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INTRODUCTION



Postcolonial intellectuals: new paradigms

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I would claim, I would insist on, my right to the title of having done intellectual work. I am an intellectual. I am an intellectual in Gramsci's sense because I believe in the power and necessity of ideas.¹

The figure of the intellectual has fascinated and mesmerized generations of thinkers, from Antonio Gramsci to Edward Said, from Michel Foucault to Gilles Deleuze, from Pierre Bourdieu to Jürgen Habermas, from Noam Chomsky to Cornel West, from Nancy Fraser to Gayatri Spivak, from Frantz Fanon to Stuart Hall, from Paul Gilroy to Rosi Braidotti, from Bruce Robbins to Helen Small and from Achille Mbembe to Judith Butler to mention but a few. The intellectual has also been studied from different disciplinary perspectives: political science, referring to the role of publicness and democratic influence; philosophy, concerning the question of truth and rhetoric; gender studies, concerning the divide between public and private and the visibility of feminist interventions; celebrity studies, concerning the role of charisma and stardom; (digital) media communication, concerning the role of new social media platforms and the authenticity, trust and accountability of news online; and postcolonial studies, concerning the question of individuality and collectivity in representing and speaking up for minorities, subalterns and marginalized groups. However, in my view postcolonial intellectuals are not only 'spokespersons', to avoid Jameson's definition of the postcolonial intellectual as an 'allegory of the third world'.² On the contrary, my take on the postcolonial intellectual is to revisit, deconstruct and rethink the category of the intellectual not as universal, individualistic and autonomous but as embedded in collective discursive practices and political engagements.

This special issue draws from a two-day international conference that was held at Utrecht University on 5–6 February 2019. The conference, entitled 'Postcolonial Intellectuals and their European Publics', was organized to help launch a large new European research network called PIN (Postcolonial Intellectuals in Europe) for which I was the PI. The network is funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) in collaboration with several European partners, including prominent centres, institutes and departments in postcolonial studies (among others, the University of Leeds, University of Warwick and Newcastle University in the UK; Utrecht University in the Netherlands; the University of Lisbon in Portugal; Ca' Foscari University of Venice in Italy; Aalborg University in Denmark and INALCO in France).

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This edition of *Postcolonial Studies* features a selection of some of the excellent presentations from that conference, reworked and elaborated in line with the focus of this special issue. The selected papers include that of keynote speaker Kamaia L. Glover (Professor of French and Africana Studies at Barnard College, Columbia University) and articles based on presentations by other speakers that were a good fit with the scope and intervention proposed for this issue. The chosen scope aims to avoid too narrow or orthodox a definition and interpretation of the intellectual. Instead, the intention is to offer space for new cultural and political interventions to emerge in conjunction with the notions of intellectual engagements, Europe and creative practices.

It is widely held nowadays that the figure of the traditional intellectual is in decline and bound to disappear soon.³ The diminution of the influence and visibility of the intellectual is attributed to the dwindling status of the academic, who is becoming increasingly enmeshed in neoliberal priorities, and is therefore losing his/her autonomy and critical stance.⁴ A second factor is the increased spread of information outlets and social media sources, which has made access to wider audiences and constituencies easier, but also more fragmented. Finally, this development is attributed to the postmodern condition that deconstructs the position of the intellectual as one of authority and indisputable truth.

With the increased dominance of social media, the role of public intellectuals has shifted from that of highly individualized and solitary iconic figures to that of collective, diffused and multi-sited actors. Although intellectuals have always relied on communities, networks and coalitions in order to represent and uphold particular ideals and values, the role of intellectual was often perceived as a titanic one that coalesced mostly around white male figures. While this myth and misconception has been amply debunked by showing the richness of intellectual figures, movements and networks around the world, from colonial to anticolonial and postcolonial formations,⁵ there is still a tendency to interpret the intellectual as a 'figure' elevated above the masses and endowed with exceptional skills and abilities in communication and dissemination, along with being blessed with attributes such as charisma, popularity and fandom, often approaching the realms of celebrity and star status.

So far from being in decline, the figure of the intellectual has shifted with the erosion of this idea of exceptionality and influence in the public sphere. And as Helen Small writes, this idea of the disappearance of the public intellectual, or the so-called crisis of the intellectual, might be a Western cliché, informed by a universalistic bias that equates the conditions of postcolonial intellectuals whatever their origins or geopolitical specificities.⁶ To the contrary, intellectual movements, protests and activisms are more alive than ever (see for example The Arab Revolution, the Black Lives Matter Movement, #MeToo, All Monuments Must Fall), but are also dislocated and not necessarily at the heart of Western nations. We therefore have to take into account three elements that are essential for the role and function of the public intellectual: the community which the intellectual represents or speaks for, the medium used and the audiences reached or targeted.

While traditional intellectuals have relied on traditional media such as writing and the press or mass media such as radio, television or cinema, the rise of multiple social media platforms has brought far-reaching differentiation in the modalities through which intellectuals can express themselves and reach their publics, also allowing them to switch from

one platform to another (e.g. Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Tumblr or even TikTok). Along with this easier access and influence in the public sphere, however, new issues of mediation and reliability have also emerged.

For example, questions of authenticity, authority and accessibility become paramount, and also questions of transparency, trust and truth. In an age of fake news and ‘post-truth’, producing false content (paid ‘trolls’) and automated accounts (‘bots’) that promote such content is common practice, not only to manipulate and influence political campaigns (see the example of Cambridge Analytica in this special issue) but also to steer public debates and foment propaganda and polemics through retweeting and likes. With the rise of disinformation and conspiracy theories, what is the role of the postcolonial intellectual and how can it be discerned and separated from the affordances of the platform used?⁷

The postcolonial intellectual

The notion of the intellectual has long designated a public figure with considerable cultural capital who sides with oppressed people. It is with the Dreyfus affair at the turn of the twentieth century in France that the term first emerges to define a group of writers, professors and journalists who took up the cause of the Jewish captain against false accusations of treason.

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci conceives of intellectuals as educated and influential individuals who are *organic* to a certain historical formation or social group or public – be it hegemonic or struggling to gain hegemony.⁸ According to Gramsci, anyone can be an intellectual, but he theorized the distinction between ‘traditional’ and ‘organic’ intellectuals. An organic intellectual is a member of a social class, as opposed to a member of the traditional intelligentsia, which regards itself as a class apart from the rest of society. Organic intellectuals are intent on changing the status quo and fighting for equality and justice.⁹ The distinction between the traditional intellectual and the organic intellectual is important in understanding the difference between the role of the public intellectual in normal professional positions, such as that of priests, teachers or administrators, and the function of the ‘organic’ intellectual who uses his position to organize interests, and to gain more power and more control. As Edward Said comments:

Gramsci believed that organic intellectuals are actively involved in society, that is, they constantly struggle to change minds and expand markets; unlike teachers and priests, who seem more or less to remain in place, doing the same kind of work year in year out, organic intellectuals are always on the move, on the make.¹⁰

Said conceptualizes the intellectual as a figure who is outside his or her own context, always slightly out of place, and therefore unsettled and unsettling, uncompromising, as well as offering double insights into realities that would not otherwise emerge. Said sees in the figure of the intellectual the position of the dissident and the spirit of opposition, an almost romantic figure who operates ‘against the status quo at a time when the struggle on behalf of the underrepresented and disadvantaged groups seems so unfairly weighted against them’.¹¹ Hence his characterization of the intellectual as ‘exile, marginal and amateur, and as the author of a language that tried to speak the truth to power’.¹² Here, the notion of the intellectual in exile refers to an *actual* condition which may

also be a *metaphorical* condition, which means that the delineation of the intellectual derives from the social and political history of dislocation and migration, although it is not limited to it.¹³

From the famous conversation between Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault on the notion of the intellectual, an image of the intellectual emerges akin to Said's portrait of the dissident intellectual 'speaking truth to power'.¹⁴ However, their account is further characterized by the dismissal of the problematic of representation, which marks a clear distinction with respect to Said. In Said's view, intellectuals are responsible for 'underrepresented and disadvantaged groups' and do not withdraw from the effort to give them a voice.¹⁵ According to Deleuze, instead, the intellectual as representative consciousness of the marginalized and the oppressed is no longer necessary because people are sufficiently able to represent themselves: 'representation no longer exists; there's only action'.¹⁶

Substituting desire for interest, Deleuze concludes: 'we never desire against our interests, because interest always follows and finds itself where desire has placed it'.¹⁷ Intellectuals become unnecessary for people who supposedly desire what is in their interest. However, in saying this, Gayatri Spivak argues, Deleuze fails to recognize the role of ideology in shaping people's desires, and allegedly 'reintroduces ... the Subject of desire and power [and the] self-identical subject of the oppressed', precisely at the moment he was committed to radically demystifying the Western autonomous, stand-alone subject.¹⁸

Spivak extends the reach of the term in essays like 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' by using it to figure social groups 'further down' the social scale and consequently even less visible to both colonial and third world national-bourgeois historiography alike; she is especially preoccupied by 'subsistence farmers, unorganised peasant labour, the tribals and communities of zero workers on the street or in the countryside'. More particularly, her analysis is directed at the subject position of the female subaltern, whom she describes as doubly marginalized by virtue of relative economic disadvantage and gender subordination.¹⁹

Thus, the role of public intellectuals is not merely a question of speaking up in the name of others. As Foucault points out in the interview with Deleuze, the idea of 'speaking for' has ethical implications, as the public intellectual not only takes responsibility for speaking for others but may come to ventriloquize and silence them.²⁰ For Foucault, the proper role of an intellectual is to expose the machinations of power and the systems of knowledge that justify, naturalize or conceal the operations of power. People who experience domination and exploitation do not need intellectuals to tell them that they are oppressed – they know that perfectly well (see Deleuze's point on desire in the passage above). What they need from intellectuals is not leadership, but resources, technical knowledge and assistance in navigating dense webs of institutional power.

The role, then, of public intellectual is particularly complex for postcolonial intellectuals as they juggle competing regimes of political representation, both individual and collective, and play a crucial role in their community as well as in the host society. This special issue considers the figure of the postcolonial public intellectual, trying to avoid normative definitions by favouring work that does not magnify the role and impact of individual figures and public celebrities but rather focuses on the transition of the notion of the intellectual towards more collective and artistic forms of presence,

performance and practice in the public sphere, redefined to include multiple and diverse publics.

So what makes intellectuals postcolonial is not an accident of birth or being the spokesperson for disenfranchised groups, but as Engin Isin has so cogently written:

What makes postcolonial intellectuals postcolonial is [the] understanding of their location in imperial-colonial orders and what makes them intellectual is this understanding of their location in knowledge-power regimes. [...] Postcolonial Intellectuals traverse both dominant and dominated positions. [...] Perhaps then postcolonial intellectuals are neither universal nor specific but transversal political subjects, always crossing borders and orders, constituting solidarities, networks and connections. Traversing both fields of knowledge-power and imperial-colonial orders is their condition of possibility and *modus operandi*.²¹

The notion of transversality is certainly central to Stuart Hall's self-proclamation of being an intellectual *avant la lettre* yet not being the traditional intellectual that either Gramsci or Said might have called for.

Through the prism of an intellectual life: Stuart Hall

Stuart Hall remains one of the most resounding and inspiring examples of the public intellectual. He was not only the cofounder of cultural studies but also a versatile and anti-authoritarian public intellectual who paved the way for many other scholars, activists and artists. He not only navigated the field of academic debate but was often enmeshed in public and political debates that had great resonance for larger audiences. He also communicated his message via different media outlets, from television to radio and newspapers, either recorded or live. Moreover, he was a sharp, critical analyst of the mediatization of our culture and of the politics of representation, always taking into account the multiple interconnected societal dimensions of communication and action, from highbrow to popular culture, from consumerism to activism, from scholarly engagement to political mobilization.

'Stuart Hall: Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life' is a recently discovered and newly restored video of one of Hall's most famous lectures, based on one of his most influential essays, delivered at the Caribbean Reasonings Conference in 2004.²² It is a dazzling talk, a true tour de force of one and a half hours in which Hall speaks with his characteristic charm and flair, but also with extreme precision, about the responsibilities of intellectuals and educators and their role in fighting injustice, racism and inequality. Based on his autobiographical narratives, of growing up in Jamaica while feeling out of place and dislocated from his own Caribbean identity, he describes with formidable clarity what it means to 'unbelong' both to the family he grew up with and to the Caribbean society into which he was born, never feeling at one with the expectations of the people among whom he was raised.

His desire to escape colonial society, an attempt to become a modern person at the heart of empire, is highly ironical as this desire to become modern is what dislocated him in the first place, as with many other colonized intellectuals who became out of place both in the place of origin and in the place of arrival. 'How to be a Caribbean intellectual?', he muses. 'I am a Caribbean in the most banal sense, in the sense that I was born here. But that accident of birth is not enough to justify owning up to that title.' Yet he recognizes that much of his thinking is shaped 'through the prism of his Caribbean

formation'; in that sense, he says, 'I am committed to a politics of location', but his relationship to the Caribbean was one of dislocation and displacement both literally and figuratively.²³ He was a child of the postcolonial, as were many of his peers, experiencing himself from the position of a colonial subject, which means to experience oneself as 'fundamentally displaced from the centre of the world, which was always represented to me as "elsewhere" and at the same time dislocated from the people and condition around me'.²⁴ Here, Hall embraces the notion of being 'out of place', a concept shared by Said in his childhood memoir,²⁵ a feeling of dislocation experienced by a whole generation of postcolonial intellectuals at the end of Empire.

This 'unsettledness', which is about being and going somewhere else, as Said posited in his notion of the intellectual, is the typical experience of many postcolonial intellectuals in the world in the same conjuncture. This means 'never feeling at one',²⁶ a form of dislocation and alienation that is characteristic of the crisis of the intellectual. He uses this wonderful phrasing, reminiscent of Engin Isin's definition of the intellectual:

There is a sense in which one has to stand back, outside of oneself, in order to make *the detour through thought*; to approach what one is trying to think about indirectly, obliquely, in another way, another mode.²⁷

So, for Stuart Hall one of the preconditions of becoming an intellectual is also recognized in the figure of dislocation, in the detour through thinking. This kind of intellectual labour is described as hard work as 'to be any sort of intellectual is to attempt to raise one's self-reflectiveness to the highest maximum point of intensity'.²⁸ And this implies the paradox of being at odds with oneself as one can only think identity through difference:

To think is to construct that inevitable distance between the subject that is thinking and the subject that is being thought about. That is just a condition of intellectual work.²⁹

To capture this displacement and detour, Hall notes the need for an interdisciplinary approach, because it is not possible to think this process within the framework of traditional disciplines: they cannot account for the changing fragments of reality that confront us today.³⁰ Even cultural studies, which he founded and helped to shape, is not a discipline but a transdisciplinary field of inquiry, he explains. And here he enters the most interesting part of his proclamation:

I am not really in the true sense of the word a 'scholar'. That is not what I am. I have lived an academic life and earned my living [...] I love to teach [...] I respect and defend the academy to the hilt and the capacity it gives to transmit knowledge to future generations and to pursue knowledge for its own sake. One has to defend the arena of critical thought – especially these days when it is under attack from so many quarters – with one's life. But that does not mean that I want to be or think of myself as having been an academic. I would claim, I would insist on, my right to the title of having done intellectual work. I am an intellectual. I am an intellectual in Gramsci's sense because I believe in the power and necessity of ideas.³¹

He elaborates on the notion of the present conjuncture and how his intellectual work is oriented to explaining the condition in which we find ourselves, and how we got here. What forces have brought us here, so that we might understand the present in such a way as to intervene and bring about change? This is a history of the present, which

takes into account what came before – the anterior condition that makes this present possible.

... the world presents itself in the chaos of appearances, and the only way in which one can understand, break down, analyze, grasp in order to do something about the present conjuncture that confronts one, is to break into that series of congealed and opaque appearances with the only tools you have: concepts, ideas and thoughts.³²

For Hall, understanding the present conjuncture is the object of his intellectual work. We have to transform the forces but we have to understand first how they came into existence, as the history of the present commits us to thinking of its anterior conditions.

The notion of conjuncture is central to Hall's thought and he pays particular attention to it in this lecture. Conjuncture does not mean that the world does not have a pattern, neither does it mean that the future is already wrapped up in its past. There is no closure yet written into it, and if we do not believe this it means we do not believe in politics. The notion of conjuncture is developed by Hall from Gramsci's ideas about how social change might be brought about by social action located within a specific historical moment and set of conditions. This includes the use of cultural theory, not as a given but strategically, in order to produce meaningful cultural and political change. Hall was not interested in theory for the sake of theory but in theory as a set of localized, contested and conjunctural knowledges that always needs to be negotiated and debated in a dialogical way.³³ He elaborated on the notion of the conjuncture/conjunctural as indicating the tensions that emerge at the beginning of social change, which includes the shift from everyday events to more structural and deeper causes of social and political change.³⁴ This means responding to actual events as they are, in the here and now, and not according to how we might have wished them to be. This in turn means placing people and the possibility of human agency and connections as central to and part of the conjunctural analysis.³⁵

So Hall explains how we have to think of forces that come out of history and that exist in a specific historical moment. These are determinants, but not deterministic. Contingency is the sign of this effort; what is needed is not a long epochal overview but specific historical locations. Very dissimilar currents (of short or long duration) come to fuse and condense in a specific configuration and that configuration is the object of analysis of intellectual inquiry. Through this understanding of conjuncture, we see, for example, that racism is not just a general historical condition but something arising at specific conjunctures.

The task of the intellectual, then, and what Hall sees as his life task, is 'unravelling the present conjuncture', by which he means 'being disturbed by, and trying to analyse so as to transform, systems and structures of power, of injustices, of inequality, which are generated by forces that one does not fully understand and whose consequences one therefore cannot fully estimate and whom one cannot therefore effectively resist'.³⁶ In that sense Hall subscribes to Said's notion of the intellectual life as a vocation, although Hall does not subscribe completely to the definition Said gives. Hall thinks that the task of the intellectual is to speak truth to power, to take responsibility, to speak beyond the confines of the academy, to make truth more accessible. Maybe not truth with a capital T, but the best truth the intellectual can discover. Hall defends the academy as a place for intellectual thinking, although the academy is no guarantee

that such thinking will take place. All the same, it has to be defended as a space for critical intellectual work. He commends the vocation of the intellectual life and the duty to defend it as it will always mean ‘subverting the settled forms of knowledge, interrogating the disciplines in which you are trained, and questioning the paradigms in which you have to go on thinking’.³⁷

This is what he calls ‘thinking under erasure’, borrowing a term from Jacques Derrida, suggesting that one must question the very tools one needs to theorize and think. But that is the beauty of ‘thinking conjuncturally’ because there will be a new moment, a new conjuncture, with a new relation of forces that needs to be unravelled and understood.

There will be work for critical intellectuals to do. I commend that vocation to you, if you can manage to find it. I do not claim to have honoured that vocation fully in my life, but I say to you, that is kind of what I have been trying to do all this while.³⁸

Everybody and everything is on the move according to the logic of globalization. There is the movement of capital, of technologies, the flow of messages and images, and flow of investment, of entrepreneurs, and of the executive corporate global class.³⁹ This is in line with what Arjun Appadurai defines as the five scapes in modernity at large.⁴⁰ It is a flow and movement that is for everybody except the poor, but it is also for the multitudes who are crossing boundaries under dire conditions: ‘The economic migrants and the asylum-seekers, the illegal migrants, the “sans-papiers” – the ones without proper papers. The ones driven into camps across the borders by famine, civil wars, environmental devastation or pandemic. A movement of people trying never to be “there”, crossing every boundary in the world’.⁴¹ This is what Hall calls the underbelly of the contemporary globalization system, where we have to account for different waves of people escaping all kinds of infrastructural injustices and disparities: escaping poverty, ill health, ecological devastation, civil war, ethnic cleansing, rural depopulation, over-urbanization – you name it.⁴²

That is the task of the intellectual: to speak of the multicultural question of our modern times, but never in finitudes and closures, in dialogue, and taking into account the differences and multiplicities. It is also important to be self-reflective and to remember that intellectuals do not speak in a void but are a product of their times and should not exempt themselves from the task of creating distance between the subject that is thinking and the subject that is being thought about:

[I]t is one of Foucault’s greatest insights that in order to become ‘subjects’ we must ‘be subjected’ to discourses which speak of us, and without which we cannot speak. Of course, culture is also enabling as well as constraining.⁴³

And it is within culture that we create intuitions about life and give meaning to our historical convergence.

We can produce great works of philosophy, of painting, of literature; but only because we have already subjected ourselves to the laws and conventions and meaning of a language, the circumstances of history and culture without which we could not have made ourselves. This process is called ‘the decentering of the subject’. It represents the dislocation of the subject from the position of authorship and authority.⁴⁴

This creates the perfect framing and link to the aim and scope of this special issue, which is to encompass more nuanced and complex understandings of engaging with the figure

of the intellectual by also bringing to the fore figures such as artists, writers and activists, as well as movements that are influential in changing public opinions and representing and foregrounding the interests of marginalized groups. The aim is also to intervene and make a statement about the contingency of our time from different disciplinary backgrounds, methodological traditions and material grounding.

The contributions to the special issue combine approaches from history, (digital) media studies, postcolonial theory, literary critique, music and the culture industry, as well as political philosophy and algorithmic culture. By foregrounding a postcolonial framework, and by focusing on intellectuals with networks in Europe and across the globe, the intention is to analyse how they contribute to alternative practices of representation and communication grounded in specific conjunctures understood not only as historical but also mediatic and technological.

Postcolonial intellectual engagements: critics, artists and activists

The articles in this special issue all work to concretize the above-mentioned aims and goals. Neelam Srivastava's article on 'The Intellectual as Partisan: Sylvia Pankhurst and the Italian Invasion of Ethiopia' deals with a relatively overlooked British figure in the history of European anti-colonialism, the feminist, communist and antifascist campaigner Sylvia Pankhurst, who worked actively as a publicist in support of Ethiopia in the 1930s against the Italian fascist invasion. This contribution brings to light not only one of the many forgotten radical female figures active in political campaigning, but also their move beyond the notion of partisanship by acting beyond the interests of their own nation and operating in the wider network of antifascist and anti-imperialist intellectual engagement. Through the analysis of Pankhurst, the article argues for an understanding of the postcolonial intellectual as a partisan who cuts across civilizational divides, bringing together metropolitan and colonial networks of resistance. Drawing on Carl Schmitt's *Theory of the Partisan*, Srivastava argues that the partisan is not only an insurgent fighter but also an individual who takes sides in the interconnected struggles against colonialism and fascism, thus gesturing to the possibility of a global theory of resistance.

Kaiama L. Glover's fascinating article "'The Francophone World Was Set Ablaze": Pan-African Intellectuals, European Interlocutors, and the Global Cold War', takes as a point of departure the extraordinary multi-continental peregrinations of Haitian essayist, novelist, militant socialist activist and erotic poet René Depestre. Born in Haiti, Depestre is not only a highly celebrated poet and artist but also a political activist who was connected to the international socialist movement and took active part in the French decolonization movements in France. Expelled from French territory, he subsequently lived in Prague, Cuba, Chile, Argentina and Brazil. Returning to France, he took part in the first Pan-African congress organized by the magazine *Présence Africaine* in September 1956. He was, however, ambivalent regarding the Négritude movement, started by Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire and Leon-Gontran Damas. He was against ethnic essentialism and was fascinated by creole life, which he situated in the world history of ideas. He never saw himself as an intellectual in exile but more as a nomad with multiple roots. His favourite metaphor was that of the 'Banyan' man, in

reference to the tree that is often evoked for its rhizome roots. At the moment of writing Depestre lives in France, aged 94, in a small village in the Aude.

Glover's article chronicles in details the 1955–1956 *Présence Africaine* 'Debate on National Poetry' in which Depestre was involved. This debate exemplifies the networked literary polemics and conversations that Afro-intellectuals brought into the very heart of the metropolises of Europe: The declarations they made and the conclusions they drew were held up to the scrutiny of multiple, and at times antagonistic publics. The article offers a close look at the intellectual and political underpinnings of this fraught exchange between celebrated Martinican poet-statesman Césaire and then-militant socialist Haitian poet Depestre as a means of understanding the ways in which twentieth-century intellectual and artistic movements in Europe, centred in Paris in particular, presented real challenges to prominent figures in the colonial and immediate postcolonial francophone world. Depestre's uncomfortable positioning reflects the larger quandary facing Afro-diasporic intellectuals and artists called on to navigate identities that reflected their political commitments and the expectations of their white allies, on the one hand, and their racial identification on the other.

Depestre's contribution to the notion of a transnational Black movement is followed by Ana C. Mendes and Julian Wacker's timely contribution 'The Louvre going *APESHIT*: Audiovisual Re-curation and Intellectual Labour in The Carters' Afrosurrealist Music Video', which offers a multimedia reading of the widely debated and praised 2018 music video *APESHIT* by the duo The Carters (Beyoncé and Jay-Z). The authors reading of *APESHIT* as an Afrosurrealist artistic intervention in Western museum spaces and practices places this work in a larger picture of contemporary Black resistance against racial epistemic injustice, a hegemonic politics of space, and artistic appreciation. Embedded within a wider 'decolonise the museum' movement, the role of the creators/performers Beyoncé and Jay-Z is interpreted as embracing the role of the public intellectual-activist and intervening in what has been the remit of the Western, white, liberal intellectual for centuries, by integrating a political act of resistance against the enduring coloniality of Blackness in the European museum and elsewhere in the public sphere. The article's argument is threefold: (1) the aesthetics of the *APESHIT* music video builds on and contributes to the Afrosurrealist artistic tradition, engaging with contemporary Blackness via the strange and absurd; (2) the music video itself creates performance art that intervenes in and extends beyond the Louvre and audiovisually re-curates its exhibitions and (3) the Carters can be seen as celebrity 'critical organic catalysts' whose Afrosurrealist intervention targeted at the colonial legacies of museums activates a critical relationship with these museum spaces traditionally constructed as White spaces.⁴⁵

Adriano José Habed's article 'The Author, the Text, and the (Post)Critic: Notes on the Encounter Between Postcritique and Postcolonial Criticism' brings the discussion back to the notion of the intellectual as a critic often invested with a negative worldview. The focus of the article, and central to special issue generally, is on how the figure of the intellectual might be reconfigured in a time when critique is running out of steam, or losing its appeal and radical potential. The intervention proposes a corrected view of critical labour as part of everyday, local practices, as highlighted above, or dismissed in favour of new analytical frameworks that seriously consider the agency of human (as well as non-human) actors and networks. This new perspective is often referred to as

‘postcritique’, a proposal put by Rita Felski for a hermeneutic strategy that aims to overcome the limits of critique, paying attention to different forms of materiality and to local agents as compared with postcolonial critique. This article engages with a sophisticated confrontation between postcritical and postcolonial approaches, unravelling both the productive exchanges and the frictions between them. In order to account for the frameworks or contexts in which cultural objects are produced without falling into some of the pitfalls of critique that postcritique aims to counter, the article suggests the author be seen as a bridge between the individual and the collective, as Said suggests. The article closes with an analysis of a several (critical and postcritical) readings of J. M. Coetzee’s *The Childhood of Jesus* to provide an example of how authorship can enter the interpretive scene through the figure of ‘late style’.

In the closing article, ‘Decoding the Cybaltern Cybercolonialism and Postcolonial Intellectuals in the Digital Age’, Pinar Tuzcu brings us to a new territory of digital materiality by focusing on the invisible power that now structures the contemporary social, political and economic infrastructure of our everyday lives. It looks at how the modes of knowledge production in the digital age construct new colonial relations. Tuzcu argues that these *cybercolonial* hierarchies are defined by a new elite: an artificial intelligentsia that gives rise to new epistemic disparities under the heading of cybercolonialism, which redefines the role of postcolonial intellectuals within an algorithmic culture. Considered to be neutral and objective, algorithms instead present very insidious forms of bias and discrimination. Despite its origin in the Arabic-Islamic Renaissance (800–1200), the mathematical procedure of automated calculation that is known as the algorithm is today dominated by white male computer developers who control the high-tech industries of the Western world. Algorithms reproduce structures of oppression and discrimination by privileging certain communities and individuals above others, but also by reinforcing the ‘othering structures’ such as those linked to border regimes and securitization practices.

Analysing the 2018 data scandal concerning Cambridge Analytica, the article shows how the power held by this artificial intelligentsia is encoded within a largely inaccessible field of computing, producing and manipulating information that looks rhetorically neutral but is artificial in nature. The article demonstrates that this kind of knowledge production deepens the geopolitical hierarchies between the Global North and South as it brings new mechanisms for silencing the *cybaltern*. The *cybaltern* refers to a group of people whose voices are muted and rendered unheard, paradoxically despite and because of the digital tools available to them. With this in mind, postcolonial intellectuals are given the task of decoding the discursive gaps and traps that (re)produce a condition of cybalternity under conditions of cybercolonialism.

To conclude, Rosi Braidotti’s ‘Postface’ offers an excellent platform to bring together the various intellectual engagements while pointing towards new directions and areas of study around the notion of the postcolonial intellectual that also engage with posthuman knowledge, environmental challenges and the ethics of technology. Braidotti points not only to the long intellectual lineage of white men personifying the spirit of the nation, from Voltaire to Foucault, but also to the more recent ‘rhetoric of the lament’ that sees contemporary critics and thinkers, from Bruno Latour to Slavoy Zizek, embroiled in a politics of self-pity and self-glorification, which is marked by intense negativity. Often disguised as a discourse on civilizational decline, environmental extinction or

epidemiological crisis, the tone that dominates is that of left-wing melancholia or right-wing catastrophism mixed with doses of the apocalyptic.

Braidotti clearly positions a need for more postcolonial critique and race and critical theory to counter this nihilism and these self-indulgent postures, to take instead a robust and ethically affirmative mode: no more Eurocentric white male idols, but as this volume proposes, a multitude of alternative ways of thinking and engaging with our contemporary world, ways that are shared and humble, at a time when what is needed is not grandiose theorizing but collective action and solidarity across borders, setting up a new agenda. Postcolonial intellectuals caught among these changes are best positioned to face up to these contemporary challenges as they are ‘practical thinkers, devoted to social justice and connected to the real world’. This underlines the urgency of this special issue, which, as Braidotti puts it, aims to press for the role and function of ‘postcolonial critical thinkers in the contemporary, technologically linked, yet socially fractured world’.

By favouring an affirmative approach, Braidotti shows how different cartographies of power and action need to be delineated or recognized in this political time of collective mobilizations that bring millions of women, LBGTQ+ and Black Lives Matter supporters onto the streets.

The loss of power of the intellectuals as privileged class, however, also allows for a more democratic deployment ... Intellectuals’ interventions, knowledge production and idea-sharing today are a posthumanist, and post-anthropocentric endeavour, always technologically mediated. As such, they are neither the responsibility of an exclusive cast of a selected few *cognoscenti*, nor the prerogative of – often self-appointed – full-time critical thinkers.

We have to recognize that intellectual labour covers a much wider spectrum of possible modes of being intellectual. In times of deep crisis and accelerating emergencies, there is no time to agonize, but as Braidotti summons us, we must organize to make affirmative futures possible.

Conclusions

The richness and diversity of the different contributions are testimony to the complexity and contested nature of the notion, role and function of the postcolonial intellectual. In this special issue, the postcolonial intellectual is understood not as a normative figure but as a commitment, both individual and collective, to social change that can be articulated through different kind of publics, and expressed through different media forms and artistic practices.

Whereas Sylvia Pankhurst and René Depestre might fall into more traditional notions of the European postcolonial intellectual, operating against colonialism, nationalism and the danger of essentialism and identity politics, the work of Beyoncé – or the Carters with the video APESHIT as an Afrosurrealist intervention in Western museum spaces – brings us to the contemporary realm of the culture industry and demonstrates how resistance can be successfully and commercially articulated and mobilized from within existing power structures. The Carters as societal ‘influencers’, and therefore, as a new generation of public intellectuals, resonate with the debates on the intellectual as critic, and their role within postcritique. Should we not move beyond the ossified paradigms of theory and

critique, rethinking the figure of the author as creating a bridge between the individual and the collective, as promoted by Said, as well in his Late Style? And here of course the figure of Stuart Hall comes back resoundingly as someone who has managed to criss-cross all these different fields, definitions and practices of the intellectual beyond the limits of theory, discipline, time and media, markets and publics. To study the conjuncture of our time is the predicament of every intellectual and, as the various contributions in this special issue have tried to demonstrate, the figure of the intellectual and of intellectual commitment cannot be seen as unilateral and univocal but rather must be understood through intensities, transversal engagements and social mobilization, both individual and collective. Also, as the last article by Pinar Tuzcu argues, these new territories of intellectual engagement might not always be easy to locate or be clearly materially embedded. New and emerging forms of artificial intelligentsia, with the implied biases of algorithmic culture and new encoded forms of discrimination and marginalization, require a constant updating and rethinking of where the boundaries between the human and the posthuman reside, as Braidotti highlights, pushing further our categorization, classification and definition of what postcolonial intellectual engagement actually means and requires in the context of our contemporary predicament.

In this light, this special issue has chosen to focus on critics, writers, artists and activists in the broadest sense, also offering specific interventions in relation to figures and concepts that are not usually covered by the traditional notion of the ‘intellectual’. They may be journalists, poets, musicians, performers or computer programmers who, because of their gender, profession or alternative audiences do not qualify as either ‘organic’ or ‘traditional’, to follow Gramsci’s distinction, but may involve both standpoints, that is as both part of everyday professional life that yet may have a great impact in the arena of the postcolonial. Through their intellectual engagement – be it art, criticism or (digital) activism – transformations are mobilized that contribute to the redefinition of the public sphere from a postcolonial perspective.

As Arjun Appadurai has recently stated, it is essential to construct new archives for the narratives of migrants and postcolonial intellectuals in Europe in order to loosen the strictures of citizenship and nation-building presently asphyxiating Europe. This is highly relevant in a (Western European) society where conceptions of a neutral public sphere and civic institutions are challenged by (subdued or denied) ethnocentrism, rising populism and transnational opinion networks and new media.

Notes

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7. Historically, manipulating journalists was a primary strategy. Now, social-media platforms have given voice to new influencers and expanded the range of targets. We see authentic members of online communities have become active contributors in disinformation campaigns, co-creating frames and narratives. One-way messages from deliberate actors would be relatively easy to identify and defuse. Recognizing the role of unwitting crowds is a persistent challenge for researchers and platform designers. So is deciding how to respond. See <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-02235>.
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12. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p xvi.
13. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p 52.
14. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, pp 85–102.
15. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p xvii.
16. Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, 'Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze', in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, Donald F Bouchard (ed), Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977, pp. 202–217, p 206.
17. Foucault and Deleuze, 'Intellectuals and Power', p 215.
18. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp 271–313, p 279.
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21. Engin Isin, 'Preface. Postcolonial Intellectuals. Universal, Specific or Transversal?', in *Postcolonial Intellectuals in Europe. Critics, Artists, Movements and their Publics*, Sandra Ponzanesi and Adriano José Habed (eds), London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2018, pp xi–xiv, xiii.
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