent' image of itself in contrast to the imperial colonisation of other European powers.³²⁸



Figure 4.66 A souvenir photograph of Nejl Makke Åhren and family during a performance stay at Skansen in 1896, Nordiska museet, NMA.0058599, photo: Frans G. Klemming

When Skansen opened its doors in 1891 it therefore promoted an expansive nation state through the display of a Sami encampment inhabited by a Sami family - Nejl Makke Åhren, and his wife and children, from Frostviken, Jämtland (figure 6). At the same time, Hazelius also expressed Sweden's rootedness in the past through the display of peasants inhabiting other buildings, just as Nelly was to later inhabit the cottage at Halland open air museum. Comparatively little has been written about the motivations of peasants like Nelly that performed at Skansen and other open-air museums, but there was certainly some reticence. As we have seen, Nelly agreed to live in the open air museum only

³²⁸ Gunlög Fur, 'Colonial Fantasies – American Indians, Indigenous Peoples, and a Swedish Discourse of Innocence', *National Identities* 18, no. 1,2 January 2016: 11–33.

because of a lack of alternatives.³²⁹ When Hazelius purchased the Oktorp farmstead from Halland in 1896, he wanted the original owners, the Lundquist family, to reenact their lives in its new location at the open air museum during the summer of 1897 for the Stockholm exhibition, but they refused as the father, Åke, was too frail.



Figure 4.67 Left, the Lundquist family in their house at Oktorp farm that was purchased for display at Skansen, photographed by Severin Nilsson, Hallands konstmuseum, V000125; Right, Åke Lundquist photographed in his house by Severin Nilsson. He is reading "Vårt Land," a conservative nationalist newspaper that Nilsson probably gave as a prop, since it was distributed in Stockholm. Hallands konstmuseum, V000127

Although the Lundquists declined to reenact their lives at Skansen, they did take part in curating their possessions. When Hazelius bought the entire Oktorp farmstead, including its outbuildings, for the sum of 5000 crowns he also took 350 artefacts and tools, but only those items he deemed traditional.³³⁰ The family lived in a hybrid world with a mixture of old and new, local and imported, but as with Ishi, it was the museum that decided what was authentic. It is deeply ironic then, that in attempting to preserve the folk traditions of Halland, Hazelius left the family only with what was modern. Indeed, with the 5000 crowns from the sale Åke Lundquist built a grand brand-new farmhouse. In August of 1896 Åke's daughter Johanna travelled up to Stockholm in order to oversee

³²⁹ Baglo argues for a nuanced interpretation of the living display of Samis at Skansen and Hagenback's 'Human Zoos', pointing out that although Samis were victims of racism and colonisation, one should not discount their own agency in these displays. She has extensively researched various Sami performers and uncovered different motivations, from money and cultural preservation, to travel and a sense of adventure (Baglo 2015; 2014). She also argues that 'complete embodied experience' of the open air museum broke down barriers between the performers and public.

³³⁰ Ingrid Bergman, ed., *Känn dig själv*, Fataburen 1998, Nordiska Museet, Stockholm, 1998.

the placement of the items within the house, including the peasant paintings that were to hang on the old cottage walls, as if it was permanently Christmas. Having sold all their paintings, it effectively meant the end of that tradition for the Lundquist family and a strange sort of death for the paintings themselves.

For the journey to the big capital Johanna had a dress specially sewn up. The dress was in a highly fashionable cut for the time, but sewn in a blue dyed handwoven wool - very likely dyed with imported indigo. Almost a century later, in 1994, Johanna's grandchildren donated the dress to Skansen, which they copied so the replica could be worn by museum interpreters. The curators remarked on its value not only for its deep connection to the Oktorp farmstead, but also as hybrid item of hand-dyed and hand-woven wool sewn into a modern fashionable shape, reflecting the hybrid world in which Johanna lived (Bergman and Nordiska museet 1997).³³¹ However, the curators do not remark on the fact that something as apparently 'traditional' and 'local' as the handwoven wool was probably dyed with a dye stuff produced under the conditions of the colonial plantation. Clearly the fact that this hybrid dress is valued by curators a century later when it would have been ignored by Hazelius indicates that open air museums are now interested in depicting the transition to modernity and the heterogeneous worlds in which Swedish peasants lived. However, there is a need to make more explicit the global colonial forces in which Swedish peasants were entangled and the part that the open-air museum with its live reenactments had in this. This is something in which contemporary art practices, including my own, might have a role to play.

In a twist to this history, reenactment has been used as a tactic by contemporary American Indian artists, such as Luiseño artist James Luna, to respond to the colonial gaze implicit in Ishi's story and the human zoo. His *Artifact Piece* (1987) (figure 8) seems to reenact the idea of Ishi as living exhibit in the museum, albeit along the lines of Waterman's ironic suggestion of placing him in a glass vitrine. In the section devoted to Kumeyaay Indians at the San Diego Museum of Man, James Luna lay down on a bed of sand, wearing nothing but a loincloth, presenting himself as an artefact for view. Labels pointed to and explained his various scars from incidents of drinking and fighting, while a nearby vitrine displayed various personal items including contemporary ritual objects from the La Jolla

³³¹ Bergman.

reservation where Luna lived, music by the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, and the Sex Pistols, poetry by Allen Ginsburg, political buttons, college diplomas, divorce papers and other cultural artefacts. By performing in nothing but a loincloth, he references the performance of ‘authenticity’ that Ishi makes in the photographs from the reenactment camping trip of 1914.³³² Yet his personal items break with white ideas of what should pertain to an authentic Indian. Rather, as Jean Fisher puts it, it is a “masquerade that mimes and parodies stereotypes of ‘authentic’ ‘Indianness.’”³³³ The use of parody and humor is important in Luna’s work, and he himself said “I think the bestowed title of an ‘American Indian ceremonial clown’ is the best description for what I am—that is, a satirist and commentator with a special gift of gab.”³³⁴



Figure 4.68 James Luna, *The Artifact Piece*, 1987. Installation view, San Diego Museum of Man. Courtesy of the estate of James Luna and Garth Greenan Gallery, New York.

³³² Clifford, *Returns*.

³³³ Jean Fisher, ‘In Search of the “Inauthentic”’: Disturbing Signs in Contemporary Native American Art’, *Art Journal* 51, no. 3, 1992: 44–50. p49

³³⁴ James Luna et al., ‘Fasten Your Seat Belts, Prepare for Landing’: in *Pablo Tac, Indigenous Scholar*, 1st ed., Writing on Luiseño Language and Colonial History, c.1840, University of California Press, Oakland, CA, 2011, 41–56. p42

Crucially, it is the effect of the live performance which unsettles the colonial gaze and does not allow Luna to be entirely reduced to an artefact. Clifford describes Luna's performance as both "living and dead", while Fisher similarly calls the work "a parody of the 'Indian' in the realm of the 'undead'."³³⁵ On the one hand, Luna reveals the way the museum display has the effect of rendering 'dead' and 'extinct' native peoples that are a part of the contemporary world and have a living and continuously changing culture. On the other hand, it is the potential for his body to suddenly speak to viewers, rather than to just be visible, as Fisher argues, that disrupts the hierarchical regime of the gaze:

If the purpose of the undead Indian of colonialism is to secure the self-identity of the onlooker, the shock of his real presence and the possibility that he may indeed be watching and listening disarms the voyeuristic gaze and denies it its structuring power.³³⁶

In her essay, 'Ambivalent Entertainments' Jane Blocker characterises Luna's approach as a productive ambivalence which brought living flesh to the dead bones of the museum. Here the dead bones are the objects of the archive, collected and categorised by the white gaze, which make the living flesh of the Indians disappear. The Artifact Piece is ambivalent because it both participates in, and disrupts, the logic of the archive by breathing life into it, while at the same time demonstrating that the Indian is, in his own body, viewed as a museum.³³⁷ After all, the museum was not only the repository of Indian remains, but also the mechanism by which Indians were turned into entertainment for white audiences. This complicates the idea that Luna's real presence through performance is a necessarily emancipatory gesture. Rather than being problematic however, Blocker views this strategy of ambivalence as full of generative, creative potential. She links with what Gruzinski's calls 'the mestizo mind' which disrupts the narratives of purity, authenticity, categorisation, and historical truth which are played out in the archive.³³⁸

³³⁵ Fisher, 'In Search of the "Inauthentic"' p48; Clifford, *Returns*. p134

³³⁶ Fisher, 'In Search of the "Inauthentic"' . p48

³³⁷ Blocker, 'Ambivalent Entertainments'.

³³⁸ Serge Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization*, Psychology Press, London, 2002.

Indeed, much has been written about the role of the ceremonial clown in Native American culture, as a subversive figure who embodies the meeting of paradoxical qualities and processes under transformation.³³⁹ While early anthropological writing interpreted native American ritual clowning as a way to maintain order and control through catharsis, later work has been influenced by Bakhtin's writing on the European carnivalesque which, as we have seen in chapter one, sees clowning and the carnivalesque grotesque as a generative practice, which has the potential to disrupt the status quo, or at least to make audiences reflect on the processes in the overall ritual. Don Handelman traces the etymology of the English word clown, to a 'clot' or 'clod,' something loose and clumsy, which is unfinished in its internal organisation - a fusion of unlike attributes yet productive like a sod of earth. He points out that in Europe clowns were associated with pre-modern rural festivals around the vernal equinox. Native American ritual clowns similarly embody processes of transformation and are often associated with fertility rites.³⁴⁰ The passage between defined states that rituals are designed to mark and mediate is contained within the hybrid bodies of the ritual clowns. Barbara Babcock sees it as a form of paradoxical metacommentary: "Clowning - on the ancient stage, under the big top, in the Pueblo plaza - exemplifies these very principles and creates a space where texts can talk to each other. The clown's performance is a parabasis and a parataxis that disrupts and interrupts customary frames and expected logic and syntax and creates a reflexive and ironic dialogue, and open space of questioning."³⁴¹ James Luna, as a ceremonial clown, reveals the absurdities of the boundaries created by the categorisation of the museum, by embodying the meeting of paradoxical categories - dead/alive, pre-modern/modern, authentic/inauthentic - in the undead Indian. Tellingly Clifford quotes Luna as saying in discussion "I am not a coyote. Coyote was not a nice guy. I am a clown."³⁴²

Just as bibles and treaties, guns and swords, were simultaneously tools of subjugation and liberation, so reenactment can subvert the colonial gaze despite its connection to the history of human zoos and open air museums. Reenactment is however, not just a spectacle. It is also a practice which can take

³³⁹ Barbara Babcock, 'Arrange Me into Disorder: Fragments and Reflections on Ritual Clowning', in *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals toward a Theory of Cultural Performance*, ed. John J MacAloon, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, and Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1984; Don Handelman, 'The Ritual-Clown: Attributes and Affinities', *Anthropos* 76, no. 3/4, 1981: 321-70; Robert Brightman, 'Traditions of Subversion and the Subversion of Tradition: Cultural Criticism in Maidu Clown Performances', *American Anthropologist* 101, no. 2, 1999: 272-87.

³⁴⁰ Handelman, 'The Ritual-Clown'. p328

³⁴¹ Barbara Babcock, 'Arrange Me into Disorder: Fragments and Reflections on Ritual Clowning'. p107

³⁴² Clifford, *Returns*. p137

place away from any public. Although Skansen now employs museum interpreters in period dress, the boundary between the “professional” and the “amateur” have been blurred as hobby reenactment groups have proliferated.³⁴³ Reenactment is therefore also something that interests people as an experience and as a way of learning. By turning away from reenactment as a spectacle towards reenactment as a method, I shall attempt to address what role reenactment might play in the construction of the self, and how this interfaces with reenactment as knowledge. In order to do this, I compare a recent reenactment of Captain Cook’s First voyage with an Early Modern intercultural moment centred on plant pigments - a sixteenth century reenactment of the Brazilwood trade.

Cannibalistic reenactments

On October 1-2, 1550, the city of Rouen, Normandy, held a spectacular performance for King Henry II's “royal entrance” (*joyeuse entrée*). The royal entrance was a tradition rooted in the medieval period in which the French Kings toured the most important cities in the Kingdom, marked by great festivities, including pageants, music, and theatrical performances. The ritual was designed to reinforce the relationship between the city and the King, presenting the local elites with an opportunity to lobby, petition, and to communicate their notions of ideal kingship. At this time, Rouen was a major European centre for the global trade in dyestuffs and manufacture of dyed textiles. The various associated industries were distributed along the Robec river, which would turn various shades of blues and reds as the dyers emptied their tanks in the mornings.³⁴⁴ One of the most important red dyes used and traded into Europe at this time was brazilwood - the dyestuff we see being rasped by

³⁴³ As part of my practice in 2007 I joined one such reenactment group called The Tudor Group, that focuses on everyday British life in the 1580s. The group does extensive research into clothing, customs, food, and crafts, and meet at each other's homes throughout the year to share findings and to work together on their ‘kit.’ They are invited to various open air museums and Tudor historic sites to reenact for the public, where the group camp and spend time even after the public have left. Notably the group does not perform in first person, but rather makes it clear that they are modern people wearing sixteenth century clothing so that they can explain how things work, and the limits of what can be known. The focus is not to perform for the public as Tudor characters, but rather to educate and impart knowledge coming out of practical and embodied research alongside textual research. At the same time it is an immersive experience for the public, who see otherwise ‘dead’ historic environments animated with human activity and clutter. My specialism within the group is painting and pigments.

³⁴⁴ Amy J. Bueno, ‘Representing the Tupinambá and the Brazilwood Trade in Sixteenth-Century Rouen’, in *Cultural Exchanges between Brazil and France*, ed. Regina R. Felix and Scott D. Juall, Purdue University Press, West Lafayette, IN, 2016: 19-31; Michael Wintroub, ‘Civilizing the Savage and Making a King: The Royal Entry Festival of Henri II (Rouen, 1550)’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 29, no. 2, 1998: 465–94.

prisoners and used by Swedish peasants in chapter one. Portugal had quickly established a monopoly in the trade of brazilwood soon after Pedro Álvares Cabral's arrival to the coast of Brazil in 1500. The local Tupi Amerindians felled the trees, trimmed them down to the heartwood, and transported the heavy logs to the waiting ships, in exchange for metal goods. The French attempted to challenge this monopoly by establishing a series of trading posts on the coast of Brazil. The Normans took advantage of the enmity between various local Tupi Amerindian groups, and formed alliances with local Tupinambá who were enemies of the Tupi and that were, in turn, in alliance with the Portuguese. Consequently, the French incursions into the Brazilian coastline involved an escalating series of violent clashes with the Portuguese.³⁴⁵

When King Henry II came to make his royal entrance into Rouen in 1550, support for these lucrative trading posts and colonies were foremost in the city's concerns. The event was an opportunity for the city merchants to make their case to the King, through a spectacular reenactment of the brazilwood trade (figure 9). In a meadow on the outskirts of the city an entire Tupinambá village was reconstructed, with communal lodges made from roughly hewn logs, surrounded by palisades. The local vegetation of juniper, ash, and willow had their trunks painted red to look like tropical trees from Brazil. Above the trees flew parrots and other exotic birds, while monkeys also imported from Brazil swung from their branches. The village was populated with three hundred naked inhabitants, fifty of whom were actual Tupi - "natural savages freshly brought from Brazil."³⁴⁶ The rest were sailors who had lived with the Tupi in Brazil and according to witnesses spoke their language and copied their mannerisms well. Together they reenacted the daily life of the Tupinambá, shooting with their bows and arrows, chasing monkeys, lounging in their hammocks under trees, cutting and transporting brazilwood to a small French fortress in exchange for iron objects. The river Seine was transformed into the Atlantic as merchant ships transported the brazilwood across its waters to the city of Rouen.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁵ Perrone-Moisés, 'Performed Alliances and Performative Identities: Tupinamba in the Kingdom of France', in *Performing Indigeneity: Global Histories and Contemporary Experiences*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE, 2014, 110–35.

³⁴⁶ Perrone-Moisés. p114

³⁴⁷ Perrone-Moisés; Buono, 'Representing the Tupinambá and the Brazilwood Trade in Sixteenth-Century Rouen'; Wintroub, 'Civilizing the Savage and Making a King'.



Figure 4.69 Woodcut depicting the reenactment of the Brazilwood trade in Rouen, Robert Le Hoy, *C'est la deduction du sumptueux ordre plaisantz spectacles et magniques théâtres dressés et exhibés par les citoyens de Rouen*, 1551, Institut national d'histoire de l'art, NUM 8 RES 577

Suddenly the peace was broken by an attack from the Tubajara - an enemy group of Tupi who were allies of the Portuguese - and a fierce battle ensued, with long bows and hand-to-hand combat with clubs. The Tupinambá were victorious and the Tubajara village was burnt to the ground. Beatriz Perrone-Moisés cites an anonymous witness and chronicler of the event who was impressed with how “real” the scene looked, and attributed this to both the participation of “real savages” and the long experience of living with the Tupinambá of the Norman sailors.³⁴⁸ The battle between the Tupinamba and their enemies was followed by the reenactment of a sea battle between the French and the Portuguese, in which the French allies of the Tupinambá also won. Battle scenes like these were typical of royal entrances, but they were normally of classical scenes from antiquity or myth. Perrone-Moisés believes there has been a tendency to underestimate the significance of this

³⁴⁸ Perrone-Moisés, ‘Performed Alliances and Performative Identities’. p114

departure from tradition. While many previous contemporary commentators have seen the whole Brazilian reenactment as yet another image of the exotic other seen through the lens of European colonialism, Perrone-Moisés argues that although there will be aspects of colonialism in any given sixteenth century encounter between Europeans and Amerindians, not looking at the particular context tends to obscure Amerindian agency. Instead of representing the power of the King to subjugate and civilise the savage, she sees this particular reenactment as a form of diplomatic ritual demonstrating the close ties between the Normans and the Tupinambá. The two battles - between the Tupinambá and the Tubajara, and the French and the Portuguese - were really one battle belonging to the same war over control over the brazilwood trade raging along the Brazilian coastline at the time.³⁴⁹

Four-hundred and fifty years later, in 2001 a team of professional sailors, historians, botanists, and volunteers, set off on a six-week voyage to retrace part of Captain Cook's voyage along the North East coast of Australia and the Indonesian archipelago, in a replica of his ship, the *Endeavour*. This was to be the basis of a BBC television documentary called *The Ship*, filmed and directed by the visual anthropologist Chris Terrill, which aired in 2002. The stated aim of the series, according to the introductory opening sequence, was to "tell the story of two voyages - of Cook's and of our own."³⁵⁰ Soft focus sequences of actors in eighteenth century costume playing the part of Cook, the head botanist, Joseph Banks, and the sailors, interspersed the footage of the struggling crew of out-of-shape academics who, while dressed in modern clothes, had to endure extreme physical labour, fuelled only by the restricted diet of tooth-breakingly hard ships biscuits and tepid stews of salted meat. The back and forth movement between the two narratives made linkages between the exhaustion, ill health, and doldrums suffered by both crews past and present, while the differences in technological advancements were thrown into relief when health and safety regulations and modern medicine came to the rescue. As the ship reenacted Cook's various landfalls along the coasts of North Queensland and Indonesia, the tensions between the figure of Cook as a nation-building hero, and colonial usurper of indigenous lands, was navigated by the presence of two Murri aboriginal, and two Maori participants, who provided an indigenous perspective and negotiated the ships reception by Aboriginal communities, and protestors at the outset of the voyage. In this sense, at the same time as

³⁴⁹ Perrone-Moisés.

³⁵⁰ Chris Terrill, 'The Ship: Retracing Cook's Endeavour Voyage (TV Mini-Series 2002-)' (BBC, 2002).

telling the history of Cook's first voyage, *The Ship* seemed to be a trial of endurance in the spirit of reconciliation, while providing the viewers with sadistic entertainment of watching academics suffer.

Early on the series, the tensions between the figure of Cook as a nation-building hero and his actual role as a murderous colonial usurper of indigenous lands was revealed as the ship met Aboriginal protestors at the outset of the voyage. This was rather cynically handled through the presence of two Murri aboriginal and two Maori participants, who were meant to provide an indigenous perspective and negotiate the ship's reception by Aboriginal communities as it reenacted Cook's various landfalls along the coasts of North Queensland and Indonesia. In this sense, at the same time as telling the history of Cook's first voyage, *The Ship* seemed to present itself a trial of endurance in the spirit of reconciliation. However, the same replica ship continues to re-traumatise indigenous people affected by the ongoing legacy of Cook's colonialism. Maori rights activist Tina Ngata argues that it reaffirms the deeply racist 'Doctrine of Discovery' which "asserts that non-Christians on these discovered lands were not human and therefore the land was empty or *Terra Nullius*."³⁵¹ In 2019 the New Zealand government spent over \$20 million dollars on commemorations of 250 years since Captain Cook's voyage, which included the replica of *the Endeavour* - referred to as the "death ship" by Ngata - reenacting its landing at Tūranganui-a-Kiwa. Ngata was amongst many indigenous activists who campaigned in vain for the event to be cancelled. She argued that the commemorations/celebrations reframed the event as a benign "encounter" rather than as an invasion which involved the murder of indigenous people. Ngata saw the invited participation of Maori people in the reenactment as way to occlude the ongoing struggles against colonialism, while centering the White invaders' version of events.³⁵²

Certainly the 2002 series *The Ship*, reenacted the colonial voyage of *the Endeavour* from the White invader point of view. While the tragedy it represented for indigenous inhabitants was occasionally briefly reflected upon, it was the living and working conditions of eighteenth century white European sailors that the academics on board were forced to reenact for the entertainment of viewers. Aside from the six-part documentary series itself, the epistemological value of the voyage and reenactment in general, was reflected upon by a number of academic publications produced by the participating

³⁵¹ Tina Ngata, *Kia Mau: Resisting Colonial Fictions*, Kia Mau Campaign, Unity Books, Wellington, 2019. p 52

³⁵² Ngata.

historians, the most prolific being Vanessa Agnew. Not only has she published an account of her experience on the voyage, but she has also edited a number of special publications on reenactment, along with Jonathan Lamb, a fellow participant. Agnew was presumably invited to take part in the reenactment due to her expertise as a scholar of eighteenth century travel writing. Revealingly, her criticisms of the epistemological capacities of reenactment belie both a very Enlightenment conception of the self and a deeply hierarchical approach to knowledge, which privileges the 'analytical' capacities of text over sensory experience. In contrast, as we shall see, the Tupinamba reenactment of the Brazilwood trade reveals a very different conception of the self, which in turn, restructures its epistemological possibilities.

When asking 'What is Reenactment?' in her introduction to a special issue of *Criticism* called 'Extreme and Sentimental History', Agnew argues that it is grounded in the emotional experience of the individual. Much like capitalism, reenactment has a global reach, but Agnew describes it as 'endemic' to the UK and the USA, and intimately linked to the individualist, Protestant traditions of those countries.³⁵³ She contends that reenactment is "a body-based discourse in which the past is reanimated through physical and psychological experience" and links it with Edmund Burke's notion of the sublime, in which the strongest emotions are privileged.³⁵⁴ If knowledge in reenactment is the result of individual experience, this inevitably leads to what Agnew calls a crisis of authority. Whose individual experience – if any – can be said to most accurately testify to the past?

She sees two ways in which reenactment responds to this crisis. First, is through an increasing intensification of experience - in a field of competing experiences the more extreme the suffering the greater its validity. The reenactor who is willing to starve himself in order to reenact an emaciated civil war infantryman occupies a position of greatest authority. Second, is through 'authenticity', the more historically accurate the costume, settings, and behaviour, the closer the reenactor comes to the truth. As such, Agnew believes that reenactment's only value as a methodology for interpreting the past is confined to the technical remits of experimental archaeology, where history crosses into science and the laboratory experiment. Materials and methods of construction can indeed be tested,

³⁵³ Agnew, 'What Is Reenactment'. , *Criticism* 46, . *Special Issue on Historical Reenactment*, Co-Ed. Vanessa Agnew and Jonathan Lamb No. 3, Summer 2004: 327–339. p328

³⁵⁴ Agnew. p330

but she seems to view it of limited interest and argues that it is always through the lens of individual experience and as such cannot describe the broader questions of historical processes.³⁵⁵

It is revealing that Agnew seems dismissive of these forms of knowing which involve the everyday, the non-logocentric, and body-based skill - the technical in its etymological sense as craft. For her, the essentially “domestic character” of these practices are not up to the task of interpreting historical events.³⁵⁶ Indeed, as the 9/11 attacks took place while they were aboard the ship, Agnew becomes angry at the frivolity of the reenactment which seems to prevent her participation in this big historical event.³⁵⁷ This privileging of events over the everyday, and text over embodied knowledge, is rather at odds with movements within historiography, such as ‘microhistories’ with historians such as Carlo Ginzburg who looks at the lives of ‘common’ people, or postcolonial historians such as Dipesh Chakrabarty and the subaltern studies collective. Rebecca Schneider detects an embarrassment with the live body in Agnew’s writing, and argues that she and her colleague and ship mate, Alexander Cook, resurrect the old mind/body divide with their denigration of emotional, as opposed to analytical, engagement.³⁵⁸ Indeed, if we return to the collaborative reenactment of the Brazilwood trade by the Tupinamba and Norman sailors, we shall see that it is the multi-perspectival side of reenactment that has the potential to break with these hierarchies of being and of knowledge.

While the participation of the Tupi in a reenactment in France might seem surprising now, Perrone-Moisés contends that, far from being exotic, they were in fact a part of everyday life in Rouen. In addition to the fifty Tupi participants in the 1550 reenactment, Tupi allies were regular visitors to Rouen, returning with every ship load of brazilwood. Moreover, the Norman sailors that were reenacting the Tupi had a long experience living with the Tupi for many months every year when they were in Brazil waiting for their ships to be loaded up with brazilwood. Their knowledge of Tupi language and customs was not superficial. Perrone-Moisés cites the anonymous chronicler as saying

³⁵⁵ Agnew.

³⁵⁶ Vanessa Agnew, ‘Epiloque: Genealogies of Space in Colonial and Postcolonial Reenactment’, in *Settler and Creole Reenactment*, Eds. V. Agnew and J. Lamb, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2009, 294–318. p297

³⁵⁷ Agnew, ‘History’s Pure Serene: On Reenacting Cook’s First Voyage, September 2001’. In *Staging the Past: Themed Environments in Transcultural Perspectives*, Eds. J. Schlehe, M. Uike, C. Oesterle, and W. Hochbruck. transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2010

³⁵⁸ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*, Taylor & Francis, Oxford, 2011. p35

that spectators “who had regularly visited the land of Brazil and of Cannibals for many years attested in good faith that the effect [of this] figuration was a perfect simulation of the truth.”³⁵⁹ She even goes as far as to argue that these sailors were “authentically (re)presenting their own lives in Tupi villages’ and that “Tupi” can be regarded as but one of these men’s “multiple identities.”³⁶⁰ She points out that one does not even have to depart from Western notions of identity, to imagine that someone may perform multiple personas in different contexts, and that as such these sailors were performing an aspect of their own identity as much as the Tupi actors.

If, however, one attempts to consider reenactment from the point of view of Tupi understandings of personhood, the notion of the individual essential self sketched out in Agnew’s account is challenged even further. This not only counters her account of reenactment as a circumscribed method, but also the very notion of the bourgeois self which was constructed through images of the peasant and the savage, as we saw in chapter one. Here Perron-Moisés draws our attention to contemporary research into Native American philosophies, in particular, Viveiros de Castro’s *Cannibal Metaphysics* (2014), which is based on Tupi and other Amazonian Amerindian thinking. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in Amerindian cosmology humanity or personhood is extended to all sorts of beings. What makes someone a particular “genre” of human, is the perspective they occupy through their particular body. This “body” is however, not static or unchanging, rather it is “constantly in the process of being fabricated and transformed through the performance of a series of appropriate gestures and relations, ornaments, paintings, haircuts, foods, ways of speaking, moving, and relating to others.”³⁶¹ What Agnew calls the mere “minutiae” of everyday life, are in fact what makes one human. Perrone-Moisés puts it that these sets of practices “fabricate bodies,” which in turn make up the “real human” or the perspective. When the self is conceived of as a process rather than an essence, the Western notion of performance, reenactment, and representation is decentred and provincialised. As we saw with the *ixiptla*, the signifier and signified are conflated as the performer becomes their performance.

³⁵⁹ Perrone-Moisés, ‘Performed Alliances and Performative Identities’. p114

³⁶⁰ Perrone-Moisés. p121

³⁶¹ Perrone-Moisés. p122

Peronne-Moisés goes on to draw on another example of Tupi performance during the early colonial period, when in 1613 a group of leaders from Equinoctial France and representatives from six Tupi allied villages visited King Louis XIII to petition him for support for the colony. The King received the visitors in the Louvre on April 12, and one of the Tupi, Chief Itapucu addressed him and the assembled courtiers, interpreted by David Mignan - a French intermediary who had been sent to Brazil as a teenager and grown up in the Tupi village of Junipará. The Tupi ambassadors were then baptized, and Itapucu took on the name Louis-Marie, which was commemorated in an engraved portrait of him in European dress included in an account of the *History of the Mission of the Capuchin Fathers to the Island of Maranhao* by the Franciscan Claude d'Abbeville. Again, Peronne-Moisés cautions against reading this event as the exotic display and submission of the Tupi, rather it was a performance of alliance. The real content of the encounter lies in the actions of baptism, and taking on a Christian name and dress (figure 10). She points out that since Amazonian thinking conflated 'being' and 'clothes' Itapucu/Louis-Marie was transforming his being, but since he had no stable being in the first place, this was not a permanent state nor a suppression of his Amerindian being. Furthermore, not only did the King and Queen mother act as godparents in their baptism, but the Tupi ambassadors were married to French women who returned with them to Brazil - an unusual expression of allegiance in European/Amerindian relations. It was however, a common expression of affinity in Tupi society, where captives who were about to be cannibalised were turned into brothers-in-law through marriage for a year before they were ritually killed. Looking more closely at Itapucu/Louis-Marie's performance of baptism and donning of European dress, Peronne-Moisés points out that the description accompanying the image states that Itapucu/Louis-Marie came from the village of Iciacaba and that Itapucu was only one among ten war names that he possessed.³⁶² Rather than erasing Itapucu, and his other ten names, Louis-Marie was yet another process of becoming for the great Tupi leader.³⁶³

³⁶² Perrone-Moisés.

³⁶³ Tupi warriors received an additional name every time they killed an enemy.



Figure 4.70 Engraving of the visiting Tupi ambassadors, *Les Tupinambá en France*, Joachim du Viert et Pierre-Jean Mariette, 1613. BnF, département des Estampes et de la photographie, QB-1 (1613)-FOL, f. 161, © Bibliothèque nationale de France

In his pamphlet, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul* (2011), Viveiros de Castro writes of the frustration of sixteenth century European missionaries at the difficulty of permanently converting the Tupi to Christianity. At first they appeared enthusiastic about learning about the new religion, and willing to believe, but the missionaries soon found that the 'converted' Tupi soon reverted back to their previous practices. The Europeans compared the Amerindians to plants, apparently pliant and submissive, but in need of continual maintenance to prevent them from growing out of control.³⁶⁴ Viveiros de Castro puts this down to a fundamental difference in thinking between the Europeans and the Tupi. The latter were difficult to convert because they did not hold 'beliefs' in the first place. Their

³⁶⁴ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul - The Encounter of Catholics and Cannibals in Sixteenth-Century Brazil*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2011. p6

religion was not a set of dogma that could be rejected in favour of another, but rather a collection of practices that assumed no essential being but rather a state of continual change. Their conception of humanity, the body, and the self, was fundamentally different to that of the Europeans. Given their continual state of becoming rather than essential being, the other presented the Tupi with a precious opportunity for transformation. Unlike the European modern tendency to construct the self through the exclusion of the other, as we have seen with the images of peasants and savages, Viveiros de Castro contends that for the Tupi “the other was not a mirror but a destination.”³⁶⁵

Tupinambá philosophy affirmed an essential ontological incompleteness: the incompleteness of sociality, and, in general, of humanity. It was, in other words, an order where interiority and identity were encompassed by exteriority and difference, where becoming and relationship prevailed over being and substance. For this type of cosmology, others are a solution, before - as they were for the European invaders - a problem.³⁶⁶

This desire for the other found its ultimate expression in the cannibalistic practices of the Tupi, but it was also found in their enthusiastic mimesis of the Europeans which the missionaries mistook for a willingness to convert. If the self is continually fabricated through practices such as eating, clothes, and gestures, then performing the practices of the other is a method of incorporation - a way of creating affinity with the other, of bringing the other into relation.

It is no mere dialectical pirouette to say that the Tupinambá were never more themselves than when they expressed their desire to “be Christians like us.” When they declared their wish to convert, the possible practical advantages that they sought were submerged inside a “*calcul sauvage*” in which being like the Whites - and the being of the Whites - was a value up for grabs on the indigenous symbolic market. European implements, beyond their obvious utility, were also signs of the powers of exteriority, which it was necessary to capture, to incorporate and to make

³⁶⁵ Viveiros de Castro. p47

³⁶⁶ Viveiros de Castro. p47

circulate, exactly like the writing, the clothes, the ritual bowing gestures of the missionaries, the bizarre cosmology that they disseminated.³⁶⁷

In this context, Itapucu/Louis-Marie's baptism was far from being a submission, and the Norman sailor's reenactment of, and with, Tupi warriors was not a mere construction of exoticism and colonial power. Rather, these were performances in which "relational affinity, not substantial identity was the value to be affirmed."³⁶⁸

These performances and reenactments seem worlds apart from Agnew's formulation of reenactment as an individual experience which is judged according to its emotional intensity. If Agnew's main objection to reenactment's interrogative capabilities is its focus on the body of the individual self, it is relevant to consider whether or not this individual self is as stable or as limiting as she contends. Revealingly, Agnew herself talks about her loss of self in her own account of her time aboard *The Ship*:

Ship-life imposes a regime of physical as well as emotional self-alienation, and when private and public selves are forced into conflict, it is the inner life that shuts down.³⁶⁹

Being a scholar of eighteenth-century travel writing, the sublime is the obvious way for her to contextualise this loss of self. Yet, it is interesting that in her skepticism, she does not consider that it is precisely this conflict between private and public selves that might be a result of the practices which are transforming the self. In the cramped conditions of an eighteenth-century ship, and under the hierarchical structures of the social regime, it simply may not be possible to maintain a separation between a public and inner self that is the hallmark of the modern self. This is not to say that Agnew suddenly became an eighteenth-century sailor, but rather that the practices demonstrated the impossibility of maintaining a stable modern self in these conditions and started a process of transformation. As Agnew discovered, transforming the self can be a painful process, especially if it is not desired.

³⁶⁷ Viveiros de Castro. p51

³⁶⁸ Viveiros de Castro. p31

³⁶⁹ Agnew, 'History's Pure Serene: On Reenacting Cook's First Voyage, September 2001'. p216

Agnew might well counter that since these Tupi reenactments took place at the beginnings of modernity, rather than now, in our late capitalist age, that these different conceptions of the body and the self are no longer operating now. It is important to note, however, that Peronne-Moisés and Viveiros de Castro are basing their suppositions about sixteenth century Tupi conceptions of the self on the anthropological study of contemporary indigenous Amazonians such as the Araweté, Yudjá, Krahô, Kayabi, and the Wari. For these contemporary groups, the performance of certain practices and gestures are constitutive of a continually changing self. Indeed, Peronne-Moisés cites various examples of indigenous groups who speak of becoming less or more *Indio* through the taking up of Western lifestyles or the observance of practices such as keeping certain diets, hairstyles, or speaking certain languages. Importantly, none of these states is permanent - there is no authentic self. Therefore, it is always possible to become more *Indio* once again by taking up the relevant practices. While Ishi was not an Amazonian Indian, attending to the concept of an ever-changing self, constructed through various gestures and the creation of affinity through reenactment, casts a different light on his remarkably close mimicry of Mrs Waterman's table manners. In the contemporary context this means that being human, and indeed being indigenous, is always something performed rather than an essential state. However, this is not at all to say that being indigenous is any less real. That would be to repeat the classic Western European conception of performance and representation which separates the signifier from the signified, while ascribing the signifier a lower status as somehow less authentic in relation to the absent signified essence. Moreover, it does not preclude the ability of indigenous people to make collective political claims. When analysing the work of the subaltern studies group, of which she was a part, Gayatri Spivak described them as using a "strategic essentialism." She claims that in attempting to situate the subaltern as a 'subject' of history, the historians were really talking about a 'subject-effect' which is produced by an "immense discontinuous network... of strands that may be termed politics, ideology, economics, history, sexuality, language, and so on."³⁷⁰ She therefore reads the subaltern studies project to retrieve a subaltern 'consciousness' as a "*strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest."³⁷¹ Coming from a perspective of deconstruction, Spivak does

³⁷⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography', in *The Spivak Reader Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996). p 213

³⁷¹ Spivak. p 214

not believe in essentialism, but rather argues that one might use essentialist categories for visibly political ends while at the same time disavowing them. She has subsequently ceased to use the term ‘strategic essentialism’ as she argues that as the term became popular it was misunderstood and became a “union ticket for essentialism” without any consideration to the ‘strategy’ and what that may be.³⁷² I would argue that thinking of becoming a (particular type of) human as performative is a way to bring together these strands in the “immense discontinuous network” of which Spivak speaks. It does so in a way that not only constructs individuals, but also constructs collectives with political demands. As we have seen in the previous chapter, it also allows us to think through a cosmopolitics which can confront radical ontological equivocations, and include other-genres-of-human, such as the ‘Earth-beings’ that de la Cadena describes, and their attendant ‘Earth-practices.’ Indeed, it is through practices that the self, and the collective, can be made and transformed.

Alchemical reenactment

Having turned away from reenactment as a spectacle in the human zoo, towards reenactment as a form of experimental archaeology, we have encountered two different understandings of the self. The essential individualistic modern self that Agnew views as a barrier to reenactment’s interrogative capacities was, as we have seen, constructed through images (in prints, paintings, and the spectacle of the human zoo) which disciplined the bodies of peasants and savages. In contrast to this, the continually changing self of the Tupinamba, and other Amerindians, is constituted by practices. In order to more fully comprehend this process, it is vital to attend to how these practices are carried out in collaboration with materials, and other beings, in an environment. As we have seen in Chapter two, Amerindian multinaturalism and perspectivalism affords an agency, and indeed a personhood to animals, plants, and minerals, whereas Western modernity has instrumentalised them as natural resources available for human use. Some anthropologists specialising in lowland South America have drawn on the notion of the alchemical person as a useful way to describe the Amerindian relationship to materials, and the way their embodied practices with these materials constitute and change the self.³⁷³ Just as alchemists working with physical matter saw their experiments as inseparable from

³⁷² Sara Danius, Stefan Jonsson, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’, *Boundary 2* 20, no. 2, 1993: 24–50, p 35

³⁷³ See *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*, Vol. 13, Issue. 2, 2015 devoted to the notion of the alchemical self.

their own processes of self-transformation, as seen in the philosopher's stone, so Amerindians see the bodily practices of refining and processing toxic tubers for consumption as transformative of both the food and the person. Even deeper resonances with Amerindian perspectivalism are found in what Elizabeth Rahman and Juan Echeverri describe as one of the defining characteristics of Eastern and European alchemy - "the inseparability of matter and meaning, or substance and soul, which merge within a psychic and somatic 'intersubjective field.'"³⁷⁴ For the purposes of this thesis, the idea of the alchemical person also serves as a powerful way to link these broader issues to reenactment in the context of what I playfully call 'peasant-painting', that is to say planting and pigment-making, as well as painting.

The association of painting with alchemy, a practice associated with the arcane and magical, is so commonplace that it risks sounding rather trite. However, since the materials of painting were historically the products of alchemy, the links between the two are not merely a hackneyed metaphor and are worth taking seriously. Rather than focusing on the viewer's experience of paintings, or the social context of painters and paintings, James Elkin's book *What Painting Is* (2004) centres on the act of painting itself and argues that painting *is* alchemy. He takes issue with Jung's allegorical use of alchemy, as it overlooks the importance of the laboratory and the interaction with physical materials. Elkins points out that alchemical procedures range from routine formulas for soap to ecstatic visions of God, and that neither alchemy nor painting can be done with clean hands.³⁷⁵

The book begins with a chapter called 'A short course in forgetting chemistry' indicating the rupture between chemistry as modern science, and the pre-modern practice of alchemy. For Elkins, one of the most important aspects of alchemy, and painting, is not-knowing. This contrasts with modern chemistry in which repeatable experiments are designed according to hypotheses based on an accepted paradigm. According to Elkins, in both alchemy and painting, there is no prior theory, the only knowledge obtained is a bodily 'know-how' born out of the experience of handling materials. This bodily expertise is consequently hard for the viewer, or art historian, to discern without also experiencing working with the same materials. Elkins goes on to describe classes which he has taught

³⁷⁴ Echeverri and Rahman, 'Introduction: The Alchemical Person'. *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 13(2) 13, no. 2, 2015: 1–10 p2

³⁷⁵ Elkins, *What Painting Is*. Routledge, London, 2004. p4

in the Art Institute of Chicago in which students try to copy paintings, and, in particular, the first student who attempted to copy a Monet. Here reenactment becomes a way of both looking at and rehearsing the painting in question. The student's attempts are continually compared with the original, each failure leading to more detailed observations of how Monet worked. Her initially formulaic mark-making is replaced by an increasingly proximate variety of gestures.³⁷⁶

Not only was the movement of the body vital to the reenactment of the Monet, but also the texture of the paint. The paint could not be too thin, nor too thick, but needed experimentation with a combination of oils and varnishes in order for it to behave in the characteristic way of stretching across the surface only to spring back into broken beads of colour. It was the combination of the 'shiny and resilient' paint, mixed up in 'greasy lumps' in concert with the twists and turns of the brush which produced the vigorous unpredictability of Monet's marks. Through this process of trial and error, working with the feel of the paint and the movement of the body, Elkins' text starts to move to and fro between descriptions of his student and Monet at work, almost as if they were happening simultaneously:

Lifting the brush again, she could let the body of the mark trail off into a thin wisp or a series of trialing streamers as the paint broke away from the hairs of the brush. Everything depended on the way she moved in those few instants of contact. The best motions, the ones Monet must have made habitually, were violent attacks followed by impulsive twists and turns as the brush moved off.³⁷⁷

Elkins, who has himself been painting alongside his student, argues there is no science that would be able to describe Monet's way of working. Chemistry with its need for repeatability would be useless in characterising the mixture of the paint since the exact ratios of pigment, oils, and varnishes, will vary from one dab to the next as the painter works intuitively in response to the painting as it unfolds. Nor can anatomy define Monet's gestures. Here Elkins lays claim to having accessed Monet's mind through the reenactment of his painting:

³⁷⁶ Elkins.

³⁷⁷ Elkins. p15

The state of mind that can produce those unexpected marks is one divided against itself: part wants to make harmonious repetitive easy marks, and the other wants to be unpredictable. Books on painting are no help either, since they can only give gross formulas. Only being in the Art Institute with the student, standing next to the original, and taking up the brush myself, made it possible to communicate these thoughts.³⁷⁸

Elkins' assertion that he has gained insight to Monet's thinking by copying his painting, would seem extraordinary to many contemporary art theorists and practitioners. It is certainly deeply unfashionable. After Barthes' *Death of the Author*, seeking to interpret an artwork by uncovering the intentions belonging to what Barthes calls "a modern figure," this "human person."³⁷⁹ Certainly Elkins' book links the painter's studio to the alchemist's laboratory in a way which emphasises a solitary, indeed solipsistic, practice. For Elkins the studio is kind of 'psychosis' where "the painter works in isolation, for hours and even years on end."³⁸⁰ Far from undermining the individualistic modern self, Elkins' recourse to pre-modern alchemy seems to shore up the modernist figure of the (male)heroic, tortured genius painter - a figure that has been widely criticised since the sixties. The book focuses almost exclusively on oil painting, and in particular valorises works in which gesture and mark-making are central to the painterly project at hand. In that sense, his rather romantic interpretation is perhaps appropriate to the types of painting discussed in his book - Monet, Rembrandt, Nolde, Tintoretto, Bacon. However, with its rather totalising title - *What Painting Is* - it elevates a discussion pertinent to a provincial instance of Western European painting to a general principle, without taking into account how differing ontologies affect the interaction with materials and the construction of the self.

Tantalisingly, Elkins' description of the reenactment of Monet's painting perversely serves to undermine the integrity and coherence of 'Monet' as an individual person although unfortunately it is not something he fully explores. The alchemical act of transforming the self as one transforms matter chimes with Barthes' assertion that after the death of the author, the contemporary writer is "born

³⁷⁸ Elkins. p16

³⁷⁹ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1977, pp142-143

³⁸⁰ Elkins, *What Painting Is*. p140

simultaneously with this text” and that “there is no other time than that of the enunciation.”³⁸¹ Elkins and his student are not becoming Monet during their reenactment - not because as Agnew would say, they are irrevocably trapped in their modern individual selves - but because there is no essential Monet for them to become. Rather, they have positioned themselves in a particular perspective in what Rahman and Echeverri call an “intersubjective field” where the materials of paint, and Monet’s painting, are as much actors as Monet himself.³⁸²

For Elkins the reenactment is merely a demonstration of how books and science fail to give insight into a Painter’s practice. Certain knowledge can only be learnt through an interaction with materials - except Elkins argues that a lifetime of working in the studio may amount to no knowledge at all. Indeed, he argues that ‘the fundamental anxiety of painterly or alchemical method is that it may not exist.’³⁸³ Elkins calls upon the reader to forget modern chemistry in order to paint, because he believes that working without any prior knowledge of the materials is key. He downplays the influence of alchemical theories about materials on pre-modern artists’ practice since he argues that alchemy itself was not a reliable source of knowledge. Elsewhere, he even argues that contemporary painters are somehow more like alchemists than past painters, because they purchase their industrially ready-made paints in art shops and have even less knowledge about their ingredients than their predecessors. Elkins traces a history where painting has gone from being undertaken under the techniques and methods of a craft which enable painters to control their materials, towards the expressive experimentation of an individual collaborating with the paint:

As painters say, the paint seems to have a mind of its own— it “wants” to do certain things, and it “resists” the painter. Some artists have tried to discipline paint, to learn its inner rules, and to control it from a position of knowledge. Others have learned to let paint do what it wants, so that painting becomes a collaboration between the artist’s desire and the unpredictable tendencies of the paint. In the first category belong the majority of premodern painters, the academicians, conservators and chemists, technically-minded artists, color theorists and chemical engineers. In the

³⁸¹ Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’. p145

³⁸² Echeverri and Rahman, ‘Introduction: The Alchemical Person’.

³⁸³ Elkins, *What Painting Is*. p173

second belong the Expressionists and Neo-Expressionists, and the majority of contemporary painters.³⁸⁴

Here pre-modern painters have more in common with modern scientists than contemporary painters. Fundamentally, Elkins is continually making a distinction between the 'knowledge' of chemistry and science, and the 'non-knowledge' of painting as alchemy. As chemistry separates itself from alchemy through the rigour and reproducibility of the scientific method, so painting becomes a more essential version of alchemy, giving up any attempt at knowledge in favour of the originality of the artist led by their materials in the madness of the studio. The issue with this is that it reproduces Western modern categories and hierarchies of knowledge, and makes no account of any painting practiced outside of the Western European high art cannon. In this discussion of painting as alchemy, knowledge has become the domain of techno-science only, while painting is a psychosis, practiced blindly in solitary confinement. It leaves no space for what de Sousa Santos calls an 'ecology of knowledges,' and an engagement with non-Western histories of knowledge.³⁸⁵

If we turn to those painting conservators - whom Elkins lumps in with the technically minded pre-modern painters, and chemists - we may see that their use of reenactment and reconstruction is a way to assert the epistemological value the practice of painting, against the hegemony of science. Indeed, Spike Bucklow, who works at the Hamilton Kerr Institute, argues that that conservation is unusual in that it sits at the interface of the conflict between art and science, and has the potential to negotiate between the two.³⁸⁶ When these negotiations fail, he warns that there is a tendency for conservation to be viewed as merely a practical application of science, in which the artwork is a pretty, but passive, object to be examined by the instruments of techno-science. This ignores the strength of artworks in their right, and the practices that went into their making. Bucklow contends that a research practice which integrates technical analysis, with contextual studies, and the making of reconstructions (or what I would call reenactment), is important precisely because it combines methods which are now seen as radically distinct disciplines and gives them all a level footing.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁴ Elkins. p116

³⁸⁵ Santos, *Another Knowledge Is Possible*.

³⁸⁶ Bucklow, 'Cultural Networks and Artists' Materials'.

³⁸⁷ Bucklow, 'Housewife Chemistry'.

Indeed, as Bucklow points out, before the separation of these practices into the disciplines of the Western academy - the disciplining of practices so to speak - the distinction between subjects such as art and science, medicine and cookery, the sacred and the profane, were blurred. Popular books of facts could contain “a mix of medical, cosmetic, cooking, dyeing, ink-making and stain-removing recipes.”³⁸⁸ In an article discussing the reconstruction (or reenactment) of painting and paint recipes, he dubs this ‘Housewife Chemistry’ drawing attention to how the subsequent emergence of a hierarchy of disciplines is allied with misogyny. As we saw in chapter one, Federici argues that part of the purpose of the great Witch hunts was to suppress female knowledge around subjects such as medicinal plants, healing, abortives, and midwifery. This was manifested through the disciplining of the peasant, and especially the female peasant, body. An extension of this was the separation out of scientific method from the everyday, and the subsequent denigration of practices considered a part of housewifery in relation to those that belong to chemistry and industry.

The implied distinction between scientific method and housewifery rests on the perceived repeatability of the former, in contrast to the unquantifiable embodied practice of the latter. Theoretically, anyone can follow the methods given in a scientific paper and reproduce the same results, while it is commonly understood that cookery involves the collection of an infinite number of honed gestures involving the feel and taste of the ingredients, the temperature of a particular oven, the colour changes from golden, to caramelised, to burnt, and so on. As Luce Girard writes in ‘The Practice of Everyday Life,’ “By carefully following the same recipe, two experienced cooks will obtain different results because other elements intervene in the preparation: a personal touch, the knowledge or ignorance of tiny secret practices (flouring a pie pan after greasing it so that the bottom of the crust will remain crispy after baking), and entire relationship to things that the recipe does not codify and hardly clarifies, and whose manner differs from one individual to another because it is often rooted in a family or regional oral tradition.”³⁸⁹

It is the difficulty in abstracting generalisations from embodied practices that leads them to be disregarded as forms of knowledge, as we can see in Agnew’s view of reenactment. Carlo Ginzburg

³⁸⁸ Bucklow. p17

³⁸⁹ Luce Girard, ‘Gesture Sequences’, in *The Practice of Everyday Life: Living and Cooking. Volume 2*, trans. Timothy J. Tomasik, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1998, 199–214. p201

characterises this as the generalisation of the scientific method versus the particularity of what he calls the conjectural method.³⁹⁰ The conjectural method is a practice based on the 'reading' of qualitative signs or clues from which knowledge is intuited, and is inextricably based in the materialities of bodies and the senses. Like Bucklow's reference to popular books of eclectic 'pre-disciplinary' knowledge and 'housewife chemistry', Ginzburg argues that the conjectural method was historically used by a broad range of practitioners, such as physicians, historians, politicians, potters, joiners, mariners, hunters, and fishermen, but was especially associated with women and the peasant class.

As the scientific method came to be regarded as the most rigorous way to generate knowledge, other practices either ceased to be respected as forms of knowing, or came under pressure to appear scientific even if it was inappropriate. In his essay 'Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes' (1980), Ginzburg discusses the demands on both history and medicine, as practices both necessarily based on conjecture from collected evidence and symptoms, to prove themselves as sufficiently scientific. While history never succeeded in this endeavour, medicine gradually came to be afforded the status of science despite the lack of repeatable rigour since the knowledge of a disease was indirect, gleaned through a collection of symptoms which could present themselves differently in different bodies.

In spite of the more or less justified objections to its methods which could be made, medicine for all that remained a science which received full social recognition. But not all the conjectural disciplines fared so well in this period. Some, like connoisseurship, of fairly recent origin, held an ambiguous position on the borders of the acknowledged disciplines. Others, more embedded in daily practice, were kept well outside. The ability to tell an unhealthy horse from the state of its hooves, a storm coming up from a shift in the wind, or unfriendly intentions from the shadow in someone's expression, would certainly not be learnt from treatises on the care of horses, or on weather, or on psychology. In each case these kinds of knowledge- of lore- were richer than any written authority on the subject; they had been learnt not from books but from listening, from doing, from watching; their subtleties could

³⁹⁰ Ginzburg, 'Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes,' *History Workshop*, no. 9, 1980: 5–36.

scarcely be given formal expression- they might not even be reducible to words; they might be a particular heritage, or they might belong to men and women of any class.”

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For history and other humanities, a certain rigour was afforded to them through the gradual dematerialisation of the written text in the West. Ginzburg points out that this was a cultural choice rather than an inevitably brought about by the invention of the printing press, since printing did not sever the ties between sound and word, nor the calligraphic and the textual in the Chinese context. This meant that in the West, the text had a repeatability, and thus an authority that other modes of semiotic communications were not afforded. As we have seen, the dismissal of Amerindian pictograms and kipus as forms of writing, enabled colonisers to argue that Amerindians lacked history and was used to justify their oppression. In contrast, Ginzburg argues that the process of dematerialisation has not (as yet) happened to painting, which is the reason he gives for why “we think that while manuscript or printed copies of *Orlando Furioso* can exactly reproduce the text Ariosto intended, a copy of a Raphael portrait never can.”³⁹² Here of course, it is interesting to recall the copies of the Virgin of Guadalupe by the ‘Indian with the gift,’ and Elisa Varasugo’s comment that each of Tejada’s versions of the Virgin are so alike that they more akin to personal recreations (or reenactments) rather than copies.³⁹³

While a copy of a painting may not have the same status as the original in the Western European canon, Bucklow and other conservators make what they call ‘reconstructions’ in order to bridge the gap in knowledge between the technical analysis of the originals, and the information gleaned from historical research and period treatises on the techniques of painting. Indeed, as both Ginzburg and Elkins point out, there is much that one learns from painting that cannot be formalised into a written text. Moreover, one cannot assume the motivations or experience of the authors and compilers of books on paint recipes, as Bucklow describes, there are many reasons why these texts might not be a reliable account of the period practice of painting. Although recipes for preparing ultramarine are more common than instructions for preparing azurite, the latter was more commonly used. This

³⁹¹ Ginzburg. p21

³⁹² Ginzburg. p17

³⁹³ Vargaslugo, ‘El Indio Que Tenía “El Don...”’

discrepancy could be because ultramarine was more prestigious, but it also could be because preparing azurite involved bodily movements that are difficult to specify, whereas the recipe for preparing ultramarine involves a more easily described list of ingredients, such as waxes and resins.³⁹⁴

Working with the materials, and picking up the brush, is therefore an invaluable way of discovering what might have gone into the making of a painting. Girard talks of a 'life and death of gestures' to refer to the certain way bodily gestures in cooking may cease to be passed on as technological change renders them obsolete.³⁹⁵ Yet, the materials themselves can be seen as repository of gestures, in the way that they interact and demand a certain treatment. The materials can pass on the gestures even if there has been a break in human-to-human transmission. However, it is revealing that Bucklow and his colleagues choose to use the word 'reconstruction' rather than 'reenactment' to describe this practice. It might be because reenactment is often associated with being performed before an audience as a spectacle, while the majority of this practice is done within the confines of the conservator's workshop/laboratory, but Bucklow's colleagues at the Hamilton Kerr institute have indeed been involved in making 'reconstructions' in front of the camera for the BBC series *The Private Life of a Masterpiece*, albeit not in historical costume.³⁹⁶ Rather, I suspect that it is to do with the pressure to be perceived as more rigorous. 'Reconstruction' as a word draws attention away from the practitioner towards the finished object, thus emphasising the repeatability of the endeavour by downplaying the influence of subjectivity. 'Reenactment' on the other hand, emphasises the bodily performativity of the exercise, and its position in time, thereby underlining its contingency. Elsewhere, in the field of forensic science and criminal law, attempts have been made to sharply draw the distinction between reconstruction and reenactment, with reenactment sitting firmly outside the bounds of the scientific method. Like the example of Sherlock Holmes, forensic reconstruction makes use of the conjectural method based on a collection of clues, which Ginzburg would argue is at odds with the repeatability of the Galilean scientific method. Ironically reenactment might be the best method to perform repeatability within the practice - a gun may be fired, and the spent bullet compared with one found at the crime scene. Yet it is precisely the embodied performativity of

³⁹⁴ Bucklow, 'Housewife Chemistry'.

³⁹⁵ Girard, 'Gesture Sequences'.

³⁹⁶ Rose Miller and Christine Patrick, 'Four Weeks of Work for Four Seconds of Fame: Reconstructions for Television', in *In Artists' Footsteps: The Reconstruction of Pigments and Paintings, Studies in Honour of Renate Woudhuysen-Keller*, Archetype, London, 2012, 165–76.

reenactment that makes it unscientific, and which leads to the need to distance reconstruction from reenactment within forensic science:

The word "reenactment" means to act out or perform again. It has nothing whatsoever to do with scientific principles. The distinction between reconstruction and reenactment is a critical one. To confuse the two is to confuse crime scene analysis with a puppet show... These sorts of reenactments are, at best, just recreations of recollections, and have nothing to do with criminalistics or scientific principles. Reenactment producers are but skilled cartoonists, not analyzers of physical evidence. It is dangerous for the members of a jury to confuse the two terms.³⁹⁷

One senses that painting conservators' use of the word 'reconstruction' over 'reenactment' belies a similar anxiety around the status of the embodied practice in relation to science and knowledge. Bucklow argues that the obsession with 'historical accuracy' in conservation reconstructions is a reflection of the focus on repeatability in the scientific method, and distracts from the real issue of experimental design. The expectations around any experiments in reconstructing pigments, paints, and paintings differ according to how and to what ends they may have been designed. At the same time, Bucklow points out that even scientific experiments are often not as repeatable as generally claimed. He cites a recent study of postgraduate students of biochemistry who were shocked to discover that experiments frequently do not work, and that undergraduate experiments had been stage managed by their professors to give the appearance of repeatability and predictability.³⁹⁸ Work in the laboratory, like the studio, involves a set of embodied skills that must be developed with experience, and sometimes things go wrong for unknown reasons. Another survey of chemists found this was so common that it was "jokingly blamed on the phases of the moon."³⁹⁹

Bucklow situates reconstruction as a method under the umbrella term 'housewife chemistry' as a way to sidestep these tensions around repeatability and to bring to the fore a type of knowledge gained

³⁹⁷ D.H. Garrison, Jr., 'Shooting Reconstruction vs. Shooting Reenactment', *Association of Firearm & Toolmark Examiners Journal* 25, no. 2, Spring, 1993: 125–27. p126

³⁹⁸ Bucklow, 'Housewife Chemistry'.

³⁹⁹ Bucklow. p19

through embodied practice. The conjunction of terms harks back to a period before the disciplining of disciplines, and revindicates women's knowledge. It also attempts to reduce the distance between scientific and artistic practice, and brings them into a more equal dialogue:

Housewife chemistry - such as the reconstruction of pigments, paints and paintings - has the potential to go a significant way towards addressing issues of repeatability and significance, precisely because it engages directly with the craft uncertainties associated with tacit knowledge, undocumented and embodied skills.⁴⁰⁰

I would argue that conservators should also be brave enough to embrace the term 'reenactment.' Using the word 'reconstruction' hides behind a veil of objectivity and thereby subtly diminishes the importance of the embodied interactions between painter, paints, and pigments. Reenactment also entails entering into invisible relationships and cosmologies not immediately observable in the artwork itself. Just as the Tupi were willing to 'convert' to Christianity and become the other for a while as a form of cannibalistic nourishment, so reenactment involves an attempt to occupy a different perspective. Reconstruction, on the other hand, tries to occlude the subject, rather than attempting to enter into an alternative subjectivity. It tacitly implies a scientific process of what Heidegger called 'deworlding' whereby the disruptive influences outside the immediacy of the object are minimized.⁴⁰¹

An example of such deworlding in the scientific method can be seen in early research into Mayan blue. When Van Olphen attempted to reconstruct Mayan blue in 1966, he made two versions, one using synthetic indigo in oxidised form, and synthetic indigo that had been reduced using sodium hydrosulfite to replicate the conditions of a fermentation vat.^{402 403} Presumably this was to facilitate

⁴⁰⁰ Bucklow. p26

⁴⁰¹ Hubert L. Dreyfus and Hubert L., *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, División I*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1991. Dreyfus says: "In the natural sciences shared scientific background skills are necessary for deworlding nature and for testing theories, but these skills do not determine what is to count as the objects of the theory. The scientists' background skills function precisely to free the science's objects from dependence on all practices, including the practices that reveal them. They thus reveal incomprehensible nature... [and] deworlded relations between deworlded data." p. 207

⁴⁰² van Olphen, 'Maya Blue'.

⁴⁰³ Indigo is blue and insoluble when in oxidised form, and appears as a blue pigment that can be used in a binder for paint. In order to dye fibre and fabric with indigo, it must be reduced (have the oxygen removed) so that it becomes water soluble and can penetrate and combine with the fibres. Various historic recipes exist that use some form of fermentation

repeatability by excluding unpredictable variables that might happen if using plant-derived indigo and live fermentation processes. After all, plant-based ingredients contain a multitude of other complex compounds that may affect results (although they may also turn out to be a secret necessary ingredient). Of course, Van Olphen was successful in discovering that the mixture of indigo and attapulgite clay needed to be roasted in order to achieve the colour change and stability of Mayan blue, so this is not to say that the scientific method is not a powerful way of creating knowledge. Nonetheless, using synthetic ingredients and laboratory conditions does not say much about the indigenous methods of making Mayan blue, nor the significance that these processes may have had for them. This requires the interaction of various forms of research, including the conjectural methods of historical investigation, anthropology, and the embodied practice of reenactment.

In conversation with Luis Manuel May Ku, he recounted how his retrieval of Mayan blue involved working across various disciplines as well as bodily practices.⁴⁰⁴ He read a range of scientific papers which described the chemical process of making Mayan blue, and anthropological research into pre-Columbian Mayans – indeed, much of the same reading that I have done for this thesis. In these articles, as a Mayan speaker, he recognised the word *ch'oj* as a word that means blue, as well as a plant. He told me that the *ch'oj* was widely cultivated by Mayans in his community up until thirty to forty years ago for use as a laundry bluing agent to make the white clothes of the Mayans appear brighter. It only ceased to be cultivated because a synthetic laundry bluing agent became widely available. Maestro May Ku set about searching for this plant all around the Yucatán peninsula, interviewing elders about it. He said that they invariably replied that they had heard of the plant but did not know what it looked like, or that they knew the plant but had not seen it growing in years. After searching in vain for three months, he returned home to the village of Cobá in Quintana Roo where to his surprise he spotted one lone little plant, measuring only forty centimetres growing at the *Casa de Cultura* (cultural centre) of which he is the director. He sent a photograph of it to some biologist friends who confirmed it was indeed *ch'oj*.

to remove the oxygen from the vat of liquid, upon which the indigo becomes greenish/yellow. Fabric is then dipped into this vat of greenish/yellow liquid and is initially green when removed. As it oxidises in the air, the fabric turns the characteristic indigo blue. These days sodium hydrosulfite is used to reduce indigo as it is faster and easier, but it is harmful to aquatic life, toxic if ingested by humans, and has the potential to spontaneously combust.

⁴⁰⁴ Conversation with Luis Manuel May Ku via Whatsapp video, 2nd March 2021

A similar story of providence accompanied his search for the palygorskite clay needed to make Mayan blue from *ch'oj*. In accordance with academic research that has identified the ancient Mayan source for palygorskite/ *sak lu'um*, Maestro May Ku visited the mines at Ticul and Dzan where the workers showed him how to distinguish it from other types of clay and gave him some samples to take home. Upon his return, he noticed his neighbour was digging out a hole for a new septic tank by hand... and there beside the hole was mound of freshly dug up *sak lu'um* clay. Maestro May Ku told me that the conjunction of these providences led a Mayan priest to tell him that it demonstrated that he had been chosen to return Mayan blue to the Mayan people. There were multiple agencies interacting. He carefully collected the seed from the little *ch'oj* plant round the corner from his house, which he then germinated and cared for all through the dry season until they were big enough to start experimenting with ways of making Mayan blue using the *sak lu'um* clay collected from his neighbour's yard.

Maestro May Ku described his way of working with *ch'oj* and *sak lu'um* as methodical and empirical, drawing on his experiences with the craft of ceramics, and the tempering of pigments with resins. Trying out different orders of processing, and different timings was an embodied practice that employed a sensitively and responsiveness to the *ch'oj* and the *sak lu'um*. He finally made his first samples of *azul Maya ch'oj* in November 2019. I was unable to question him directly as to whether or not he thought of his practice as reenactment due to the fact the Spanish term for reenactment is *recreación* or *recreación histórica* which does not carry the same performative emphasis. However, I noticed that he described his practice as *reunion* with Mayan blue which seems to place an emphasis as much on the agency and bodies of the pigment and his ancestors as on himself, and implies a sense of belonging together. He has used his *azul Maya ch'oj* in his ceramic work in a pre-Hispanic Mayan style, such as the vessel in figure 4.12 engraved with the image of the rain God Yum Chaák who was worshipped in the sacred cenote at Chichen Itzá. Maestro May Ku has also integrated his *azul Maya ch'oj* into Mayan ceremonies and given thanks to the Mayan deities for this reunion (figure 4.11).



Figure 4.71. Luis Manuel May Ku gives thanks for azul Maya ch'oj with an ofrenda situated beside the ch'oj plants. The following text accompanied his post on facebook (my translation): "With an offering to all the Yuntzilo'ob (lords) of the Mayan cosmos, today we gave thanks as a family for all the blessings and kindnesses received for the reunion with this wonderful sacred and ancestral color: AZUL CH'OJ MAYA. We offer among the little plants of the Ch'oj all the elements and implements that make up such a precious color. In the offering I present the product that will be available to those who know how to value and appreciate it. The work of almost 2 years of investigations, processes, tests and trials yielded excellent results. Always with a fixed goal, I give thanks for these gifts that have been conferred on me. I also thank all my friends and teachers who with their wisdom guided me to achieve my mission. The Mayan Culture Lives !!! Our customs and traditions live !!! (August 5th 2020). Images courtesy Luis Manuel May Ku.

Nonetheless, Maestro May Ku says it is too early to say if he has recreated the exact same Mayan blue that his ancestors used. He has given samples to Dr. Elías Jaime at the University of Chapingo for analysis and to the British Museum for comparison with ancient samples in their collection, and he argues it is only then that one can know if his pigment is the same as that of his ancestors. However, even if it turns out not to be identical to historic samples, his *azul Maya ch'oj* is at least very similar, and would demonstrate that this technique invented by the ancient Mayans can be used to produce different results.⁴⁰⁵ He expressed pride in the fact that scientists are so excited by what they call a "nanotechnology" with many possible future applications was invented by his ancestors.⁴⁰⁶ Indeed, Maestro May Ku's pigment is for sale and being used by other artists in his community in mediums such as oils and acrylics, as well as in his own ceramics using ancient Mayan techniques. If Maestro

⁴⁰⁵ 'Coolhuntermx | El pigmento azul de los mayas', *Coolhuntermx* (blog), 30 November 2020, <https://coolhuntermx.com/azul-maya-de-luis-may-pigmentos-anil-colorante-natural-mayas/>.

⁴⁰⁶ Conversation with Luis Manuel May Ku via Whatsapp video, 2nd March 2021

May Ku's work is reenactment, it is not a reenactment that is constrained to work solely within the remits of historical accuracy, it is a reenactment that brings something of value to his community and speaks to their future.



Figure 4.72. Luis Manuel May Ku, Vessel engraved in the style of Tulum with the rain God Yum Chaák, painted with azul Maya Ch'oj, Height 12 cm. x diameter 8 cm. Using the ceramic techniques of maestro Gaspar Ernesto Courtenay Tzib, 2020. Image courtesy Luis Manuel May Ku

One of the most instructive aspects of Maestro May Ku's retelling of his reunion with *azul Maya ch'oj* is the way he worked across a variety of disciplines from chemistry to archaeology, and to anthropology, in addition to drawing on the knowledge of his elders and his own artisanal practices. He did not separate out the scientific, craft, providential/cosmopolitical, and sacred practices of working with the plant. Indeed, although academics such as Agnew believe that the epistemological capacities of reenactment are circumscribed, it would be next to impossible to set up a reenactment without drawing on a multitude of disciplines. As such, rather than 'deworlding' in order to approach materials 'objectively,' reenactment combines and proliferates interconnected meanings. Despite their amateur status, a reenactor will draw on the disciplines of the academy, such as research technical analysis, primary sources, historical research, and anthropology. Indeed, Petra Kalshoven, an anthropologist who has researched German Indianist reenactors, has found, the reenactors are as much reenacting the role of anthropologist as Native American.⁴⁰⁷ Reenactment functions at the intersection of these ways of knowing, and adds its own embodied form of knowledge. As Buckow describes the practice of housewife chemistry:

Placing the physical evidence offered by artworks within practical and theoretical contexts has shown that every single material used by artists was part of a vast cultural network that extended way beyond their workshops.⁴⁰⁸

This vast cultural network is reflected in the subcultural networks in which reenactors operate, and in a sense, their reenactment practice is indistinguishable from their everyday lives. Practitioners tend to specialise in different areas and trade with each other, creating a microcosm of past interrelations. In England, 'The Original Reenactors' Market' meets several times a year in a sports hall in a village outside Coventry. It is a strange anachronistic collection of stalls where the medieval period rubs up against the Tudors, Vikings with English civil war. Specialists in areas such as dyeing, ceramics, shoemaking, and metal work may have their own preferred 'time period' but make and sell to other time periods too, in order to cater to a wider market. Yet, it is also a very social event, which, in spite

⁴⁰⁷ Petra Tjitske Kalshoven, *Crafting 'The Indian': Knowledge, Desire, and Play in Indianist Reenactment*, Berghahn Books, New York, 2012.

⁴⁰⁸ Bucklow, 'Cultural Networks and Artists' Materials'. p6

of the anachronisms, echoes the premodern and early modern market as a meeting place where materials, knowledge, and ideas are exchanged. I would argue that this fluidity between disciplines and ways of living is reenactment's strength.

An example of this can be found in following Bucklow's description of the production of a red pigment from scraps of dyed cloth. While Elkins' description of painting as alchemy emphasises the isolation of the studio, and downplays alchemy as a form of knowledge, Bucklow's book *The Alchemy of Paint* (2009) makes a contrasting account which reveals the interconnected meanings surrounding painters' materials and how they reflected pre-modern European cosmologies. Indeed, the very interaction with paint had ritual significance that belonged to a world beyond the studio. Cloth dyed red with insects such as kermes and cochineal had a high status due to its expense, and as we have seen, was subject to strict sumptuary regulation in New Spain. Painters in Europe could rarely afford to make a pigment straight from the raw insects until the proliferation of cochineal from the New World. Consequently, they would collect small scraps of dyed silk and wool from tailors' workshops and extract the dye using a strong lye solution. They would then precipitate the dye into a pigment using alum. As Bucklow reveals in *The Alchemy of Paint*, artists would time how long the cloth should simmer in the lye solution by chanting... "one or two *Pater Nosters*, two or three *Misereres*, or for three *Ave Marias* according to different recipes."⁴⁰⁹ Now, a reconstruction of this pigment might involve dyeing some wool or silk with a scale insect first, and then extracting the dye using potash, and precipitating it with alum. The resultant pigment could then be compared with technical analysis of historical artworks. A reenactment of the pigment might involve collecting scraps of dyed wool from reenactors who have been sewing clothes from carmine dyed fabric, and chanting the suggested number of *Pater Nosters*, *Misereres*, or *Ave Marias* while extracting the dye in lye made from the ashes of the reenactors' hearth (figure 4.13). Discovering that none of these prayers are long enough to properly extract the dye in just two or three repetitions, suggests that this was not meant merely as a practical way to measure time in a period before clocks. Rather, the time described must have been allegorical, much like the biblical forty days and forty nights that often appears in paint recipes, and the prayer itself an important ritual part of the process. In this we see the separation between sacred and profane, the miraculous and the quotidian evaporate.

⁴⁰⁹ Spike Bucklow, *The Alchemy of Paint: Art, Science and Secrets from the Middle Ages*, Marion Boyars, London, 2009. p10



Figure 4.13 Sewing a coat with madder-dyed wool and then making a pigment from the scraps.

Bucklow argues that the modern interest in materials is fundamentally different to a medieval interest in materials due to the way the conception of the self has changed.⁴¹⁰ The modern self is divided between body and mind, through which the world is filtered, as such, the medieval medicinal usage of pigments and dyes would now be understood as either physical materials which affect the physiology of the body through ingestion, or as colours in a painting that affect the mind through their visual power. Thus, the temptation is to translate the medieval prescription of kermes insects by mouth for the heart, and as paint for the soul, as the body and mind respectively in the modern sense. However, Bucklow argues that this would be a mistake. The European medieval self was made

⁴¹⁰ Bucklow.

up of body, soul, and spirit - and while body and mind were individual, the spirit was universal. Every person was conceived as a miniature universe, interconnected with the heavens and earth. In the doctrine of signatures, the red of burnt sienna, the red of burning coals, the red of brazilwood, fiery red hair, strong urine, and a fiery temper were all related.⁴¹¹ As we saw in chapter one, with the permeable self of the Swedish Peasant, it is this inseparability between matter and meaning, substance and soul in pre-modern European thinking that enables anthropologists of Amazonian Amerindians to make links between alchemy and Amerindian concepts of personhood.

While Elkin's account of painting as alchemy does allow for the agency of paint, claiming as he does that "paint seems to have a mind of its own," his emphasis on the isolation of the studio fails to attend to the way the agency of paint is interconnected with the wider cosmos.⁴¹² That distance between painting and the world has been constructed gradually, and began in the early modern period with the rise of capitalism and the beginnings of the art market. As we saw in chapter one, the world's first art market, where 'off the peg' paintings could be purchased, was situated above the first stock market in Antwerp, and as Silver points out, this led to the explosion of genres such as peasant scenes, landscapes, and still lifes.⁴¹³ Although the early peasant scenes were bawdy and ambivalent, expressing a communal carnivalesque comic mode for some and defining the civilised bourgeois self for others, the genre progressed to bucolic scenes in which peasants were reduced to bit parts. Such pastoral scenes showed nature being tamed by man, while conversely the development of empty, wild, landscapes expressed the sublime of nature (or God) over the solitary viewer, thereby individualising the self. So began what Heidegger famously called 'The Age of the World Picture,' linking the spatial construction in Western landscape painting to the separation of man and nature, subject and object, and facilitating the development of the scientific method.⁴¹⁴

However, as we have seen throughout this thesis other painting practices have existed outwith the development of the world picture. Peasant-painting can mean paintings *by* peasants rather than paintings *of* peasants. An expanded painting, as Joselit says makes visible the networks of its own making. In the practice of this thesis, the studio has been expanded into the field of cultivating dye

⁴¹¹ Bucklow. p17

⁴¹² Elkins, *What Painting Is*. p17

⁴¹³ Silver, *Peasant Scenes and Landscapes*.

⁴¹⁴ Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture'.

plants, and an attempt to re-enact peasant relations with plant persons. The peasant has also entered the laboratory in an ecology of knowledges, all the while, attending to the colonial histories of bio-prospecting, land appropriation, and enslavement, as well as the figure of the peasant within Western European painting. Reenactment is a research method that not only allows one to research the past but can also be used speculatively to imagine an alternative past, and therefore an alternative future. As Chakrabarty points out, there is a fundamental heterogeneity in the moment when the historian meets the peasant. On the one hand, the peasant is historicized “in the interest of a history of social justice and democracy” on the other hand, the peasant is seen as “a figure illuminating a life possibility for the present.”⁴¹⁵ What if alliances had been formed between European peasants and Mesoamerican Amerindians? What if there had been exchanges of knowledges instead of extraction of natural resources? What if Swedish Peasant Painters had made Mayan blue from woad? How might that expand ‘our’ painting now?

⁴¹⁵ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*. p108

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have retraced a decolonial history of painting through the figure of the peasant. I have also developed a decolonial research method and practice. As a genre of Western European painting, images of peasants alongside the first stock-market in sixteenth-century Antwerp, they are intimately linked with capitalism, modernity, and the construction of the bourgeois self. In these paintings the body of the peasant was disciplined, and nature constructed as something to be controlled and exploited in the age of the world picture. By attending to peasants-that-paint, however, one can see that the grand narrative of Western European painting is but one provincial story, even within Europe. The peasants that painted in South West Sweden did so as a form of resistance to the modernising project around them. Their paintings reveal a socially inscribed, permeable self, interconnected with the cosmos. In contrast to the man/nature divide, these peasants viewed plants, animals, and supernatural beings as part of the household, as well as the wider world. At the same time, these painters were implicated in global colonial trajectories through the very pigments that they used. While poorer peasants may have used European woad, more successful peasant-painters were able to afford imported indigo produced by the plantation system in the Americas, and later India. In the case of brazilwood, Tupinamba Amerindians were exploited for its harvest in Brazil, while the displaced rural poor were forced to rasp it in Europe.

By focusing on the colonial history of indigo blue, I have shown how woad was an early cash crop in Europe, disapproved of by Luther, and associated with the fantasy of the plentiful Land of Cockaigne. This underscores how valuable plant dyes were as a commodity, and that they played an important role in the colonisation and exploitation of the Americas. Although early attempts to set up woad plantations in New Spain failed, plantations of the native indigo, *xuiquilitl*, were soon set up, using the labour and knowledge of enslaved Africans. At the same time, the remarkable Mesoamerican technology for making Mayan blue went unnoticed by the Spanish settlers and was eventually 'forgotten.' This was due to the inability of the Spaniards to see the significance of the pigment due to their radically different theories of painting and their own sense of superiority, but also due to a withholding on the part of the native population who continued many of their practices hidden in plain sight during the early colonial period.

By attempting to understand the sacred meaning of Mayan blue, and the theory of the image that the *ixiptla* entails, we are confronted with a radically different view of the self. In Amerindian perspectivalism humanity is universal, while nature is multiplicity - multinaturalism as opposed to multiculturalism. As such, plants are persons too. Viveiros de Castro proposes that this 'cannibal metaphysics' can become the basis for a continual decolonisation of thought. Applying Amerindian perspectivalism to a project which follows the networks of painting's own making, allows us to account for things excluded by networks of colonialism, and attend to radical difference. In taking the thought - or painting- of others seriously, we think *with* others and allow our own thinking to be transformed.

As Viveiros de Castro points out, "when everything is human, the human becomes a wholly other thing."⁴¹⁶ In Amerindian perspectivalism there is no essential self, but rather a continually changing self that is constituted by practices, which in turn involves the collaboration with other beings. In my final chapter, I have made a case for reenactment as a practice-based method which allows us to think *with* others, across space and time. Despite reenactment's problematic history as a form of colonial display in museums and the human zoo, by turning away from reenactment as spectacle, towards reenactment as method, we may see its potential to disrupt the modern, individualised self, and to work at the interface of different agencies and knowledge systems. In the case of the Tupinamba reenacting the brazilwood trade in Rouen, we can see that reenactment is in fact a method of Amerindian perspectivalism. Reenacting planting and pigment-making is central to my practice, as a form of research, but also as a performance in itself. Taken as a form of what Bucklow calls 'housewife chemistry' it allows the peasant to enter the laboratory.

Making Mayan blue from woad

During the course of this practice-based PhD project, I have been experimenting with making a pigment using the Mayan blue technique with the woad that I am cultivating. I have drawn research from the fields of analytic chemistry, archaeology, anthropology. I have then used this to guide my experiments based on a mixture of established methods for the extraction of indigo from woad

⁴¹⁶ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*. p63

developed by contemporary natural dye experts Jenny Dean and Michel Garcia, and the research by the SPINDIGO project, an EU funded research project into the potential of introducing indigo-producing crops into European agriculture.⁴¹⁷ On a practical level, as a painter who wants to make enough pigment to paint with, the technology of Mayan blue, allows for the production of a large amount of pigment from a small number of plants, as the indigo is essentially ‘filled out’ by the addition of clay. This means that relatively little land has to be given over to woad production while still supporting a large number of painting practices. On a more conceptual level, making Mayan blue from woad constitutes a decolonial gesture. While hybridity is often associated with the (post)colonised regions of the globe, this pigment serves to highlight that the European condition is also one of hybridity. One could call it *nepantla* - to use a word coined by the Aztecs during the sixteenth century to refer to the state of being between two worlds.⁴¹⁸ Mayan blue made from woad revisits this early colonial moment, while imagining an alternative future. It is a hybrid pigment in which the non-European element is the technology, while the European element is the ‘raw-material,’ reversing the usual relationship between Western technologies and exploited non-Western ‘natural resources.’

In 2018 I published my recipe for making a blue pigment from woad using the Mayan blue technique in an article for *Third Text*.⁴¹⁹ Given that the indigenous Mesoamericans seemed to have intentionally kept the process secret from the Spanish during the sixteenth century, it might be argued that my making of Mayan blue amounts to cultural appropriation. Indeed, I am working collaboratively with Professor Antonio Domènech Carbó, professor of analytical chemistry in the University of Valencia, who is analysing my Mayan-woad-blue samples in order to better understand how the chemistry of Mayan blue functions, and therefore actively participating in the ‘rediscovery’ of the pigment. However, I felt that since various recipes and methods had already been published in scientific articles and Valerio Reyes book, that guarding the secret is no longer an option. Natural dye enthusiasts have

⁴¹⁷ Jenny Dean and Karen Diadick Casselman, *Wild Color, Revised and Updated Edition: The Complete Guide to Making and Using Natural Dyes*, Revised, Updated ed. Edition, Potter Craft, New York, 2010); Michel Garcia, *Natural Dye Workshop with Michel Garcia ‘Colors of Provence Using Sustainable Methods’*, DVD, vol. 1, 2012; ‘Sustainable Cultivation of Plant-Derived Indigo for Diversification and On-Farm Value-Added Dye Pigment Production – SARE Grant Management System’, accessed 23 March 2021, https://projects.sare.org/sare_project/fs10-241/.

⁴¹⁸ The word *nepantla* has become important for Chicana, feminist, and queer theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa who work with the idea of the border and the new mestiza.

⁴¹⁹ Sigrid Holmwood, ‘Cultivating Colour: Making Mayan Blue from Woad’, *Third Text*, July 2018, 1–20,

also started to use the process in novel ways. For instance, the dye expert Michel Garcia uses the clay to mop up the indigo that washes out when rinsing his indigo dyed fabrics, and then filters and roasts the results.⁴²⁰ My contribution would therefore be to share my recipe for using the technology with woad in the context of an article about the colonial histories that led to its disappearance, and which called for the Western European history of painting to be provincialised and the Amerindian history of painting taken seriously.

Tactics of resistance must vary in different contexts. In the current context, ‘commoning’ knowledge can offer a more powerful resistance to the exploitative processes of global capital. Peter Linebaugh’s Magna Carta manifesto evokes the European peasant struggles and communal practices at the beginnings of modernity, and proposes a new ‘commoning’ in the fight against the contemporary enclosures of privatization and accumulation of the world’s resources.⁴²¹ Indeed, although we may think of the ‘commons’ as a European construct, this contemporary revival of the struggle for the commons draws equally on various indigenous practices of commoning, especially coming from Latin America and the ideas of *el bien común* and *el buen vivir*.⁴²² However, as Jeffrey Atteberry points out, the use of the notion of ‘commoning’ by ‘Access to Knowledge’ (A2K) activists must be done with critical awareness — a charge which equally applies to artists such as myself.⁴²³ Atteberry points to the fact that Locke used the idea of the commons to differentiate the process by which the ‘common resources of the earth’ granted by God could be annexed as private property through labour—a notion of labour based on European agricultural practices. Consequently, the apparently ‘un-laboured’ lands of the Americas could be claimed by Europeans as part of the common treasury available for appropriation into private property. This justification of annexation through Western models of occupation persists today, enshrined in the legal concept of terra nullius and the doctrine of discovery. Atteberry is clear that activists must be careful to model their concept of commoning with an awareness of the uneven positions occupied by different players within the field of an information commons, especially when it comes to indigenous knowledge under the contemporary

⁴²⁰ Garcia, *Natural Dye Workshop with Michel Garcia ‘Colors of Provence Using Sustainable Methods’*.

⁴²¹ Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*, University of California Press, CA, 2008.

⁴²² David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, ‘El Buen Vivir and the Commons: A Conversation Between Gustavo Soto Santiesteban and Silke Helfrich’, in *The Wealth of the Commons: A World Beyond Market and State*, Levellers Press, Amherst, MA, 2014.

⁴²³ Jeffrey Atteberry, ‘Information/Knowledge in the Global Society of Control: A2K Theory and the Postcolonial Commons’, in *Access to Knowledge in the Age of Intellectual Property*, ed. Gaëlle Krikorian and Amy Kapczynski, Zone Books, New York, 2010, 329–52.

threat of bioprospecting. When I discovered that a Texas based company calling themselves Mayan Pigments Inc, have filed a series of patents involving the Mayan blue process and trademarked 'Mayan Pigments', 'Mayacrom' and 'Mayanize' I came to the conclusion that sharing my recipe with woad might help prevent contemporary Mayans from being excluded from working with their own rightful cultural inheritance.

Consequently, when I was close to finishing my PhD I was overjoyed to discover that Luis Manuel May Ku had brought back Mayan blue to the Mayan community in 2019. His Mayan blue is all the more special since it is made from *ch'oj* that he has cultivated and *sak lu'um* he has dug up from the local earth, and is now being used in Mayan ceremonies and art. When in conversation with him, I gingerly asked if it was problematic for him that I was making Mayan blue from woad. He replied that the scientists had already made Mayan blue before him so in a sense it was already 'out there.' Indeed, in confirmation of Robert Merton's notion of 'multiple discovery' we seemed to have followed very similar paths in our investigations, we both started as artists needing a blue for our work (having chosen to constrain ourselves to historical pre-industrial pigments) and we used the same scientific and anthropological literature as our starting points.⁴²⁴ Yet, as we conversed, we also went over the differences in our pigments. Maestro May Ku was able to draw on the memories and knowledge of his elders in his own community, while I had to turn to publications of craft dyers such as Jenny Dean and Michel Garcia, and agricultural research projects for inspiration.⁴²⁵ Maestro May Ku cultivated the indigenous *ch'oj* from seed that he found growing wild next to his home while I, on the other hand, originally purchased seed of woad online from the only commercial woad farmer in England, Ian Howard.⁴²⁶ Maestro May Ku uses *sak lu'um* dug up from his neighbour's land, while I buy industrially processed palygorskite clay online from Kremer, a German shop specialising in materials for art and conservation. His networks are intensely local and bound up in his community and in the memory of his elders, while my networks are dispersed and found mainly online. Finally, of course, *ch'oj* and woad are very different – Maestro May Ku's pigment is a bright turquoise which closely matches

⁴²⁴ Robert K. Merton, *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1973; Robert K. Merton, 'Resistance to the Systematic Study of Multiple Discoveries in Science', *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 4, no. 2, December 1963: 237–82,

⁴²⁵ Dean and Casselman, *Wild Color, Revised and Updated Edition*; Garcia, *Natural Dye Workshop with Michel Garcia 'Colors of Provence Using Sustainable Methods'*; 'Sustainable Cultivation of Plant-Derived Indigo for Diversification and On-Farm Value-Added Dye Pigment Production – SARE Grant Management System'.

⁴²⁶ 'About Us » The Woad Centre', accessed 23 March 2021, <http://www.thewoadcentre.co.uk/about-us/>.

ancient samples, while woad (especially if it has not been a very sunny year) cannot hope to be as vibrant. His pigment is likely to be very close to the Mayan blue as was made by his ancestors, while my pigment does not pretend to be the same as the historic Mayan blue.

Above all, Maestro May Ku is bringing back a pigment of great significance back to the Mayan people. I was struck by how he had given thanks to all the Mayan deities for being reunited with Mayan blue, while to my shame this kind of gesture had not occurred to me, with my secular upbringing. Yet, of course, giving thanks for a harvest does still exist in Europe, so I will learn from Maestro May Ku and give thanks to woad at the end of next summer. Indeed, as I have tried to argue in this thesis it is through such practices that we may change ourselves and our relationships with other beings. Unlike Maestro May Ku, I am making a pigment that never existed. Instead, it is a way of telling a story, one of partial connections, equivocations, and violent oppression. It also a way for me, as a painter, to become more intimate with the materials that I use and where they come from. The fact that that the Mayan pigment making technology could have been used with woad before, yet was not, tells us much about how despite all its colonial expansionism, how limited and contingent Western European thought (and painting) has been all along. The retrieval of this pigment should be done as a way to remember the context in which it first disappeared. Should the reader choose to cultivate some woad and re-enact the recipe provided, I hope they will do so while dwelling on the entwined narratives of indigenous Mesoamericans and European peasants under coloniality and Western modernity. By considering the painting practices in which Mayan blue was developed, with its alternative conceptions of representation and humanity, we might provincialise Western European painting and the bourgeois subject constructed through the image of the peasant and the savage.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁷ The reader may also support Luis Manuel May Ku, by buying his *azul Maya ch'oj* through his facebook page: Luis May.

A recipe for making Maya blue from woad

Figure 5.73 Woad leaves can be harvested several times in one season. After rinsing them, roughly chop and add them to hot water, no hotter than 80c



Figure 5.74 Let the steeped leaves cool to 50c and strain off the leaves. The liquid will be brown. Add some potash or soda ash to bring the Ph to around 10/11. The liquid will instantly become dark. Whisk air into the liquid



Figure 5.75 Whisk until a blue foam forms, and indigo starts to form. Add palygorskite clay. Start with a small amount as you can always add more later. The clay will help the indigo settle to the bottom.



Figure 5.76 When the indigo and clay have settled, strain using a fine filter paper, fabric, or mesh. Work extra clay into the resultant paste if needed and form into tortillas. Roast the dried tortillas in a frying pan or in an oven, be careful not to overheat, you only need a temperature of 120c for the reaction to take place.



Figure 5.77 Comparison between roasted tortillas top, and unroasted bottom. Maya blue made from woad

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