Paloma Polo

THE RETURN OF THE GAZE: THE POLITICAL TASK OF NARRATION

18.10.2025 – 01.03.2026

This exhibition is the first retrospective of Paloma Polo (Madrid, 1983). It presents a selection of twelve projects created between 2010 and the present day, alongside the previously unseen film *Wrinkled Minds*. Polo's work approaches very specific historical events, accounts that have formed the foundations of hegemony, as well as others discarded or silenced.

Paloma Polo, film still from *Wrinkled Minds*, 2025

THE RETURN OF THE GAZE: THE POLITICAL TASK OF NARRATION. PALOMA POLO

Mabel Tapia

"The telling is all we have," said Ursula K. Le Guin through one of the characters in her novel *The Telling*. Far from treating history as an immutable, definitive and unambiguous construct that repeats itself *ad infinitum*—as is sometimes claimed—the telling inscribes what is narrated within a political-affective transformation in which past, present, and future unfold simultaneously and incessantly in the very act of telling. Which are our stories? Which stories are missing? How is absence narrated? What are the narratives of resistance and emancipatory struggles? What happens to history when it is not told, or when it is rendered ideologically invisible or suppressed? What world-system do narratives lock us into—or, conversely, what worlds do they open us to? These questions underlie and are updated in all acts of telling, as they in turn transform the narratives we inherit. This is why the task of narrating is defined as highly political.

Paloma Polo's projects (Madrid, 1983) are steeped in the questions outlined above, and in a non-negotiable confrontation with what is defined as History. This challenge occurs in the act of narration. Engaging in the task of narrating entails taking on the responsibility of disturbing History, for leaving it undisturbed would be to surrender. Through long research processes, Paloma Polo approaches precise historical events, narratives that have been part of the hegemonic colonial-patriarchal foundations of our memory, as well as others that have been discarded or silenced.

However, her proposals do not interrogate the inherited dominant history from a binary perspective; rather, they seek to intervene in it and, of course, in the tools with which it is constructed and through which it operates. This is why it is not by accident that, together with language, the image occupies a central place in her works—that is, the image is what structures, carries, and produces the telling. Image and language are approached, particularly in Polo's most recent projects, as two of the most powerful technologies mobilized by the West. Image has become the paradigm for the fabrication of imaginaries that

produce mirages of veracity—a kind of "evidence of the here and now" that simultaneously reveals and conceals, rooted in underlying layers of enduring latency. Reappropriating this technology in all its malleability, testing its status, and engaging with it to produce an experience, in many senses involves (re)assuming "the master's tools," either to force or to transform conditions. In Paloma Polo's works, the image—fixed or in motion; produced, found or resignified——is challenged and tensioned to generate material and sensorial displacements. In confronting the images, one cannot remain undisturbed, but must also not surrender—and, above all, never leave them undisturbed either.

In this sense, the artist pushes us to confront a rift between what was and what could have been, between what we know and what we don't, between what we believe we know and what we don't know. Thus, forcing the image entails moving it to the unexpected, which also requires us—as spectators and accomplices—to shift our far from harmless ways of seeing. In Paloma Polo's work, returning the gaze involves, first and foremost, the movement that allows for disarticulating the objectification that the act of gazing may embody, and thereby partially reversing the power relations that inevitably bear upon the object of the gaze.

In the famous essay *"Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"*, written in 1973 and published two years later, the British film theorist Laura Mulvey analyzes how Hollywood cinema constructs and reproduces the patriarchal unconscious. For Mulvey, the heterosexual active-passive division of capitalist work dominates narrative structures in this form of cinema, and even constitutes a means of perpetuating them, naturalizing conditions of human perception that are far from natural. In an interplay where the camera's gaze is devised as a male projective gaze, the object of desire—or of the gaze—is predetermined.

> "The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact, so that they could be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*."

The form of cinema that the theorist analyzes can only be dismantled from within its own operating structures:

> "...cinematic codes create a gaze, a world and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire. It is these cinematic codes and their relationship to formative external structures that must be broken down before mainstream film and the pleasure it provides can be challenged. To begin with (as an ending), the voyeuristic-scopophilic look that is a crucial part of traditional filmic pleasure can itself be broken down."

A decade earlier, and in a different context, the writer and filmmaker Ousmane Sembène also critiqued the power dynamics underlying the act of filming/looking, in his historic confrontation with the French filmmaker and anthropologist Jean Rouch in 1965, when he accused him: "You look at us as if we were insects". This confrontation of a visibly anthropocentric stance is not only an accusation against Rouch but also against the entire structure of the scientific discipline he represented, and it continues to weigh decisively on both humans and non-humans today. By contrast, in Paloma Polo's work, returning the gaze is not merely about reversing the system established in the *relationship between*; rather, she accurately describes a constant search for images that do not objectify—images which, far from fixing or being fixed, challenge the very structures that produce them.

Returning the gaze also means returning, again and again, to the places and stories, or to the subjects that have inhabited us—inhabit us—even unknowingly, through their absences or oppressed presences. In this way, returning the gaze involves dislocating the fallacy of linear temporalities and, perhaps, enacting a rupture that can lead to potentialities yet to be imagined. Intervening in History aims to reconfigure our present and future collective conditions. This appears to be the driving force behind each of Paloma Polo's works, operating under the persistent concern with both present and historical structures of power, the construction of narratives, and the forms of colonization of knowledge and bodies.

A fundamental question underlying the task of narration has not been addressed yet, and it is made explicit in the film *Unrest* (2015) created by Polo in APECO, the Aurora Pacific Economic Zone and Freeport, in the region of Casiguran, Aurora province, Philippines. This work bears witness to the devastation caused by extractivist practices and the territorial plundering inherent in capitalist society, as well as to the forms of organization and the projection of resistance and emancipation. At the beginning of the film, against a black screen, we hear a person speaking in their own language: "Before we start, I hope you don't mind if I ask a question. What side are you on?" The person asking the question is an inhabitant of the region, and this direct, simple question explicitly compels both the artist and us, as spectators, to take position. Which side are we on? Which side are we on when narrating? Narrating invariably implies taking sides. The research Paloma Polo undertakes—through projects that never seek consensus—dives into the structural dismantling of everything that the capitalist system entails in terms of the destruction of the Other, and of something other, and dives as well into the generation, understanding, and multiplication of other forms of life.

The exhibition *"The Return of the Gaze: The Political Task of Narration"* proposes opening a sensitive-reflective constellation that articulates four nodes, or nuclei, through projects presented non-chronologically. The artist herself brings together an ensemble of her production within these nodes, in bodies that connect groups of works. Together they compose a larger, delicate, and complex fabric; a fabric in which the relationships between structural frameworks of social organization and specific historic contexts are made tangible.

The opening work in the exhibition, *A Fleeting Moment of Dissidence Becomes Fossilised and Lifeless After the Moment has Passed* (2015), presents photographs of forty plants with their local names—provided by Naty Merindo, an Agta healer residing on the San Ildefonso peninsula of Casiguran, Philippines—and their scientific names, supplied by Filipino botanist Ulysses Ferreras. Two epistemes, or cosmogonies stand in confrontation, where power relations marked by deep inequities continue to operate. The title of this series of photographs could not be more evocative. It is drawn from a passage in the article "What Can Activist Scholars Learn from Rumi?" written by Indian professor, writer, and activist Radha D'Souza for the magazine *Philosophy East and West* in 2014. Here, the phrase "a fleeting moment of dissidence becomes fossilized and lifeless after the moment has passed" captures the danger that any binary opposition or act of contestation may ultimately reproduce what it seeks to contest.

The first nucleus of the exhibition, where this piece is displayed, situates us directly in the Filipino context, as it is presented around the film *The Soil of Revolution* (2019) and also includes four works created in 2015: *A Fleeting Moment of Dissidence Becomes Fossilised and Lifeless After the Moment has Passed, What is Thought in the Thought of People,* and *Unrest*. Provoked by the question of which social conditions foster political change, Polo undertakes in *The Soil of Revolution* a research project that immerses her in the heart of a Philippine guerrilla revolutionary group, the Bagong Hukbong Bayan—the New People's Army, in English. In this nucleus, the consequences of capitalism on forms of life and ancestral knowledge are confronted alongside resistance and emancipatory struggles in Philippine territory.

The second node encompasses the works *The Path of Totality* (2010), *Thrown Shadow* (2010), *On the Difficulties of Picturing the Event* (2011), *Simultaneity is Not an Invariable Concept* (2012), and *Action at Distance* (2012). Distinct materialities—such as collage, film, and ambrotypes—embody a reflection on scientific investigations, particularly those linked to studies of solar eclipses and the conditions of possibility they entail: devices, tools, expeditions, and so on. Throughout the course of the exhibition, this body of work unfolds as the matrix of Polo's practice. These are pieces that are both foundational and indexical of the questions, methodologies, and interrogations the artist develops over the following ten years. The (re)presentation of Western scientific structures and tools—with their projections of neutrality and totalizing abstraction—is the central theme of this group of works.

The third group in the exhibition focuses on two works, *Dulcinea* (2022) and *Nubes y Plomo* (2020), which address stories

of militancy and struggle in the context of Francoism and the so-called Transition in Spain. Both works center on the lives and militancy of two members of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) from different generations: Dulcinea Bellido (16 April 1936 – 22 January 2001) and Julián Grimau (18 February 1911 – 20 April 1963). He was executed by the Franco regime, while she was a feminist leader with a vast base and extensive organizational work within the party, of whom barely any archival materials survive. Both works seem to establish a paradigmatic relationship between text and image. On the one hand, the production of images has not reached us: the film *Dulcinea* retraces the militant's biography through images recreated with actors and extras in historically contextualized sites, using photographs of each *mise-en-scène*. On the other hand, the *Nubes y Plomo* installation reproduces the images circulated, and manipulated by the Franco dictatorship.

Finally, the fourth nucleus—which closes the exhibition and constitutes a future field of investigation for the artist—is titled *"…Se jeter au fond du lac pour conserver sa vie"*[1] *[Like Throwing Yourself to the Bottom of the Lake to Save Your Life]* and includes the following projects: *The Unobserved Platform of Observation* (2024) and *Wrinkled Minds* (2025). The latter is an as-yet unreleased project, assembled on the occasion of this exhibition, and the Fulbright Scholarship at the Center for Global Indigenous Cultures and Environmental Justice, Syracuse University. It was produced within the framework of the "la Caixa" Foundation's Support for Creation'24: Production Program, with additional support from La Virreina Centre de la Imatge.

This new research project builds on the premise—which might seem counterintuitive in the light of inherited historical constructions—of examining the ways in which Indigenous thought, particularly from the Haudenosaunee Confederacy—which unites the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca and Tuscarora Nations—may have influenced the feminist ideas

[1] This sentence was taken from a quote by Kandiaronk, a political thinker and leader of the North American Indigenous Wendat Nation. The artist recovered it from the book *Dialogues ou Entretiens entre un Sauvage et le baron de Lahontan* (1704).

forged during the French Revolution. To further explore this hypothesis, the artist has spent a year as a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at Syracuse University, within the Center for Global Indigenous Cultures and Environmental Justice. Paloma Polo not only undertook a thorough search of primary sources comprising a specific bibliographic corpus, but also created spaces for dialogue and collaboration with Haudenosaunee men and women leaders. As a result of this work, and through a multimodal narrative construction, *Wrinkled Minds*, Paloma Polo's new film—partially shot in Haudenosaunee Confederacy territory—problematizes and challenges the writings by Jesuit missionaries in New France about Haudenosaunee life and culture. These texts were primary sources about their cosmogony.

From the outset, Paloma Polo's work has engaged in theoretical, sensorial, and material dimensions, challenging the epistemic constructs of modernity by proposing reconfigurations that activate genuine transformations. The processes and proposals she develops categorically reject any divisions between doing, thinking, and feeling. Consequently, each of her investigations takes shape through expanded spaces of conversation that she both receives and provokes, which in turn weave a fabric nourished by the multiple perspectives present across her diverse body of work. On the one hand, orality, but also the constant effort devoted to mobilizing heterogeneous sources: archival materials, essays, primary sources, and so on. On the other hand, her projects also unfold in the production of publications in various registers, which are an indispensable part of Polo's practice and would merit a reflection in their own right. At the same time, the artist generates a colossal amount of documentation that both nourishes and emerges from each research process. From a polyhedral perspective—far removed from linear, Euro-centered frameworks—these sources, publications and documents allow the modes of access, and interpretation to multiply again and again.

Thus, each work bears the mark of a collectivity and the promise of possible tellings to come, with all that this entails in both its aesthetic dimensions and its political commitment.

WITH THE PAST AHEAD, WE WALK THE PATHS AND DREAMS OF THE FUTURE

Irmgard Emmelhaniz

The multidisciplinary artist and researcher Paloma Polo has devoted her audiovisual and investigative work to exploring historical events and deconstructing narratives that uphold heteropatriarchal colonial hegemony. In 2012, she traveled to the Philippines for the first time, and moved there the following year. In 2015, she spent a month and a half at a guerrilla front south of the archipelago, where she shot her film *The Soil of Revolution* (2019). The Philippines, like Palestine, is a brutal laboratory for the production of disposable lives, framed within the so-called "war on terrorism". This territory is structured to serve the global market of natural resources, and operates as a strategic military platform for safeguarding United States hegemony in the Asia-Pacific. The Philippines also provides captive workforces to foreign countries. For example, it participates in the reconstruction of Iraq, and exports care workers to several Middle Eastern countries (Israel, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar) as well as to Europe, according to Swiss artist Ursula Biemann's research in her video *Remote Sensing* (2002), which examines the circulation of women from the Global South who provide care and sexual labor in Europe.

During her long stay in the Philippines, Paloma forged ties with activists and guerrilla fighters of the New People's Army (NPA in English, BHB in Filipino), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines. In 2015, she spent a month and a half with a military unit, trekking through a red zone of the tropical forest (the exact location cannot be disclosed for security reasons). The NPA was founded in 1968, in line with the messianic, teleological revolutionary temporality that emerges with armed struggle and is central to the political narratives of modernity. These narratives hit a crisis after the Nicaraguan revolution collapsed in 1990, followed by the downfall of Eastern European socialist regimes, the end of the Cold War and the triumph of global capitalism.

Paloma's journey recalls *Walking with the Comrades,* the memorable account by Arundhati Roy (for which she was declared an enemy of the Indian state), written after her stay in the Orissa hills, in the heart of India. There, she lived with groups of Maoist rebels whose communities were being displaced and massacred by extractivist ventures, because the State considered them a threat to security[2]. And the truth is, from a Western point of view, invoking these revolutionary liberation movements might seem nostalgic and outdated, as if their time had passed because the end of the Cold War gave rise to a new left, comprised of a plurality of social movements operating within the framework of democracy. This made the struggles immanent to political processes, destabilizing the armed movements while excluding the demands of millions of people around the world. Both Paloma and Arundhati discovered and show us that these guerrillas, as political subjects, remain relevant as agents of political transformation, particularly as figures of resistance against extractivism. Both confront us with the fact that viewing these Marxist-leaning revolutionary nationalist movements as mere atavisms from the days before globalization reflects a Western bias. Because these struggles, like all living decolonial struggles, are steadfast fights for land that have persisted for centuries. During the 20th century, they were influenced by Eurocentric Marxism and then were declared obsolete; however, they have not lost relevance. The problem is that they were no longer legible from the perspective of Western and urban political frameworks. This raises a key question for 21st-century forms of organization: how can practices of autonomy, resistance, and community-building be transferred to urban settings?

Throughout the 19th century, capitalism and nationalism are consolidated as the foundations of the State. Totalizing values of modernity and science are reinforced through disembodied theories rooted in human exceptionalism. The inner workings of the economy, of human relations, and of power are defined, while progress and modernity become inseparable from colonialism, destruction, and genocide, disseminating on a planetary scale one only way of inhabiting the world. The white man is erected as the center, above all other living systems on the

[2] Arundhati Roy, "India: Walking with the Comrades" *Outlook India*, March 22, 2010, available at: https://links.org.au/india-walking-comrades-arundhati-roy

planet, under a predatory logic of sustaining human life, generating chains of oppression and exploitation, as well as collective traumas transmitted from generation to generation. Add to this that, in the early 20th century, having inherited the ideas of Nietzsche and Freud, individuality and the ego are promoted over community and faith.

Today, the inheritance of modernity consists of abusive and predatory forms of interdependence to sustain human life on the planet. The notion of 'nature' as separate from humanity, and as something malleable, allowed modern man to occupy the land in ways that radically changed the planet, driving all of its living ecosystems to the verge of collapse. The science and machines that were meant to emancipate us have spawned our worst nightmares; today they are tools to wage the necessary war for the expansion of capitalism, making legal and illegal economies ever more precarious, impoverishing and exploiting autonomous dynamics, and accelerating financial, material, extractivist and gendered violence. This war can be summarized as an open war against life itself, reaching a degree of unimaginable perversity without precedent in the genocidal laboratory that is Palestine. Meanwhile, rentier elites settle comfortably into neocolonial dynamics, and social reproduction—mostly transferred to the digital sector—becomes fascist. In order to sustain capitalism, our imaginaries are being colonized by aspirationism and by very specific values linked to Silicon Valley: the fantasy prevails that anyone can build their own business, reach the summit and, if your basic needs are not met, it's your fault for not working hard enough or because you don't deserve it. Many people have been frustrated by this fantasy. And now that global masses have direct access to representation, online networks merge into political movements in ways that dissolve the difference between left and right, transforming politics into a disembodied mockery triggered by polarization and rage over the system's unfulfilled promises. In challenging modern forms of political organization, technopolitics blurs the figures of political representation anchored in defending the territory of labor rights, highlighting egos defined by identity markers (sex, gender, ethnic origin) as they wage battles for virtual visibility in a contest of victimization, which is one of technopolitics' preferred expressions.

So we are faced with the failure of liberal culture to generate real political and social change, and with a counterculture produced by hardcore white supremacists and misogynists—men who blame their precarious work situation and extreme alienation not on the rights they have lost due to technofeudalism, but rather on feminism, which they perceive as the cause of their ruin. In this context, *incels* congregate around an idyllic past that they wish to reinstate, where women and minorities do not undermine their authority or privileges[3].

Neofascisms embedded in social reproduction have not only destroyed the social and political domains of the world over the past fifteen years; they have also transferred the reproduction, production, and bureaucratic structures that sustain life to platforms and social media. Personal relationships are experienced through extreme alienation, transactional attitudes, or consumerism. While capitalism, in its ruthless war against life, expropriates and destroys, epidemics of depression and anxiety continue to spread throughout the planet. In this context, the only possible image of emancipation appears to be the (monetized) visibility of those claiming to be victims of the system. Thus, technical mediation colonizes all spheres of life and, together with the environmental crisis, generates a climate of instability and crisis on every front.

The destruction of the political imaginary and field resulting from the rise of neofascisms confronts us with the necessity of a radical transformation in political practices and vocabularies, which requires reinventing language, figures of emancipation, and forms of political organization. Faced with a senile and depressed West, and lacking horizons of emancipation, the potential figure of resistance to the capitalist system is blurred in Fern, the main character of *Nomadland* by Chloé Zhao (2022). This middle-aged woman, unable to maintain a home with her job, is forced to become a nomad, joining a ruminant-like tribe that crosses the United States in caravans, seeking temporary work in bars, restaurants, or a gigantic Amazon warehouse in Nevada. Representing the living and working conditions of

[3] Project *Una, Leah, Rhianna & Trump* (Barcelona: Descontrol Editorial, 2020)

many who experience the vanishing of their American dream, the figure of the worker as a political agent begins to wither as Fern surrenders, finding serenity, even joy and purpose, in her harsh nomadic life—a condition she attributes not to systemic forces, but to her own idiosyncrasy and personal story. The classical figure of the worker is also weakened (disorganized, precarious) in *The Forgotten Space* (2010) by Alan Sekula, who visits harbors that materialize global connectivity, encountering destitute farmhands in Holland, maquiladora workers in China who dream in English, and freight carriers and homeless people in California. Sekula makes the figures of these workers legible in the political arena of globalization—figures buried in containers shipping goods around the globe, fulfilling capital's dream of eliminating the working class. These people, however, belong to the disposable populations that endure unimaginable violence, on a scale equal to the planetary destruction caused by climate change.

In *The Soil of Revolution*, Paloma shows us images she filmed in the tropical forest while living with an armed unit of about thirty people, side by side with the 'K' or *Kasama* (comrades), and reveals how, beyond propaganda and ideology, what is essential in the struggle of these 'daughters of Mao' is neither the horizon of overthrowing the government to establish communism in the nation, nor the teachings of the *Little Red Book*. Actually, what is essential to the NPA's struggle are the imaginative practices of their animist worldview, which generate a specific world composed of reproductive relationships and autonomous practices of sustainment in the rural areas of the Philippines declared 'red zones', where they have chosen armed struggle. Oral tradition, theatre and pedagogy act as vital tools for generating imaginaries that organize and reproduce a social order focused on sustaining everyday life. NPA's struggle is based on three pillars: building the bases, which includes artistic expressions and conscientization through creative pedagogies; food sovereignty, which involves moving away from capitalist monoculture and from buying seeds from corporations that undermine it; and armed struggle. For security reasons, Paloma was unable to shoot images of the NPA interacting with civilians in the red zones. However, aside from performances and

education in the struggle, the NPA supports the creation of cooperative ventures within the communities, which considerably improves living conditions in the red zones, compared to those under government and corporate control.

In her film, Paloma stresses the importance of the Indigenous worldview in the prolonged Philippine guerrilla which, as in the Zapatista case, puts care and reproductive work at the center of the movement: the practice of commoning that takes place in the 'construction of bases' and in food sovereignty. Commoning, along with the defense of territory and life, are the contemporary cornerstones of resistance to capitalism.

Before the first five minutes of *The Soil of Revolution* have passed, we witness an unexpected clash with the enemy. In response, the unit disperses and later reconvenes for a self-criticism session led by the woman in command, where they conclude that the enemy's movements can never be predicted. This sort of sessions, together with educational discussions and drills, are part of the training of the armed units. They say that since 1990, and due to the government's assaults to enable the entry of mining companies or to defend those already operating, they have had to evacuate the forest five times. It is clear that what is at stake is the life of communities and their capacity to reproduce life; their goal, as with the Zapatistas, is to defend their territory in order to sustain communal forms of life grounded in reciprocity and self-sufficiency.

In other words, *The Soil of Revolution* illustrates how the Philippine guerrilla generates forms of subjectivity that serve as active forces of conscientization and change, oriented toward the defense of territory. For the movement, poems, songs, stories, the celebration of battles, the sharing of experiences, and honoring the dead are essential functions and vital practices that support the struggle and shape everyday life among militants[4]. In this sense, Paloma introduces us to a world where revolutionary social experience serves the purpose of realizing and expanding the movement, in a way comparable to Zapatismo in Chiapas. Active since 1994 and as a remnant of mid-20th-cen-

[4] Neferti X.M. Tadiar, *Things Fall Away:- Philippine Historical Experience and The Making of Globalization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009)

tury guerrillas, for Zapatistas it is essential to turn their back on the State and, through the *caracoles*—their councils conceived as atoms of self-governing organization—ground their form of government in creating community and defending their territory. The Zapatistas, along with other movements such as the NPA, Hamas or the Naxalites of India, are a clear threat to the technofeudalist elite, which seeks to seize all the earth's minerals in order to perpetuate its domination of digital platforms.

We might think of Paloma as an intellectual of contemporary political struggles, with art and academia as interdisciplinary fields of opportunity through which she carries out and anchors her experimental investigations. She lived in the Philippines for a full three years, until she was expelled; yet in the film she is clearly recognized as a comrade (her guerrilla name *is Ka Rhea*). Moreover, she was taken seriously and she truly committed to the struggle of the NPA. From her position of privilege as a white European woman, she was able to transmit images that no Filipino could have filmed, for obvious reasons. Yet the price of these images was her expulsion from the country. It is worth noting that many of the *Kasama* with whom she lived were killed—martyred in the struggle during those years. The way she films—both everyday life and the NPA struggle—could be described as immersive. Her gaze is that of a *Kasama*, attentive to her comrades and learning the lessons of the resistance. Her images transport the viewer, plunging us into the mountains of the Philippine forest.

To grasp the complexity, urgency, and relevance of the discursive space that Paloma constructs in *The Soil of Revolution*, we might compare it to that of Diego Enrique Osorno in *The Mountain* (2024). In this documentary, Osorno travels with representatives of the Zapatista movement on their journey by boat from Mexico to Europe during the pandemic. The Zapatistas invited the reporter, who had artistic ambitions, to participate in the voyage—essentially a staged performance likely inspired by the flotillas traveling to Gaza since 2005 in their attempts to break the Israeli siege of the Strip. The journey in *The Mountain* can be compared to the flotillas in that it seeks to generate media events to highlight the movement, under the premise that the Zapatistas will travel in the opposite direction of the colonizers—not to colonize, but to share their anticapitalist and decolonial perspective in Europe. During the trip, the Zapatistas tell Osorno about their dreams and the philosophy underlying their movement's utopia for self-government and the *caracoles*. The reporter positions himself—and thereby the spectator—as an observer, transmitting content that will be consumed like any other on digital platforms. In so doing, he deprives the Zapatista journey of its epistemic power, since Osorno reproduces the colonial construction of a neutral or documentary approach to political subjects.

On the other hand, beyond Paloma's unquestionable and long-standing work and political commitment with the NPA, the main strategy of her artistic endeavor is an ethics of "thinking with the people." This approach does not stem from a need to inform or represent, but from a commitment rooted in personal relationships—clearly positioned against the artistic and cultural parachuting practices introduced by globalization. In this sense, Paloma's work shares concerns and genealogies with the academic work of the Mexican researcher Mariana Mora Bayo, who focuses on the Zapatista movement and other movements in Guerrero for the defense of territory, as well as with *Images* [*and Talking Back to Them*] (2023), the multimedia installation by the Norwegian artist Sara Eliassen. Eliassen's work, based on a decade of travels, interviews, and the close relationships she built with activists, journalists, intellectuals, and artists in Mexico, seeks to unravel "the image of the resistance" in contemporary Mexico[5]. Neither Sara nor Paloma take on the task of deconstructing a neutral and unique perspective for documenting the political processes of others, and thus to generate information and an artistic object. On the contrary, they consciously avoid parachuting and the act of "worlding" with the subjects in their images. Their images, therefore, are windows or interfaces for the creation of collective content that transcends mere representational visibility or the status of a document of images. Both artists demonstrate that these images are the re-

[5] Irmgard Emmelhainz, "Mediation and Navigation in Times of Uncertain Truths," *Artishock*, November 2024, https://artishockrevista.com/2024/11/06/mediacion-y-navegacion-en-tiempos-de-verdades-inciertas/

sult of long-standing political commitment, camaraderie, and friendship—commitments that at times have placed the lives of all involved in danger. This is what I call the *relational image* or *gaze*.

Paloma doesn't offer us *an image of the NPA*, but rather the image of relationships being formed with NPA members, as they, in turn, weave relationships to sustain a movement beyond ideology. The cinematic relationality of Paloma's gaze is central to her work, just as relationships are for self-organization of the Filipino movement against expropriation, exploitation, and land grabbing through Special Economic Zones, military bases, agribusiness, the sex and entertainment industries, and financial speculation—structures that result in the displacement, impoverishment, and destruction of millions of people worldwide. For the movement, and from the perspective of sustainability, the agrarian question is fundamental. Paloma presents the characters as artisans of an alternate world building it actively by weaving relationships in everyday life and focusing on the reproduction of the camp—a process intimately connected to educational projects and transformative consciousness-raising. NPA members belong to a community that preserves memories of a collective life which is experienced as sustainable, and based on a connection with the earth. These memories are used as living knowledge for improving the micro-community's present and future circumstances.

In 2015, Paloma films *Unrest*, the counterpoint to *The Soil of Revolution* (a defended red zone), where she takes on the Aurora Pacific Economic Zone and Free Port (APECO) in the Casiguran region of Aurora province in the Philippines, as case studies. These can be understood as colonized zones, or areas dominated by capital where there is a predomination of military bases, corporations, agribusinesses, sex and entertainment industries, financial speculation ventures that produce the forced displacement, enslavement, and impoverishment of Indigenous populations. That is to say, in line with Filipino-U.S. scholar Neferti X.M. Tadiar, the system is designed to produce "valued life" as a concrete social ideal, with power and wealth built on territorial predation exemplified by the Aurora Pacific Zone or Free Port (APECO). These ventures generate wealth through

dispossession, theft, destruction, and consumption, rendering lives expendable when deemed redundant or disposable by the system. In this war, the foundations of racial and gender-sex hierarchies are reinstated as codes for organizing and dividing life and life cycles between what is considered valuable and what is deemed disposable or waste. This means that life is no longer exploited as 'working time,' as under post-Fordism; it now includes assaults on the social reproduction of disposable populations, marked by global structures of racism and heterosexism, which either erase them or diminish their capacities to sustain themselves.[6]

From this perspective, it becomes much clearer and significant that the anti-systemic struggles of the defended zones are sustained by Indigenous political thought and the community's care practices. It also highlights the need for those of us who are Westernized to decolonize from linear histories that endorse Marxism and render these struggles invisible within the political horizon, dismissing them as obsolete.

The Unobserved Platform of Observation (2024), inspired by the work of Barbara Alice Mann, is a set of images generated by artificial intelligence where Paloma undertakes the task of revealing the foundational erasure of coloniality. As in *The Soil of Revolution,* she highlights the continued relevance of armed struggle, which is rendered invisible and persecuted as a container of anticapitalist policies. In *The Unobserved Platform* Paloma reveals how the violent infrastructure underlying the imaginary of the modern world system is rendered invisible and denied. As a case in point, she engages with archaeological research from the 19th-century on, which involved assaulting and desecrating Indigenous cemeteries to collect specimens for study, putting together 'archaeological knowledge' of cultures on the verge of obliteration by colonization. The processes of extraction of materials in the history of archaeology have not been documented or narrated, and this erasure is central to dismantling the logics of coloniality. For this series of images, which we might understand as the flip side of the image of the 'disappear-

[6] Neferti X.M. Tadiar, *Remaindered Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2022)

ing Indigenous' (which are always rendered as extinct), or the exotic Indigenous or the noble savage, Paloma engages with the history of archaeology as situated knowledge. She makes visible the invisible platform of observation—the point zero of hubris—represented by images of the objective and impartial observer, of neutrality produced by artificial intelligence: the image of the white European desecrating tombs—essentially, committing a crime—sublimated by modern-colonial epistemology in the name of Western knowledge and science.

Historically, and from a Western point of view, feminism has been our tool for confronting the predatory logic of modernity-coloniality. It is no coincidence that Paloma's most recent work is a kind of decolonial archaeology of feminism, nor that the figures of murdered Indigenous women, descendants of native peoples and, more broadly, victims of gender-based violence have risen so sharply over the past ten years (in Mexico, over the past thirty). The pattern of predation that sustains the lives of a significant portion of the planet's population destroys the fundamental patterns of relationality based on reciprocity as a means of subsistence. These patterns allow people to build reputations for generosity through sharing, thereby ensuring bonds and mutual support. Instead, the depredation spreading across the globe through colonization has been shattering this framework of harmony for centuries; it may well be responsible for the surge in gendered violence, and for pushing the planet to the edge of collapse.

The culture of depredation stems from the colonial logic of exerting violence on the bodies of women and on the commons. At a time where the oppression of women has become a permanent threat to life, generalized normalization of violence continues to erase non-modern forms of reciprocity, legitimizing the culture of depredation and replacing reciprocity with transactionality and alienation. The apparent unconsciousness of capitalism behind this destructive drive in people's lives no longer carries the teleological purposes of progress, modernization, development or universalism, and is crudely justified by the pursuit of economic profit.

From the perspective of Latin American feminisms, this is why the defense of territory and of women's bodies is inseparable. It must be understood that violence that displaces, weakens, disappears and is exerted against women and territories, shapes everything behind extractivist capitalism. It is also a form of inherited violence that expropriates the body, penetrates the skin and shapes our affects. Emmanuela Borzacchiello calls it the machinery for "expropriation-dispossession of the body," designed to display power, destroy affective bonds, and instrumentalize female and dissident bodies, with the ultimate aim of affirming authority and enforcing its imposition.[7] Indolence in dealing with this form of violence legitimizes heteropatriachy, erodes community ties, and destroys the communities' capacities to sustain life collectively. Gendered violence and extractivist violence go hand in hand, as Silvia Federici explains in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), showing how feminicide in the Middle Ages is linked to the establishment of private property and "New World" colonization. These violences are rooted in both capitalism and the colonial system, which has never been dismantled, just perpetuated, rendered invisible, and institutionalized by nation-states.

Paloma's most recent film and research, *Wrinkled Minds* (2025), can be described as a decolonial archaeology of feminism. Her objective is to trace the impact of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy's gender politics as it was received in the United States and Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries, and thus to render it intelligible. The premise of *Wrinkled Minds* stems from research by Sally Roesch Wagner, the feminist historian and author of *The Indigenous Roots of United States Feminism*. In this research, Roesch Wagner argues that 19th-century feminists in the United States—who lived under conditions akin to slavery—imagined a different paradigm of equality and human harmony, inspired by the beliefs, attitudes and laws of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (or Iroquois, as the French colonists called them). This was a society that empowered women, making their empowerment the foundation of its laws and civilization. At that time, the first feminists (suffragists) were colonists on Haudenosaunee territory and first-hand witnesses of

[7] Emanuela Borzacchiello "Una carta de amor en medio de la violencia" in *Ya no somos las mismas y aquí sigue la guerra* (Mexico: Grijalbo, 2019), p. 115.

this non-heteropatriarchal society, where women had control over their own sexuality and reproduction, over the community's economy and natural resources, and were the main political authority. Suffragists noted that Western women suffered during childbirth, while Indigenous women didn't, and that they held rights over their own properties, or had a voice in their communities. And the point is that the Catholic religion imposed the subordination of white women through the figure of Eve: the first sinner to bring suffering and death to humanity, who must suffer with motherhood and live in conditions of enslavement, in silence and subordination in marriage. Remember that, at the time, women had no legal existence—they were considered non persons—they depended entirely on men, had no rights over their own bodies, and neither beatings nor violations were forbidden by the State or by the Church. In contrast, Haudenosaunee women experienced balance in their lives, they governed themselves through agreements and by consensus in public councils, and they were active agents in decision making within their communities. Roesch Wagner writes about how the suffragist Matilda Joslyn Gage—one of the first to develop feminist ideas together with Elizabeth Cady Stanton—was adopted into the Wolf Clan of the Mohawk Nation. Feminists were inspired by this lived reality, but the Haudenosaunee also influenced ideas of the Enlightenment, and even communism and Marx himself.

This genealogy of imagining egalitarian systems of social organization was erased from Western history. Specifically, European and North American feminism advocated for "the personal is political" as a core principle for challenging oppression and demanding equality. However, after nearly two centuries of struggles marked by disagreements and divisions—damned individualism—only Indigenous feminisms continue to center on perpetuating matriarchy and on a system that defends life and reproduction while linking women's sexual freedom to their agency.

Wrinkled Minds begins with a comment from Indigenous women who explain the three tracks that structure the film: the voice-over, with fragments from 18th-century French Jesuit missionaries describing Haudenosaunee society from their perspective. We hear their reflections on women's sexual freedom, which they see as promiscuity and something to be repressed. They are surprised that Indigenous peoples seem unaware of violence, and they speculate about locking up and beating the women who have been "unfaithful" to their partners. Meanwhile, we watch present-day images of two white men walking the trail of Sullivan's March. This March, commanded by George Washington in 1779, took place in what is today the central region of New York State and Pennsylvania, stretching from the Susquehanna River to the Wyoming Valley. Sullivan's March was a campaign in which U.S. soldiers destroyed Indigenous settlements in a scorched-earth offensive. They razed forty villages, burned harvests and destroyed food stores, forcing the displacement of some 5,000 Haudenosaunee who fled toward the Niagara River in search of refuge. In *Wrinkled Minds*, the progress of that campaign is narrated through the iPhone of one of the white men walking the trail, stopping at sites marked as "memorable battles", where the Western capitalist way of life is now materialized. We watch them cross a forest now inhabited by a deflated plastic Statue of Liberty, and a military tank, also plastic though inflated. The characters spend time in a bar, a hotel, and on the road, showing us the modern infrastructure of the region: a dam, an old factory, material artifacts of capitalist heteropatriarchal everyday life (such as gender-segregated bathrooms). On their cellphones, they receive or write text messages narrating the military advances of the March, based on reports by Washington's soldiers, revealing their complicity and exposing the ongoing genocide and siege of the Indigenous peoples.

The film is structured in three tracks. In the first, Paloma shows how the Jesuit missionaries understood the need to exert gendered violence within this matriarchal society in order to colonize it—a process that Emmanuela Borziachello calls the machinery for "expropriation-dispossession of the body", to assert power and appropriate the land. Once again, Paloma resorts to innovative language to forge a radical connection between the history of the Haudenosaunee genocide, women's oppression under colonization, and the images of two potential *incels* crossing those landscapes. She also practices mediation in her relationships: the screenplay of *Wrinkled Minds* was reviewed by

Haudenosaunee collaborators, who authorized her to tell the story in this manner. At the end of the film, we see an Indigenous woman confronting herself and detaching from the modern infrastructure—a factory—thus highlighting the blindness perpetuated by white supremacy.

In *Wrinkled Minds*, Paloma reveals the ideological framework that conditions the colonial gaze on Indigenous land: as a territory waiting to be penetrated and possessed, in direct relation to the patriarchal objectification and instrumentalization of women's bodies, which are transformed into figures subject to male desire and whose bodies are turned into battle fields. *Fringe*, by Rebecca Belmore (2008), provides an extraordinarily powerful representation of this transformation, embodying the colonial wound and, simultaneously, resilience, healing, and resistance. Belmore is Ojibwe and a member of the Lac Seul Nation (Obishikokaang). In her work as an artist, she uses her own body as an image to address the legacy of colonial violence on her people, particularly on women. Belmore describes her performances as rooted in the principle of "taking her own body, her own essence, to colonized spaces." The Anishnaabe writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson describes how colonialism strips Indigenous peoples of their land, their language, their culture, their family, their knowledge systems and their ability to feel at home in their own bodies: the dispossession is all-encompassing. Anchoring this in her own body, portraying it as colonization's primary site, Belmore gives it the voice to speak its own story and that of her people. In *Fringe*, the figure is reclining, a typical posture in European art history. What is unusual, however, is that the figure is lying with her back to us, exposing the brutal wound of a knife piercing her body from shoulder to waist. Aside from the severity of the character's wound, *Fringe* is also about healing. The scar will never fully disappear, but it is stitched with red seed beads—a symbol of Indigenous resilience and resistance—signifying that Indigenous peoples refuse to disappear.

In our era of extractivist capitalism and technofeudalism, colonial and inherited forms of violence against bodies and territories have intensified. The horrors of the present go from paramilitary brigades and organized crime, concentration camps

Action at Distance, 2012. Film still

Dulcinea, 2023. Film still

El barro de la revolución, 2019. Film still

La plataforma inobservada de observación, 2024. Ambrotypes. AI-generated images. Glass plates

for migrants, underground ovens for disposing of bodies, clandestine mass graves, the genocide in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, domestic spaces dominated by heteropatriarchal violence, and the anguish of families searching for the disappeared. This is a social, political and economic war against life and populations in general, and against vulnerable communities in particular—especially women, trans persons, lesbians and girls. Behind all this violence stands a machinery for the dispossession of campesino lands, for forced recruitment into criminal networks, and for benefiting transnational corporations and other forms of war deemed necessary for generating prosperity in privileged enclaves. These are specific forms of violence displayed as power and pleasure, as force and desire over the other's body, materializing in extraction, combustion, unwanted penetration, appropriation, possession and destruction. Such forms of violence are integral to Western masculine modes of predation, which underpin life on the planet and drive us to individual, social and planetary collapse. As noted earlier, in this context, modern platforms for political action begin to blur; they are unable to explain or resist the new—and old!—forms of hegemony that have proliferated to legitimize the expansion of predatory machinery across the planet.

The speculative history that Paloma constructs in *Wrinkled Minds* highlights the blindness generated by white supremacy. In an attempt to summarize, we might say that her mission as an artist, activist and researcher is to open our eyes. She also remits us to the historical debt that Western progressive movements owe to the Haudenosaunee. In order to ensure our existence, it is urgent to pay this debt and recognize that, to organize as human groups, we must innovate our political imagination—opening up to multiple futures that can serve as alternatives to the world projected by heteropatriarchal and consumer technofeudalism. The goal is to strive toward the post-human, understood and constructed by displacing the human from a position of exceptionality, and by opposing heteropatriarchy from the perspective of Haudenosaunee culture. This entails breaking through masculinist Eurocentrism from within, employing non-Western epistemologies, modes of visualization, and forms of knowledge—not blindly. Responding to Mother Earth under

these circumstances requires embracing the responsibility that women are being called to: reconstituting history and politics by learning from the matriarchies of Indigenous peoples. Restoring our societies and addressing the environmental crisis requires opening up to ancestral knowledge and epistemologies, engaging with non-modern ways of being, listening to the consciousness of the earth and non-human systems, weaving relationships of reciprocity, and recognizing planetary interdependence and symbiosis. It means putting the past ahead of the future, and imagining a society that is an alternative to heteropatriarchy, so we may inhabit the planet in a relevant, collective, harmonious manner, inspired by Haudenosaunee society. Walking alongside Paloma and Arundathi, we feel a small lump in our throats as we watch the comrades we have left behind waving goodbye. Comrades who are:

> "People who live in their dreams, while the rest of the world lives with their nightmares. Every night we think of this journey—the night sky, the paths in the woods. We see the ankles showing through Comrade Kamla's worn sandals, lit by the beam of my flashlight. We think of her walking. Marching, not only for herself, but to keep hope alive for all of us."[8]

[8] Arundhati Roy, "Gandhi, but with guns" *The Guardian*, March 27, 2010, available online: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/mar/27/arundhati-roy-india-tribal-maoists-5

HAUDENOSAUNEE WOMEN'S INFLUENCE ON MODERN DEMOCRACY AND WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

Michelle Schenandoah

"These women had to see something that told them it's possible," said historian Dr. Sally Roesch Wagner about the early Suffragists in the film, *Without A Whisper*.

Dr. Sally Roesch Wagner, was a close friend and colleague. She was a leading western feminist and women's studies authority within the United States who introduced me to Ms. Paloma Polo during the late summer of 2024. Dr. Roesch Wagner was one of the first to write about Haudenosaunee women's influence upon Women's Suffrage in the United States. I could sense Dr. Roesch Wagner's relief to have another "white woman," as she would say, become an ally in the work of uplifting the important role that the Haudenosaunee have played in the world. As Paloma shared her Fulbright Fellowship research plans during her 1-year tenure in Syracuse, NY, I became intrigued by her proposal that Haudenosaunee women influenced European feminism earlier than that of the U.S. Suffragists. I had no doubt about what Paloma proposed.

I am a member of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy of the Oneida Nation Wolf Clan. The Haudenosaunee are the model and source of inspiration for the shaping of modern democracy, specifically, the U.S. Constitution, along with the influence on women's rights - both which have had great impacts upon the world. The Haudenosaunee have been a steady and powerful influence upon the world, for which most people are completely unaware. The Haudenosaunee today see how the omission of our historical influence, the absence of our protocols to maintain a peaceful democracy, and lack of understanding about the importance of women in creating balance within societies, has led to the imbalance that we see happening today.

A gift that arises from Paloma's film is that by going on a historical journey in contemporary times, one learns about Haudenosaunee women's agency, authority, and freedoms that were perceived by Jesuit missionaries, European women and settlers who travelled to North America during the late 17th

and 18th-century, and from early American soldiers who sought to eradicate the Haudenosaunee from their lands. Paloma's work highlights pivotal colonial encounters that served as conduits for transmitting Haudenosaunee perspectives on governance and gender that are not commonly taught or examined in western academia.

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy is the oldest continuous democracy in the world and the model for the U.S. Founding Fathers in creating the United States Constitution and its representative form of government organized on the local, state, national and international levels. The structure and form of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, also known by the French as the "Iroquois", has stood for well over 1,000 years. A lesser known and powerful story is that the Haudenosaunee were also the source of inspiration for the Founding Mothers of the Suffrage Movement in the United States that sparked the light for women's rights around the world.

There is no hierarchy among our people or the Natural World. It's often said by non-Haudenosaunee people that among the Haudenosaunee "women are equal to men." Contrary to this western patriarchal interpretation where men are the standard, Haudenosaunee women hold an elevated and protected status as *lifegivers* and as the mothers who raise our nations. As Haudenosaunee women, we are however equal with men in our responsibilities to the creation of wellbeing and peace among the people, among our nations and with all living beings in the natural world.

Haudenosaunee society is centered around the role of women from our Creation Story to our clan families led by our Clan Mothers, and the way that we celebrate our women and girls. Our Creation Story begins with Sky Woman who was pregnant and fell from another world among the stars. She fell to this world that was completely covered with water and where water animals were already living. The land Sky Woman helped to shape is called Turtle Island. With the help of the water animals, her daughter and her later born twin grandsons, our Mother Earth and the living world that we know today was formed.

Human beings were created by one of her twin grandsons. This grandson left instructions for the people about their daily

responsibilities to live on Mother Earth with thankfulness. As early human beings, they were faced with death for the first time. Struck with grief and not knowing how to carry on with daily responsibilities, a young man brought forward a vision.

An elder woman from each family was asked to gather water at a stream and to report on the first animal that she saw and which side of the stream the animal was located. This animal became that elder woman's clan and informed which side of the longhouse that her clan would sit on going forward. The clans were instructed how to care for the clans on the other side of the longhouse in times of grief. As one who has lost knows, it is difficult to speak clearly as there is a lump in your throat. It is difficult to think clearly, as the heart and mind are consumed with grief, also making it difficult to hear clearly or function with clarity. As clan families among our nations, we would help to support each other and to hold each other up.

Two women both reported seeing a bear on the opposite sides of the stream. With the young man's help, the three of them made a decision which side the bear clan family would sit in the longhouse. This three sided decision making process continues to be the Haudenosaunee process for making decisions today – by passing issues back and forth across the longhouse, or "across the fire", until we come to a consensus among our clans and our nations.

To this day, the lineage of our families continues to be passed down through the women. Our children receive our clan, their name, and their nation from their mother's clan, unlike the patriarchal family structure. Similarly, the role of the Clan Mother has been passed down through these clan families. Haudenosaunee Clan Mothers still oversee the well-being of our clan families and ultimately, our nations to this day. She is the caretaker of her people at the local level and instructs her Chief on matters of importance that must be elevated to the national or international level.

The system of Chiefs and formal democracy among the Haudenosaunee was later brought to us by the Peacemaker under what is called the Great Law of Peace. It is said that the Haudenosaunee Confederacy is more than 1,000 years old. In this system, a Clan Mother selects one Chiefs to be the represent-

ative voice of her clan. Clan Mothers have the absolute right to remove her Chief if he begins to act in his own self-interest and not in the best interest of the peace and well-being of the people.

There are six nations among the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca and Tuscarora. A Grand Council is called when our six nations meet, and each nation sits in its designated place within the longhouse like the clans. The Six Nations emulate the same care taking for each other as the clan families within our nations. Within the Grand Council, agendas are set and approved, and the issues among our nations or with nations outside of our Confederacy are run through the same process of deliberation the young man and the two women who saw a bear, passing issues across the fire in the longhouse, to arrive at consensus.

Clan Mothers advise their Chiefs on their authority over the matters discussed and decided. Clan Mothers also decide upon matters of war and peace. The Peacemaker gave certain duties to each side, including giving one Chief the power to intervene and stop the matters when two sides cannot agree. The Grand Council works to consider the matters by intently listening to each other and coming to consensus - meaning, not a unanimous decision, but a decision that all nations can peacefully live with because everyone was heard, and everyone participated in the decision-making process.

The roles and responsibilities of Clan Mothers and Chiefs, having three sides to our governing bodies, the process of passing matters across the house, deliberating and handling matters at local, national and international levels, and the power to intervene and veto, all existed prior to Columbus setting sail to the Americas. The Haudenosaunee governance and protocols continue to be practiced to this day.

The U.S, Founding Fathers closely studied the Haudenosaunee people, protocols and form of governance. This history is kept among Haudenosaunee people through oral tradition and well documented by historians, including Benjamin Franklin in his Remarks Concerning the Savages of North-America:

The Business of the Women is to take exact notice of what passes, imprint it in their Memories, for they have no Writing,

and communicate it to their Children. They are the Records of the Council, and they preserve Tradition of the Stipulations in Treaties a hundred Years back, which when we compare with our Writings we always find exact.

When the U.S. Founding Fathers created their Constitution, modeling the Haudenosaunee form of governance, they left out the critical role of women. Abigail Adams warned her husband, the second U.S. President John Adams, about this move, "cementing a rebellion," said Dr. Wagner. "When (white) women married, they ceased to exist legally."

Potawatomi botanist, Robin Wall Kimmerer in *Braiding Sweetgrass* sets the stage for her book by comparing the Haudenosaunee matrilineal worldview that begins with the Creation Story of Sky Woman to that of the Christian story of Eve. One way of life uplifts women and their gift of bringing life into the world, and the patriarchal worldview forever condemning women with the physical pain and burden of childbirth because Eve ate an apple from the tree of knowledge. Women under U.S. laws were considered the property of her husband, she had no right to her children if she left her marriage, and could be physically beaten or raped by her husband.

Neighboring white women living in the U.S. colonies saw that all Haudenosaunee women had full autonomy over their minds, their bodies, their children, their homes, their possessions and authority in deciding matters over the lands of their nations.

Like the U.S. Founding Fathers, the Seneca Falls Convention organizers who began the Suffrage Movement, had first-hand knowledge of the important role of Haudenosaunee women. Wagner's research has shown that white women felt safe among the Haudenosaunee and did not want to leave the Haudenosaunee villages. According to Wagner, Lucretia Mott spent time among the Seneca Nation, and Matilda Josyln Gage was adopted into the Mohawk Nation. Gage said about the Haudenosaunee, "never was justice more perfect, never was civilization higher."

Awareness of the Haudenosaunee women's influence is coming back into light. In 2021, the U.S. Congress commissioned the Ripples of Change monument that was dedicated to the lesser known stories of the Suffrage Movement. Included in the monu-

ment is Laura Cornelius Kellogg, a Haudenosaunee woman of the Oneida Nation. While she was not fighting for suffrage but rather for the land and dignity stolen from her people, she supported the Suffragists during her life's work. Cornelius Kellogg was noted for saying,

> "It is a cause for astonishment to us that you white women are only now, in this twentieth century, claiming what has been the Indian (Indigenous) woman's privilege as far back as history traces."

Among Haudenosaunee women today, we look out onto the landscape of the United States and see environmental devastation, injustice and social unrest. We know that the U.S. government is only in its infancy, and these effects are the direct result of excluding the voices of all life in its decision—making processes— that includes the voices of children, all of the natural world and consideration for those lives seven generations into the future. The U.S. Founding Fathers drafted the U.S. Constitution thinking only of men like themselves.

Haudenosaunee women as lifegivers have the responsibility to care for the wellbeing of all life including, children, the seeds for our foods, and the waters — none of these were ever mentioned in the U.S. Constitution. The critical role and authority of women leadership is an essential element to maintaining a well functioning democracy that exists in balance with Mother Earth.

In the Haudenosaunee way of life, it is the longstanding principle that all our decisions consider the impacts upon seven generations into the future. We are a caretaking culture of multiple united nations that have influenced global movements to organize people around peace, reciprocity and balance. We can once again provide the light as our Mother Earth is now calling for all her children to change our values and way of living. The decisions that we humans make today will impact our collective great-great-great grandchildren and beyond, all of whom we will never walk on this earth with, but who come to know us by the quality of life they will come to live.

Daneto (that is all).

This oral history has been told to me by the knowledgeable holders within the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

Michelle Schenandoah is a member of the onʌyota':aka Oneida Nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. She was raised on unceded Oneida Nation territories where her family led historic legal land claims. She grew up within the teachings of the Haudenosaunee Longhouse and her family of traditional leaders. Michelle lives with her family among community in her people's homelands. She holds a JD, LLM, and MS in Journalism. She is a trained lawyer, media creator, and Founder of the non-profit Rematriation (www.rematriation.com) and Indigenous Concepts Consulting (indigenous-concepts.com), where her work highlights contributions of Indigenous Peoples in North America.

Additional Resources:

The World Economic Forum on the oldest democracies: the Haudenosaunee Confederacy is the oldest continuous democracy in the world, but this history is continually erased.

New York State Museum on Haudenosaunee Women's Influence on American Women's Suffrage Movement: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-eio7CgESk

How Women Inspired the Women's Rights Movement: https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/how-native-american-women-inspired-the-women-s-rights-movement.htm

CONFRONTING THE SUPREMACIST REPLICANTS WE REFUSE TO MIRROR

Itziar Ziga

Over the past couple of years Paloma has been sharing with me the many drafts of a screenplay she was working on for her latest film, *Wrinkled Minds* (2025).. It's been fascinating to listen to each version, each proposal. Like all immersions in a creative process, she has changed the plots and characters to narrate the obsession that took her to the Center for Global Indigenous Cultures and Environmental Justice of Syracuse University, in New York State, which is that Enlightenment feminism was inspired and elevated by the non-patriarchal, assembly-based political culture of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. This means that the first white feminist women who dared to claim political power for women—which was completely denied them at the time in Europe—were inspired by the agency, authority and freedom they had discovered in other women, the Haudenosaunee women. Not only did Paloma have this intuition; she already had proof of this influence, which was also denied or reversed by the imperialism that dominated the narrative. So she went to Syracuse, to expand these facts and back them up with documentary evidence.

I wasn't taught the history of feminism at school, nor at university. Five years of study in Journalism and not once did women come up, not even a mention of gender as a category of social analysis. This was the nineties. But in Bilbao, there was a powerful autonomous feminist movement which I was passionately engaged with. By this I mean that we can't blame academia, or men for the version of the facts by which feminism was born with the Enlightenment in Europe, and expanded magnanimously from there on to other latitudes and lower social classes, not always with the same good fortune. Because isn't it surprising how women are so backward in other continents, how we're unable to explain to them more clearly how they should go about their own liberation—in our own image—which is why we invented feminism, for all women in the whole wide world. It embarrasses me to write these lines, but I'm not exaggerating.

That's how I learned the history of feminism, and that's how I was told the story by other feminists who weren't necessarily bourgeois or scholars but just as white and Western European as I was. Though enunciated in the plural and claiming universalism, this feminism continues to define itself in waves, ongoing waves that were all generated on the North Atlantic and not by chance. This feminism claims to have integrated a decolonial perspective during one of its most recent waves, during one of the recent decades, because it has erased—and continues to erase—everything that isn't white from its genealogies. One of the most persistent erasures, still largely untraceable to this day, is Paloma's obsession: her artistic and political tenacity in revealing how Indigenous women's forms of community life in the Americas influenced the origins of feminism self-proclaimed as pioneering in the world. This feminism was born in the heat of the Enlightenment between France and England in the 18th century, at the epicenter of colonial expansion.

As she herself tells me from Syracuse—located on ancestral territory of the Onondaga Nation—"particularly the Gantowisas, which is a term that can be translated as 'indispensable women', they exerted considerable influence because they held the highest political rank in this matrilineal and matrifocal society. Unfortunately only some dimensions of this web of intersections have been charted. This project could shed light on how Europe was able to reconsider its gender hierarchies thanks to the teachings of female Indigenous thinkers, and thus to envision more egalitarian political futures. Besides, I'd like to clarify the processes that intruded upon certain dimensions of these political principles and even strengthened these hierarchies."

One of the first screenplay versions Paloma told me about aimed to put together a fictitious epistolary dialogue—richly documented with historical archives—between two women of the same time period, a Haudenosaunee leader and an Enlightenment protofeminist. I instantly fell in love with this exercise in speculative history, and I wish my friend had a thousand lives and a thousand grants so I could someday see it completed. But this time Paloma Polo decided to plunge, to plunge us all into earth a thousand times more desolate, and revealing.

This road movie is stripped of epic grandeur, and stars two supremacist replicants who follow in the footsteps today of a military campaign conducted in 1779 by George Washington himself, razing Haudenosaunee lands, cultures, harvests and peoples. Two travelers who neither travel nor empathize nor communicate, soulless children of those soldiers, missionaries and colonists who invaded and privatized everything around them, forged in over two centuries of immanent violence.

Ten years ago in northern California, I saw the most charming man in the world fly into a rage because a stranger approached the gate of his farmhouse. It was then that I understood they defend their land so forcefully because this is stolen land, stolen with overwhelming violence.

This time it was just Paloma's luck to be living in Trump's U.S.A. and, to make matters worse, during his second, highly charged term of office. I have no doubt that this political context of terrifying and undisguised racism and heterofascism has led her to finally portray her obsession along that line of supremacism's pristine continuity—from conquest to the present day. No, Trump is not an excess or a deviation; he is the essence of the U.S.A.

All xenophobia will be patriarchal; it's them and us. And to remain as ourselves, our women should never be with them—they will be ours. The voices in French of the Jesuits who were sent to evangelize and dominate the Haudenosaunee territory are sheer revelation. That mirror we refuse to see ourselves in, least of all as white feminists; that mirror of supremacism where we still believe that women's liberation was invented by our immediate political predecessors during the Enlightenment; that we are actually women, and that progress explains History. A mirror that Paloma Polo reflects and puts before us—uncomfortable as it is, though brighter than ever—so that we can break away from the entrapment that holds us back, as naive as soldiers of Empire.

"If after some time they wish to separate for whatever reason, husband and wife may do so freely. Hence it is not unusual for a woman to have had twelve or fifteen husbands. As for the men, they lie with women whenever they wish, without ever resorting to violence, as it is not customary among the savages to force each other. For everything, they abide by the woman's will." These are the words of one of the Jesuits who Paloma brings to us from the 18th century. And I say to myself, how much you raped us in Europe, how much!

YOU FORGOT YOUR AFFAIRES

Eddi Circa

I dig into Paloma Polo's last project and historical quest, and I delve into the film Wrinkled Minds, the culmination of her work. I go because I go because I go because I go because I go. She's been in Syracuse; she bought herself a car, hermeneut that she is. We're eleven to fourteen ciervas[9] *who meet together every other Saturday for a reading group. We read Hélene Cixous. The history of Western thought* has worked and continues to work through opposition; dual and hierarchical oppositions. That's what the philosopher says. Culture / Nature, Human / Non Human, Reason / Feeling. And so, on and on. She states that of them all, there is one that articulates the entire History of Philosophy: the opposition Proper / Improper. What is mine, my good, and what limits it. Thus, what threatens my good is the other.

"The existence of 'other' is necessary, there's no master without a slave, there's no economic-political power without exploitation, there's no ruling class without a subjugated herd, there's no "French" without the Arab, there's no Property without exclusion. The other is there merely to be reappropriated, reclaimed, and destroyed, as other. And the exclusion is not even exclusion. Algeria was not France, but it was «French»".

Ici, on appelle vertu ce qui devant Dieu n'est qu'un crime. Here, what passes for virtue is but a crime before God. A Jesuit won't dare look a Haudenosaunee woman in the eyes. I think that's why witnesses whisper in *The Jesuit Relations*; that's why the voice-over is fearful. He's a dirty man that can't cope. He says women come near, and at night they incite him to sex.

Historically, the relationship with the Other consists of civilizing, absorbing, submitting. The Empire of the Proper is the drive to dominate all living movement that escapes not only from male colonial thought, but also from one's own binary thought of hierarchical opposites. The weak and sickened Logos stalks live movement. The Indigenous and the feminine refuse

[9] We call ourselves ciervas, which is a play on the Spanish words *siervas* (female servants) and *ciervas* (female deer or does), because we are no longer servants to anyone. As radical feminists, we choose to be free, wild, untamed, together."

to identify with archetypes that are imposed by Western philosophy for thinking the Indigenous and the feminine. If this is truly Other, then it escapes my comprehension, it is not theorizable. The Other is not the contrary opposite; it is the unknown.

Paloma Polo sheds light as if it were sand. She opens a delicate door. Beautiful, it's a beautiful film. In the characters' movements, in the voices' caresses. In its gaze. Polo undertakes an anthropological, estranged journey. They are empty. The men, you can tell. By the way they eat their soup; by the way they eat their fried potato. Polo manages to convey this without wasting the valuable time of the decolonial hermeneut. They are merely vectors of violence, of male colonial subjectivity; they are voiceless. Fixed long shots, their bodies rather than their hands, their empty faces rather than their emotions; what they represent, not what makes them different.

When the three characters finally meet, we don't know whether it's in the past, the present or the future; the journey plunges us into an atmosphere of fiction. The way she leaves them behind in the woods, the way they're suddenly so uneasy and tormented. It comes across like an exorcism of colonial subjectivity, like both vector-men need to rid themselves of it all; of this violence they've been vectors of since the 17th century.

When the Haudenosaunee woman appears, yes, the energy contained within the film is brutally liberated. We've waited to see her throughout the entire film. Restraint. She frightens them in her way of saying "you forgot your affaires"; yes, she explains who is in charge, she is; she guides them, she explains a different world, where the old new man has no business, and that's the way it's been for centuries within the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Yes, she shows them another order that is not inevitably the order of domination, to be sure.

MENTAL TEXTURES

Natalia Valencia Arango

Paloma Polo has borrowed the Haudenosaunee concept of the wrinkled mind to name her latest film produced in 2025 and a central piece of this survey. From the indigenous perspective relayed by Polo, we learn that the term was used to define the Western mind as one whose "texture" was regarded as negative or obfuscated —oblivious to collective awareness and to understanding ecological and societal matters as relational or interconnected, embedded within a balancing commitment of all beings. These Haudenosaunee principles also include a different take on what Eurocentric minds conceive as individual rights within society –concepts grounded in class, privilege, and private property. In Haudenosaunee's worldview, modern Western rights do not exist as such, what is practiced is a set of collective responsibilities pertaining to all beings. As interpreted today, the Western mind's wrinkling was upheld by heteropatriarchal, religious, and moral frameworks that were foreign to the Haudenosaunee. The contentious occupation, epistemic extractivism and epistemicide conducted by the British and French colonial expansion—whose aftermath continues to reverberate today, especially under the authoritarian regime governing the United States—was, in light of this metaphor, a 'collusion of differing mental textures'. If, as Western spectators of this film, we attempt to elucidate what an "unwrinkled" mind is, or how to "comb" a wrinkled mind (in accordance with Indigenous practices and narratives), we will find ourselves conflicted—paradoxically processing these concepts through the very patterns of our own Western thought. This problematic is central to Polo's cinematic language and opens up a rich field of enquiry into how artistic production asserts agency within the liminal space between Western and non-Western forms of knowledge.

The obfuscated characteristic of the wrinkled mind serves as a *fil rouge* running through this film and across Polo's broader research, which negotiates and navigates ideological frameworks that deploy notions of legibility and opacity in diverse, and at times even contrasting ways. In the film's fragmented narrative, we grasp how Haudenosaunee women's conduct, authority, and agency embodied a freedom that was as inconceivable as it was opaque to the white men witnessing it. This opacity was both menacing and alluring to the Jesuits, and therefore had to be condemned as lascivious, a product of the devil— it had to be evaluated through the lens of a religious moral code. Underlying their fear lies a mesh of conflicted desire. Obscured, repressed, and thus devoid of control, desire drives how these men grapple with Indigenous women's sexual and political autonomy. Within this grasping resides a fascination, an admiration; yet these are swiftly supplanted by moral abhorrence, for their difference proves too threatening to the very ideological foundations of these celibate white men.

The questions regarding these human relations that are brought forward by this film are never meant to be fully answered, as they appear by means of a constant mirroring of the Western mind's wrinkles, its intrusive attempt to dissect and make transparent the indigenous universe. This implies an abysmal rupture. In staging this liminal friction, Polo centers Haudenosaunee survivance by proposing an ethics of relation where difference is neither erased nor explained away but expressed as all-encompassing in its lack of full legibility. The male protagonists of the film possess another unreadable quality that also inhabits opacity. This specific opacity is conveyed from a considerably different angle, one methodically devised by Polo's radical feminist politics. These men are unreadable because the vacuum they inhabit remains unbeknownst to them; they embody and enact heteropatriarchal and colonial archetypes that are as normalized as they are terrifying. Does Polo deprive them of depth, or do they deprive themselves of it? And yet, they incarnate a complexity of historical layers. Anachronic and unresolved, the concluding episode of these men's journey may come across as ambiguous, as the characters are far from deciphering any moral lesson.

Opacity is thus experienced here as a generative space that directs us to recognize the need for a cosmopolitical exchange, where meaning is not strictly quantifiable, is many times not palatable and is definitely never entirely dissectible. This realm of undefinable meaning covers the gray zone of unknowability and untranslatability, understood as a place of enunciation that does

not fully adapt to academic or curatorial attempts to situate it. If the untranslatable is that which exists beyond commensurability, and if, as Carcross Tagish First Nation curator Candice Hopkins says, silence is a generative form of refusal and not a lack of meaning,[1] we can recognize that the intermittent silence performed by Haudenosaunee characters in the film conveys a resistance, where opacity is a steady witness to the unknownable.

INDIGENOUS AMERICAN SEEDS OF DEMOCRACY AND FEMINISM

Bruce E. Johansen

In 1976, I was beginning a PhD program in Communication and history at the University of Washington in Seattle, seeking a dissertation subject. At the time, I was and editor at the *Seattle Times*. This work coincided with my growing interest in Native American history, and as an activist in such areas as Native fishing rights, which was receiving a great deal of attention in the Pacific Northwest region of the USA.

Given a convergence of events and personal interests, several of my Native friends suggested that I concentrate on how indigenous peoples in what is now the eastern United States came to influence pivotal thoughts and ideologies, including the development of democracy about the time of the American Revolution. All of this was taking place during a time of political action *vis a vis* Native Americans' future across the country through the American Indian Movement (AIM) and other organizations until roughly 1970, Native American history was generally discussed, debated, and taught (if at all) as a sideshow of the general surge westward from Europe, beginning with the voyages of Columbus, followed by other Europeans who arrived on the eastern coasts of what they called "North America," working their way generally westward. Thus, it took a while for Europeans to realize that the making of history flows in all directions, not only east to west.

The main idea behind my dissertation (granted in 1979) and later, in the book *Forgotten Founders,* (published in 1982) was that a significant number of the United States' founders utilized the thinking of the Six Nations Haudenosaunee (a.k.a. Iroquois) Confederacy as they established the United States. This is not to say that they used these practices only, but that practices and beliefs from both European thinkers and the Native peoples were combined into a unique synthesis.

When I introduced this idea to my professors at the UW, they were less than enthusiastic. Native American studies were only beginning to be used as a subject of academic inquiry, outside of disciplines such as anthropology and some fields of American history.

While I explored the works of several founders, most notably Jefferson, Paine, et al., my major focus was Benjamin Franklin who, in many ways, was the most notable intellectual founder of the country. This idea was debated briefly; see the works of Felix Cohen, during the early 1950s in *The American Scholar*. Donald A. Grinde came to many of the same conclusions in his work several years before I did. Grinde and I later combined efforts to publish *Exemplar of Liberty* in 1991.

Native peoples' practices shaped European arrivals' conceptions of government, as well as about half of the foods they ate, parts of the languages they spoke, and how they named their countries and states. Half of the U.S. states have names in whole or partly borrowed from Native peoples.

Native peoples also taught the immigrants such things as fire management, development of agriculture, irrigation, medical treatments, and much more. Native Americans built urban developments which matched or exceeded those that Europeans had left at home. Native rock houses still are larger and more enduring than many European castles.

The Haudenosaunee (Six Nations Confederacy) was founded by Deganawidah, "the Peacemaker," in Haudenosaunee oral tradition, who enlisted the aid of Aiowantha (sometimes called Hiawatha) to spread his vision of a confederacy to control bloody rivalries. The Iroquois Confederacy originally included the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas. The sixth nation, the Tuscaroras, migrated into Iroquois country in the early 18th century. The Confederacy dates from 1142 A.D., as far back as most English royal lineages, according to research by Barbara Mann and Jerry Fields.

It has been very salubrious to see many other people broaden this work. Sally Wagner, Donald Grinde, and I formed the "Coyote Collective" during the late 1980s, welcoming many other people into this line of intellectual exploration. A lively debate grew up that confirmed the ways in which the peoples of the Americas shaped European immigrants' lives.

Sally Wagner studied the works of major exponents of 19th century American feminism, such as Matilda Joslyn Gage and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *et al*., who borrowed concepts of matriarchy and feminism from Native societies. Wagner also compared Native American practices of such things as childbirth (et al.) with European practices.

Polo's research inquiry sheds light on the migration of Haudenosaunee thinking into European discourse, one more important example of how ideas may move in several directions at once.

All of this is taking part in a dangerous world in which the work of Native peacemaking is more essential than ever. Oneida thinker, Michelle Shenandoah, writes about what it means for a society to be matrilineal. This includes, for instance, the clan system, the practice of consensus, the complex political structures of checks and balances in decision-making, and the concept and practice of responsibilities taking precedence over rights, to name only a few examples.

Drawing from primary sources, Polo highlights how the political and social structures of the Haudenosaunee inspired early forms of democracy and federalism in Europe and North America. In particular, she has been documenting how Haudenosaunee women's agency, authority, and freedom were appraised by 18th-century European women and settlers, focusing on how these perceptions were translated into the feminist imaginaries and vindications conceptualized by Enlightenment thinkers.

Through examining these "zones of contact," Polo documents how colonial encounters—forged in treaty negotiations, trade alliances, missionary reports, captivity narratives, travelogues, ethnographic accounts, and other hybrid forms of cross-cultural exchange—served as conduits for transmitting indigenous perspectives on governance and gender. For instance, it is a well-documented historical fact that Benjamin Franklin, one of the founding fathers of the United States of America, praised the non-authoritarian democracy of the Haudenosaunee, with whom he engaged in dialogue and negotiation, signing treaties for peaceful coexistence and even printing their proceedings. Franklin's influential presence in Parisian intellectual salons—part of a broader effort to garner support for the American Revolution— brought him into contact with renowned women intellectuals, who may have been intrigued by gender identities that, though unfamiliar in Europe, resonated with the experiences of the first American ambassador.

One of the most effective means of disseminating Haudenosaunee culture was the widely read volumes of the Jesuit Relations. In their horrified response to Indigenous lifeways—especially the sexual freedom, political power, and social authority of Indigenous women—Jesuit missionaries in New France inadvertently exposed the French public to the realities of matriarchal structures. Elite French women, who often financed these missions and received the reports, were thus confronted with radically different models of gender relations, prompting critical reflection on their own social condition. Additionally, numerous colonial chronicles experienced fulgurating diffusion due to their striking critiques of European moral, patriarchal, and political norms.

What is even more striking is that, for the Haudenosaunee, this is already established knowledge, grounded in the extraordinary precision and continuity of intergenerationally transmitted oral tradition.

Paloma's collaboration and friendship with Sally Wagner has been central to her trajectory, as her work seeks to reaffirm and expand Sally's legacy. Without Sally's pioneering interventions, both Bruce and Paloma could never have conceived that the influence of Haudenosaunee gender conceptions and practices extended so broadly, both historically and geographically. The work of other scholars—Louise Herne, Kahente Horn-Miller, Barbara Alice Mann, Paula Gunn Allen, Donald Grinde, John Mohawk, Ray Fadden, Tom Porter, Oren Lyons, Vine Deloria, Doug George, and many others, who have created a rich mix of peoples—has also has been profoundly illuminating.

For more on material contributions see:
Forgotten Landscapes: How Native Americans Created Pre-Columbian North America and What We Can Learn from It. By Stanley A. Rice. Essex, Connecticut, 2025.

Curator: Mabel Tapia

DL B 19089-2025

Wrinkled Minds (2025) project has been produced within the Call of "la Caixa" Foundation Support for Creation'24 - Production. Supported by the Fulbright Commission, the Spanish Ministry of Culture, and Syracuse University – Center for Global Indigenous Cultures and Environmental Justice.

La Virreina Centre de la Imatge
Palau de la Virreina
La Rambla, 99. 08002 Barcelona

Opening hours:
Tuesday to Sunday and public holidays, 11 am to 8 pm
Closed holidays: December 25 and 26 and January 1
Free entry

#PalomaPolo
@lavirreinaci
barcelona.cat/lavirreina