

Modalities of Heritage Practice



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ECHOES propose four modalities for analyzing how colonial heritage is managed and practised: [Repression](#), [Removal](#), [Reframing](#) and [Reemergence](#). The concept of heritage practice emphasizes that, although many cases will deal with actual material heritage or heritage sites, the practice and management analyzed encompass not just the materiality and discursivity of colonial heritage, but also the performativity, affectivity and wider social contexts in play in and around various forms of heritage. Indeed, the idea of an immaterial heritage of colonialism is inseparable from any understanding of how sites and objects connected to this heritage are and can be engaged with in new and innovative ways.

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Therefore, I want to start by emphasizing that what these modalities are meant to describe is more than the concrete and actual actions taken towards a given material heritage 'object'. In my view, they should also extend to seek to capture the overarching attitude or orientation that pervades a given heritage practice. That is, how – in relation to a specific site, object or art work – this practice treats, relates to, produces or reduces the echoes of the colonial past in and through the significations, displays, actions, interventions and social relations mobilized. Drawing from the emergent field of [Derrida 1994, Frosh 2013], one might say therefore that the modalities of [repression](#), [removal](#), [reframing](#) and [reemergence](#) can fruitfully be thought of as indicating how different heritage practices deal with the 'colonial ghosts' in contemporary societies and communities [Khanna et al. 2003].

Neither strict taxonomy, nor moralistic teleology

It seems important to stress here that even if these four modalities constitute a heuristic tool for structuring the analysis and comparison of a great variety of heritage practices, the logic which links the four is neither teleological nor that of a dogmatic and sharply defined taxonomy.

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There is, in my opinion, a certain normative dimension to the framework. '[Repression](#)' is a modality with few redeeming or progressive qualities, whereas '[Reemergence](#)' is the modality through which we seek to capture those practices carrying the promise of entangling the colonial past with the hope of better futures, yet in a state of becoming. But there is no inherent logic or set route of progression. One does not necessarily 'graduate' from practices of [repression](#) to those of [removal](#), nor does one necessarily have to 'pass through' reframing in order to hope to advance to reemergence.

Also, I do not conceive of these modalities as strict and mutually exclusive categories when it comes to actual cases of heritage practice. Most cases will probably contain elements of more than one mode, reside on the border between two modes, or mainly practise one mode yet contain elements which might point to another. This is not a taxonomy serving to eliminate that which does not fit its logic, but rather a conceptual framework geared to contain and accommodate a pluriverse of 'dirty cases', hybrid forms and heterogeneous experiences: for example, [Reframing](#) practices which nonetheless threaten to collapse into the binary thinking of [Repression](#), or political activism for the [Removal](#) of a certain colonial heritage which at moments, and due to

exceptional performative or aesthetic innovation, opens up horizons of what we understand under the mode of [Reemergence](#).

The four modalities and the schema that unites them (which I discuss below) could therefore be described in terms of the Weberian idea of ideal types, yet I find it even more useful to think of them in terms of Manuel Delanda's idea of the 'parametrizing' of theoretical concepts. The idea here is that our concepts should be able to describe not just different states of social reality, but also be able to capture how one state gradually approaches and finally transforms into another analogous to what in physics would be the transition between phases of matter (such as water's transition from gas to liquid to ice). Delanda proposes that one might 'parametrize' a single concept (for him this concerns the concept of 'assemblage', here it would be 'heritage practice') *"to allow it to exhibit qualitatively different phases"* [DeLanda 2016: 19] according to the degree of certain parameter values. Figuratively, he suggests the image of 'installing knobs' on one's concept with which certain parameter values might be turned up or down – giving, as a consequence of this 'blend' – the concept qualitatively different expressions (i.e. phases). For Delanda, this is a way of establishing a differentiated conceptual analytics, without regressing into dualistic thinking or rigid taxonomies. I believe this should equally be a priority in conceptualizing the modes of heritage practice employed in ECHOES. So even if we are forced to separate and

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define [Repression](#), [Removal](#), [Reframing](#) and [Reemergence](#) to distinguish them from each other (making of them somewhat clear 'pure phases' or ideal types), they should nonetheless – especially in their analytical employment – be conceived of as phases of heritage practice which fade into each other, though each of them is nonetheless constituted by a certain combination of common parameters.

In what follows, I want to suggest that these parameters (our 'knobs') might here be conceptualized as, first, the extent to which a heritage practice articulates a situation of social control or of political dislocation, rupture and potential change. And, second, the extent to which a heritage practice expresses a binary or an entangled imagining of colonial heritage.

Social reproduction or Political Rupture

The first parameter (the horizontal axis in the schema) might be further conceptualized in terms of the Argentinian political theorist Ernesto Laclau's distinction between 'the social', as a sphere where signifiers have become sedimented in stable structures and are as such no longer radically questioned, challenged or reinterpreted, and situations of

'dislocation', in which the re-contestation of core societal signifiers opens up 'the political' ushering in of overt struggles for hegemony [Laclau 1990]. We have as such a fundamental (but ideal-typical) distinction between, on the one hand, a state of social stability and control in which established constructions of community and social order are reproduced and taken for granted, and on the other hand, situations in this social construction is 'dislocated' – i.e. destabilized – through antagonistic confrontations between different imaginaries of societal presents and futures. In terms of Memory Studies, elements of the same kind of distinction are also at play in historian Charles S. Maier's differentiation between 'hot' and 'cold' memories [Maier 2002], in Jan Assman's distinction between Cultural and Communicative memory [Assmann 2008] and in Trouillot's attention to the extent to which a certain past has been 'tamed' by contemporary society [Trouillot 1995].

More concretely, in terms of ECHOES modalities, this axis indicates – or for Delanda 'parametrizes' – to what extent a given colonial heritage practice articulates an idea about the past which is largely conventional, commands a high degree of consensual support (among dominant groups) in society and as such reproduces already established social relationships, narratives and power hierarchies. Or conversely, to what extent it seeks to break such complacency and thus force through fundamental changes in society.

Under this parameter, [Repression](#) and [Reframing](#) can be grouped together, because while [Repression](#) often reproduces existing social conditions by way of attempting to silence or marginalize the horrific dimensions of colonial heritage, reframing might achieve the same result by other means. The [Reframing](#) of the colonial past for example into contexts of artistic production or public leisure activity always carries the risk of de-politization through its degrading to a voyeuristic thrill or a commercial trivialization (although this is by no means a necessary outcome). But one might also suggest that [Reframing](#) potentially entails a mode to control the ghosts of the colonial past, even more effectively than the forceful denial of repression. In [Reframing](#) this haunting, it is so to speak forcefully put on display, made to perform and thereby put 'in its place'. By confining our ghosts to certain contexts (the fairground haunted house ride comes to mind as a metaphor), we might rob them of the fundamental 'spectral privilege' of turning up inconveniently, unexpectedly, even shockingly – a privilege which they to some extent retain even under conditions of '[Repression](#)'.

By contrast both [removal](#) and [reemergence](#) are highly dislocating modes of heritage practice. [Removal](#), because it radically articulates the horrific past and uses it to challenge contemporary and future social conditions, in a sense drags the ghosts into the light even as it demands and attempts to exorcise them. [Re-emergence](#) is likewise a highly political heritage, but

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it does not simply seek to exorcise the ghosts, nor does it affect the compartmentalizing domestication of displaying them. Rather, we might here hope to find forms of heritage practice engaging with these spectral remnants, by facilitating networks or assemblages that might not only radically articulate and perform this heritage but distribute these unsettling echoes into the wider spheres of public life.

Binary thinking or Entangled imaginaries

If the first axis can thus be said to indicate the political intensity of a given heritage practice, I would venture that the second axis instead might be said to describe the complexity of the social imagination articulated in and through it.

This parameter, in part, draws on a core dimension of decolonial critique – and one that it shares with various strands of psychoanalytic, poststructuralist, deconstructivist, postmodernist and new materialist thought – namely, the rejection of binary thinking. This axis, as such, concerns the extent to which a heritage practice articulates or performs a binary – whether dualistic, dialectic or antagonistic – imagining of the social structure of colonial and decolonial experiences. Concretely, such dualism is often expressed in the biased distinction between European Modernity and the non-European world, the Metropole and the colony,

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black and white. Both ideas of the colonial relationship as an essentialized hierarchy [Said 1995], or a 'postcolonial' challenge to such discourses in terms of imagining the struggle as an uncompromising confrontation between two entirely different and separate camps [Fanon 1990], might be said to be premised on binary thinking. Opposed to this would be more multifaceted and complex conceptualizations of the colonial and decolonial situation, allowing not only for 'multiple modernities' but also hybridized subjects and 'third spaces' [Bhabha 2004, Cooper 2005].

In terms of ECHOES modalities, this parameter thereby highlights that [Repression](#) and [Removal](#) might share a fundamentally binary conceptualization of the colonial heritage. If, in [Repression](#), this is ingrained in the grand narrative of European modernity and its dichotomous imaginary of 'the West and the rest', then in [Removal](#) it finds expression in the hope that the colonial past might be entirely erased, allowing the colonized society to return to an original and authentic mode of existence. I do not want to suggest, however, that binary thinking is always or by definition nostalgic or regressive. Such a radical reduction of actual social complexity, either in the form of 'strategic essentialism' [Spivak 1987] or in the articulation of a social antagonism [Laclau 1990], might be crucial to the initial mobilization against repressive colonial practices and heritages.

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Nonetheless, such binary thinking does stand in contrast to the multiplicity and hybridity associated with practices of [Reframing](#) and [Reemergence](#). In [Reframing](#), a hybridity often results from the very re-contextualizing of colonial heritage in new milieus, highlighting the complex connectivity, the common space of experience and myriad mutual exchanges, thereby explicitly or implicitly undermining the dichotomous separation of colonized and colonizer. In [Reemergence](#) heritage practices, this [entanglement](#) expresses itself more through the building and decomposing of assemblages, which not only includes multiple subject positions but attempts to imagine new forms of decolonial subjectivity, and thus not only expands and makes more complex the imagining of the colonial and de-colonial situation, but actively attempts to generate, provoke or become itself a new kind of experience of the decolonial.



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