

Reflections XIX · XX

Reflexiones desde la educación y las artes en la era COVID-19 |
Reflexões da Educação e das Artes na Era da COVID-19 | Reflections
from Education and the Arts in the COVID-19 Era

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Abstract:

Dipti Desai developed *Reflection XIX*. Desai is a Professor of Art and Art Education and she is a reference in the field of art education in activist contexts. She is also Director of Art +Education Programs, Department of Art and Art Professions, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, New York University. *Reflection XX* is developed by Naisha B. Solomon and Amanda Charnley, graduate students in the Art, Education, and Community Practice program in the Department of Art and Art Professions, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, New York University.

Keywords: COVID-19. Artes. USA. Symbol. Diversity. Mixtape

Resumen:

Dipti Desai firma la *Reflexión XIX*. Desai es profesora de arte y educación artística de referencia en el ámbito educativo artístico en contextos activistas, directora del Programa Arte+Educación en el departamento de Arte y Profesiones Artísticas, de la Steinhardt School de Cultura, Educación y Humanidades, Universidad de Nueva York. La *Reflexión XX* está desarrollada por Naisha B. Solomon y Amanda Charnley, estudiantes de posgrado del programa de Arte, Educación y Práctica Comunitaria del Departamento de Arte y Profesiones Artísticas de la Escuela de Cultura, Educación y Desarrollo Humano, Universidad de Nueva York.

Palabras claves: COVID-19. Artes. EEUU. Símbolo. Diversidad. Mixtape.

Resumo:

Dipti Desai assina a *Reflexão XIX*. Desai é professora de arte e educação artística de referência no campo da educação artística em contextos ativistas, diretora do Programa Arte+Educação no Departamento de Artes e Profissões Artísticas da Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Humanities, New York University. *Reflexão XX* é desenvolvido por Naisha B. Solomon e Amanda Charney, estudantes de pós-graduação do programa Arte, Educação e Prática Comunitária do Departamento de Artes e Profissões Artísticas da Escola de Cultura, Educação e Desenvolvimento Humano da New York University.

Palavras-chave: COVID-19. Artes. USA. Símbolo. Diversidade. Mixtape.

Reflection XIX (Reflection on COVID-19 Rainbows)

In late March, after the stay at home order was announced by Governor Cuomo, rainbows and rainbow colors on apartment windows increasingly dotted our visual landscape in New York City. Each day on my walks, I see new rainbows emerge on windows in my building complex made by children and adults. The rainbow and the rainbow colors are a symbol of hope amid the coronavirus pandemic. I recently learnt that it was first seen in Italy and now is a global visual culture image that connects people across the globe. Seeing the hand drawn or paper cut out rainbows provides a sense of community as we are all in this lockdown together. Another image that I see often is the text based, Thank You and Smile that remind us to seek pleasure during this time of anxiety and uncertainty, as well as never allowing us to forget the tremendous work healthcare and other essential workers, such as those who delivery food, run our public transportation systems, and work in grocery stores do each day for us, during this pandemic.

Looking at these simple visual gesture does provide me with solace and relief tinged with joy that our sense of community has not been totally eroded in the United States. Seeing these rainbows of hope also connects to the issue of diversity as the rainbow is a symbol that celebrates sexual diversity, becoming a symbol of the LGBTQ movement in the 1970s that incorporated the colors of the rainbow on their flag. I am also reminded that Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa coined the term "rainbow nation" to describe the diversity among its population when apartheid was dismantled, signalling a new beginning for the country. In spite of these symbols of hope and solidarity, I am troubled by the divisions and hatred against the "other" (non-white) that has increased under President Trump. The racialization of the coronavirus by Trump calling it a "Chinese disease" is particularly felt by the Asian American community and the number of racist attacks against Asian Americans has increased tremendously since the coronavirus epidemic landed on our shores. The coronavirus has also disproportionately affected and killed African-American, Indigeneous people and Latinx people in comparison to the whites. My thoughts lead me to think about how the hopeful symbol of the rainbow can be transformed to become a symbol of social action that works to challenge racism and social class inequalities in our country and world, which COVID-19 has made glaringly visible everyday in our newspapers and media. And, how do we challenge the images of blatant racist signs held by white supremacy protesting the COVID lockdown across our country.



COVID Rainbows, 2020. Photo credit Dipti Desai

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Reflection XIX (Sounds of Community Care)

The COVID-19 Community Care Mixtape is a compilation and pedagogical listening experience that we created as a way of reflecting, coping, and imagining what creative activism feels and sounds like in this moment of perpetual uncertainty caused by the COVID pandemic. Complete with original album artwork and liner notes, our project explores music's age-old capacity for healing and resistance, and has been created for you, the listener, as an act of care during this challenging time. As we witness the devastating and disproportionate effects tied to race/ethnicity and social class across our communities in the United States, we are forced to ask ourselves; how can we holistically tend to the current health crisis without examining its deeper, colonial wounds? How can we decolonize practices of care and emphasize the need for care as shared ethos of relating, contrary to the ways in which care and its labor have been gendered, racialized, and made invisible by the colonial state? These are some of the central questions that guided our thinking about this project. The title of this project pays tribute to the original art of mixtaping pioneered by New York City hip-hop DJs, beginning in the 1970s. A mixtape was traditionally a homemade compilation recorded onto a cassette tape. As the format grew in popularity among musicians and music fans, mixtapes were often crafted not only for promotional purposes, but also as gifts between friends and with a painstaking attention to detail, in order to impart a personal message or to communicate a specific theme or narrative. The art of mixtaping is the art of collecting and arranging, of deliberately fragmenting to create new forms, or working with the fragments left of destruction and translating sound from broken pieces. We draw inspiration not only from the mixtape model, but also from the art of deejaying as a whole and the musical strategies DJs employ, including archiving, remixing, sampling, organizing, and redistributing. We seek to examine the ways in which these strategies and music itself can perform decolonial functions. If coloniality is a hidden, exploitative, and often unquestioned logic permeating all aspects of our lives, we turn to decoloniality as a means of uncovering this logic and its resulting violence, affirming wholeness and humanity, and creating new worlds and ways of being.

We understand decolonial function in music as a range of possibilities, including how a song or composition creates a platform for devalued communities to be seen, heard and understood. This may take the form of a subversion of a traditional/ westernized style in song, such as Nina Simone's *Four Women* sung to the tune of the *Star Spangled Banner*. Song lyrics that address or represent the lived experiences of the oppressed also perform decolonial functions. For instance, C-Murder's depiction of gang affiliation in New Orleans in the 1990's in his song *Down 4 my n's*, which represents the negative reality of gang warfare is however indicative of the conditions colonialism and systemic racism create for communities of color. C-Murder's *Down 4 my n's* was released in 1999 right after the end of the crack epidemic, and illustrated life in the Calliope Projects in New Orleans. One can argue that the poverty and violence there were the results of racist Federal housing policies. The lyrics of the song reflect the reality of that oppression.

The songs, sounds, and absence of sound that comprise the audio portion of the project have been collected and edited with the help of musicians, artists, educators, sound healers, and friends in our immediate communities. Many of us turn to music for solace and support throughout our lives, increasingly now in these COVID times. We have incorporated songs of healing and justice that resonate with us in this moment. Some of these songs thus have great personal significance, while others were chosen to fit the larger theme of the project. By drawing on songs and sounds that represent the effects of colonialism, we are able to cast the spotlight on music traditions and the musical forms that have endured violent colonial legacies. We seek to center artists of color and queer artists, among other marginalized identities in defiance of colonialism's methods of privileging white, male heteronormativity. We are incorporating a variety of genres, including spoken word, samba reggae, calypso, hip-hop, spirituals, ambient and binaural sounds, etc. Certain songs have been chosen for decolonial lyrical content on topics ranging from land reparations to anti-capitalism. We encourage listeners to utilize this material in a variety of ways, including as a meditative "sound bath" experience or the soundtrack for a "listening party," and to explore the artists on this compilation in greater detail.

Generations of mutual aid and cooperative work led by communities of color, including the more recent healing justice movement have made our present-day community care efforts possible, of which this project is a small gesture of solidarity and care. The project will live as a digital sound sanctuary (a place where listeners can find relief and reinvigoration) on Soundcloud, a streaming platform traditionally used by independent and emerging artists, producers, DJs, etc. A limited number of physical copies of the mixtape will be made available, upon request. We hope this project by two women from very different social, economic and ethnic backgrounds (Naisha is Afro/ Indo Trinidadian, Amanda is mixed) fosters a sense of solidarity, and creates the opportunity for all of us to learn to listen to each other as an act of deep caring and social justice.



The COVID Community Care Mixtape, 2020. Photo credits: Amanda Charnley and Naisha B. Solomon

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