

**THE WINDS OF CHANGE.
RECOVERING THE FUTURE IN AN ERA OF INDIGENOUS TURNS**

Key note lecture given by Katya García-Antón at Arts Council Norway's annual conference 'Sami Rage' held on 9 November 2017.

I shall begin with an introductory protocol of my own making. It is a courtesy used internationally when entering discussions, concerning Indigenous peoples.

“Alggadettiin halidan mainnasjit ja gudnejattit
Norggas algoalbmoga, sápmelattjaid, ja
Sami guovllu, mii rastilda otnasj riikarajiid
davvirijkain ja Ruosjas”

“Buorre beaivi buohkaide! (Good afternoon to all!)

I wish to define Sapmi as the Indigenous region that extends across the current nation states of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, and that makes this country Indigenous Norway.

I pay respect to this land, to all elements that compose it both human and non-human; and to the Sami forefathers and foremothers who were custodians of it all. These spheres of life are moulded by Indigenous histories dating back 12,000 years. This is a land of conflict past and present, in need of a new sociopolitical contract of reconciliation and decolonisation.

I also pay respect to Indigenous Oslo, the city which has the largest number of Sami people within the national borders of Norway and the Nordic region.



Hunger strike outside Oslo Parliament, 1979.



13 Sami women occupying Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland's office, 1979.

Once upon a time, there was a future. Society was spurred into a process of transformation. This future was heralded by the historic events of 1979 central to the Alta-Gouvdgeino Action (1978-82). Many still remember the historical Sami hunger strikes in front of the Norwegian Parliament in Oslo, in which Sami artists took centre stage, or the occupation of Prime Minister Brundtland's office by 13 Sami women. And yet the action also marked a moment of significant fraternity, where many Norwegians joined forces with Sami river/land protectors.

1979 shook Norway into a novel awakening (arguably only comparable in its seismic impact to the first Sami political meeting in Tråante in 1917, and to the nationwide labour strikes of the 1930s).



Sverre Kjelsberg and Mattis Hætta performing 'Sámiid Ædnan' [Sami land], Eurovision Song Contest, 1980.

Popular culture was quick to show how events had captured the nation's social imagination. Who can forget the 1980 Eurovision Song Contest performance of the song "Sami Soil" (Sami Ædnan) by the Norwegian singer Sverre Kjelsberg and the Sami joiker Mattis Hætta? Their lyrics celebrated the hunger strike with the words, "in front of parliament they sat, the joik was heard day and night."

The promise of a new future began to translate legally and culturally. Amongst other measures, Norway adopted a leading position internationally by signing the ILO Convention 169 in 1990 (today still unsigned by Sweden, Finland and Russia). A series of important educational and cultural institutions were created, to protect and foster Sami culture.

“I thought I would peep
into the future
saw nothing”

Aillohas (Nils Aslak Valkeapää), 1985

Despite these important achievements, the blast of transformation appeared, to many in Sapmi, to be hardening mid process, provoking a sense of despair:

*I thought I would peep
into the future
I saw nothing.*

Áillohaš (Nils Aslak Valkeapaa), 1985



Aillohas (Nils Aslak Valkeapää) attending the World Council of Indigenous Peoples meeting in 1975.

Always ahead of his time, the Sami artist and intellectual Áillohaš led the path of decolonisation in many ways. Conscious of the powerful legal debates for Indigenous rights across the globe at the time, Áillohaš secured the acceptance of Sami peoples into the larger international Indigenous family (a community 400 million strong, and thus hardly a minority).



George Manuel, from the Shuswap Tribe of British Columbia was the founder and Chairman of The World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP), Port Alberni, 1975.

During the first meeting of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples of 1975, his joik in Port Alberni, Turtle Island/Canada was said to electrify the audience and remove any shadow of doubt that the Samis (despite their white skin) were Indigenous.

But why would he utter such words of despondency only 6 years after the high point of the Alta Action?

Partly the answer lies in his early understanding that “Sami Spirit” as encapsulated by the SV political movement born in 1970 (and a driving force to Alta) was stagnating. This deepened the divided debates of the times, between those who thought that only a Sámediggi (Sami Parliament) mirroring the Norwegian system would enable dialogue, and those compelled to seek self-determination through a political structure inherent to Indigenous thinking.

Fast forward to 2017, and we can perhaps comprehend Áillohaš’s gloom. In Sapmi today, the belief is widespread that the decolonising process in Norway has slid back 30 years. The urgent question of spiritual decolonisation has not been addressed nationally (only a few weeks ago, the first workshop on this issue was held at the Sami University College of Applied Sciences in Guovdegeino). The recent “Pocahontas” case, where a senior Minister wore an American-Indian outfit during an official fancy-dress event in Oslo; political commentary questioning the need for a Sámediggi; and the reaction to these events in social media and the press all point to a deep erosion in the social and political commitment to the Sami agenda. The significant budget cuts to Tråante 2017, the legal battles to preserve Sami reindeer-herding inland and along coastal Norway, and the proposed 10m NOK cut to the Sámediggi budget all point in the same direction. The general lack of mainstream press covering Sami affairs is particularly remarkable.

These events and others show us that fundamental Sami socio-political and cultural questions remain unresolved in Norway. Amongst them, a critical one for the cultural field is “how many Sami art critics, academics, artists, organisers, curators and artists are part of leading national cultural and mediatic institutions, outside of Sapmi (OCA included)? ” Cultural power distribution is urgent.



Máret Anne Sara, ongoing project *Pile o' Sápmi*, (2016-), Neue Neue Galerie (Neue Hauptpost), Kassel, Germany, part of Documenta 14'.

For us in the arts, these disfunctions are disheartening given the phenomenal recognition that Indigenous practitioners are awarded globally. Carcross/Tagish curator Candice Hopkins took a key role in documenta14 this year, presenting a large number of Indigenous artists (including eight Sami practitioners, a record). documenta14 brought the Indigenous discourse irrevocably onto the art world's global agenda.



Tracey Moffat, tote-bags from the exhibition 'My Horizon' in the Australian Pavilion, La Biennale di Venezia, 2017.

In this year's Venice Biennale, Aboriginal artist Tracey Moffat featured in the national pavilion of Australia (a pavilion which presented its first show by an Aboriginal artist in 1990).



Lisa Reihana, *In Pursuit of Venus [infected]*, 2015–17, La Biennale di Venezia, 2017.

Detail of Rebecca Belmore, *Fringe*, 2008, SAKAHAN Quadrennial : International Indigenous Art, 2013.

Maori artist Lisa Reihana took the Aotearoa/New Zealand pavilion, and preparations are underway for the upcoming edition of the pioneering SAKAHAN (International Indigenous Art Quadrennial) in Ottawa (founded in 2013 by the National Art Gallery of Canada).

Let us consider cultural policy in Turtle Island/Canada, Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. Their Art Councils are led by Indigenous executives such as Steve Loft (a member of the Mohawk community) and Lee Ann Tjunypa Buckskin (a member of the Narungga community), amongst others. Their mission statements declare a clear commitment to Indigenous agendas. Similarly, their major museums are proud to have curatorial and conservation teams with Indigenous professionals at the helm, such as Aboriginal Nici Cumpston (Afghan, Irish, English and Barkindji Aboriginal heritage, Senior Advisor at the National Gallery of Australia); Dr Heather Igloliorte (Inuk curator, Research Chair in Indigenous Art History and Community Engagement, Concordia University), and Dr Gerald McMaster (Plains Cree/Blackfoot Heritage; Canada Research Chair [CRC] in Indigenous Visual Culture & Curatorial Practice at OCAD University; on the Board of Directors of the Power Plant, Toronto). They have power and a mandate to reconfigure a national cultural policy that contests the hegemonic, colonial narratives of nationhood.

We stand today in the Congress of the Arts Council of Norway, and there is no better forum in which to discuss how to act to transform Norway into the decolonisation leader it set out to be almost four decades ago. We in the art world have the power to instigate that transformation. This is this the goal that has shaped much of our own programme in OCA over the last few years, and which I will comments upon later.

This goal draws inspiration from the planetary strength with which Indigenous thinking is affecting the realms of culture, in the de-canonisation of knowledge and infrastructures, and in the indigenisation of current impulses that affect the environmental, scientific and climate-change debates of our times.



'The Longest Walk,' Red Power Indigenous Rights Movement, USA, 1978.

If I place such an accent on the late 1970s and early 1980s, it is because the massive mobilisations of Indigenous peoples during these years demanding cultural and environmental rights heralded an era of new international Indigenous futures, and Alta was a part of them. This was the period of “The Longest Walk” of 1978, during the American Indian rights movement mobilisations;



Aboriginal People Fighting for Constitutional Protection, Ottawa Parliament Hill, 1981.

the Maori uprisings, such as the occupation of Bastion Point in 1978 by the Orakei Maori Action Committee; and the mobilisations of Ottawa's Parliament Hill of 1981, where a 6,000 strong First Nations group demanded the protection of Indigenous rights within the Canadian constitution.

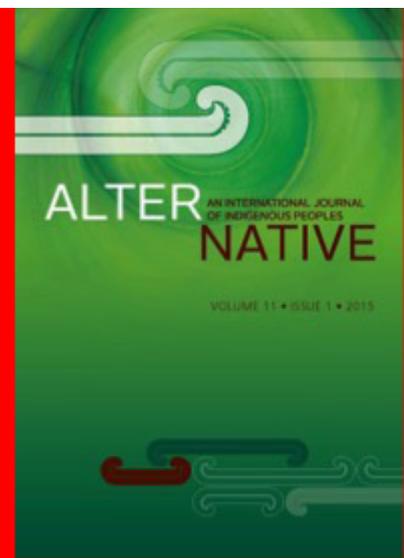
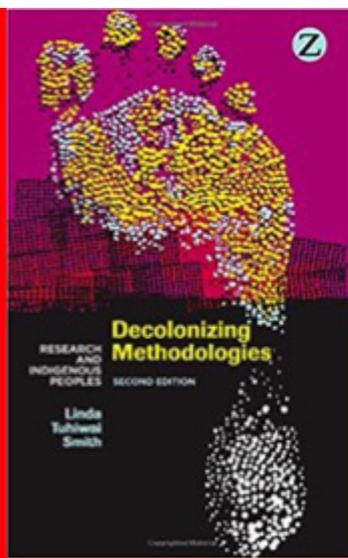
Were these socio-political events part of a wider zeitgeist in art theory?



Hans Ragnar Mathisen, *Sábmi*, 1975

From the 1960s onwards, feminism and ecology, Afro-feminism and Indigenous philosophies of old found common ground as part of the wider social justice movements. Indigenous artistic practices fought for the decolonisation of processes and languages (as in this early work by Keviselie/Hans Ragnar Mathisen, which returned the stolen Sami language to its landscape).

Afro-American poet Audre Lord's writings of the late 1970s claimed the interconnectedness of race, class, ethnicity, and species relations (or "intersectionality" as it is defined today). In 1979, the French philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard wrote "La Condition Post-Moderne", the theory of which was largely influenced by these earlier social movements as well as by witnessing the Holocaust, the end of French colonialism in Vietnam and Algeria, and the decline of the Soviet Bloc. Lyotard announced the end of a Modernity, as defined by the grand narrative. He questioned Modernity itself as monopoly of power, and his book heralded a postmodern era of multiple narratives.



Third Text: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture (1987-)

Decolonising Methodologies, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999)

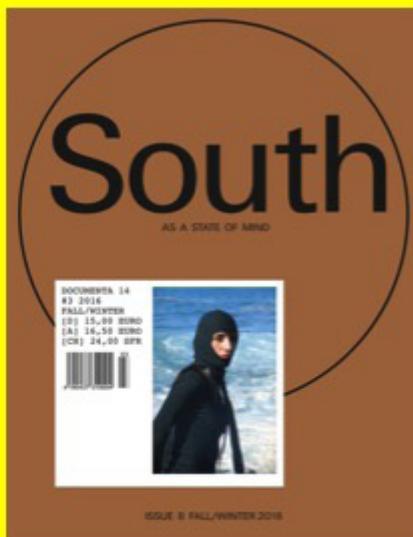
AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples (2005-)

As canonical Western theory was challenged in the 1970s, the 1980s and 1990s saw a growing body of post-colonial and post-modern theories emerging (particularly in ex-colonies and colonising nations of old). The list of authors is long... Indigenous scholarship gained recognition too in these years, as a discourse that stood on its own two feet, declaring that there can be no post-colonial theory for Indigenous peoples who are still today under colonial settlers' domination. Together, their scholarship transformed universities, museums and art centres, international conferences, biennials and other forums, and is documented within such influential platforms as the journal "Third Text" (the editorial board of which I had the pleasure of being a member of in the late 1990s).

Indigenous theorists such as Maori Linda Tuhiwai Smith contributed groundbreaking thinking as in her publication "Decolonising Methodologies", 1999, which transformed the field of educational research, its spatial form and critical epistemology. In Sapmi, Rauna Kuokkanen, Harald Gasky, Gunvor Guttorm and many others have made tremendous contributions to Indigenous scholarship, as have for example the Kahnawake scholar Taiaiake Alfred, Turtle Island/ Canada. Amongst other forums, I might point to the AlterNative journal founded in 2005 in Aotearoa/ New Zealand: a highly influential platform for the documentation of global Indigenous scholarship.

All of this has developed in tandem with a growing corpus of Indigenous law worldwide, including legal scholars like the Maori Clare Charters and the Indigenous Hawaiian Mililani Trask, and in Sapmi the prestigious figures of Matthias Åhren, Øyvind Ravna and Ande Somby, amongst others. Neither can one ignore the growing influence within Western theory of ecological studies in an era of massive botanical and zoological extinctions.

Nor can one disregard the philosophical/art theoretical questioning of humans' position in the world and their relation to others (the so-called "more than human" matrix). The latter was formulated within Object Oriented Ontology, New Materialism and Eco-Feminism, and what has been heralded as the Anthropocene era by some or the Necrocene era by others. To which I might only add that Indigenous philosophers would argue these new theories are another form of Western colonisation of Indigenous knowledge.



South as a State of Mind #8 [documenta 14 #3], 2016: 'Windless Path' by Synnøve Persen.

Afterall #44, 2017 : Two articles on Hans Ragnar Mathisen and an article by Carola Grahn.

In 2017, the next step in Indigenous cultural maturation is the Indigenous Critical Turn. Here Indigenous thinkers are not seeking acceptance from the dominant art world, but engagement as a parallel but equally valid discourse. Indigenous criticism from among Indigenous artists and writers, and with a capital C as Westerners know it, is emerging globally. It is being built as a multi-cultural toolbox. While the best critics to discuss Indigenous practices are initially going to be Indigenous, there is much space for others. This is what we have seen over the last year, both in the last two editions of the UK art journal "Afterall" and in Documenta's Journal "South as a State of Mind" running throughout 2016-17.

stryker trådene

tiden

glir

fjellene

åpne

synger uten lyd

Part of Synnøve Persen's *Vindløs Sti*, 1992.

Published in South as a State of Mind #8 [documenta 14 #3], 2016

One goal of the Indigenous critique is to “indigenise”, i.e. to promote Indigenous ways of being and knowing that are better for our mutual continuance on this planet than the ways that currently rule Indigenous peoples. Therefore, anyone who can combine the best of Western critical approaches with Indigenous world views to produce Indigenous criticism is welcome and necessary in order to build bridges of knowledge and reconciliation.

With all of this in mind, it becomes clear that the great interest in Sami arts we are witnessing today is not simply a fashionable trend in a fickle art world charmed by its exoticness (by the way, the term ‘exotic’ is also a reassertion of colonialism) but rather, part of historical processes that are reaching a high point of recognition and respect in our times.

Therefore, to discuss Sami issues is to discuss global issues; Sami narratives are not part of a provincial chapter of Norwegian history, but an interconnected element of global history¹.

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To consider the Sami agenda is not to struggle with the so-called modernisation of communities and practices that are sometimes described as being embedded in the past. In this regard, the term tradition is problematic as it is a Western invention of the 19th century (ftnote), coined to separate forms of knowledge, and deeply imbricated in the trappings of Modernity and the Empire.

And the power of Indigenous thinking is that it contests those inventions, and asserts its place as a body of thought of, and for, the future. In short, it's important to recognise that Sami practices and thinking are transformative, innovative and futuristic.

As much as post-colonial and Indigenous thinking have broadened the reference terms of art history, curatorial practices, critical writing and museology, diversification today is still often tokenistic. We need institutions in Norway and the Nordic region to go the way of the three Ps: the samification of Personnel, Projects and Publics. This means posts for Sami professionals beyond Sapmi, at all hierarchical levels; it means projects relating to Sami artistic practices and experiences as an integral part of our programmes, and it means building sustainable Sami and non-Sami publics to engage in Sami and Indigenous narratives.

In OCA, our considerations regarding Sapmi started in 2014. At the time, we discussed presenting a Nordic Pavilion project (at the Venice Biennale) based on the Daidajoavku (Sami Artist Group) work, for their significance was already clear to us then. But we realised we couldn't approach this project without embarking on a full understanding of Sapmi's recent history, building relationships, and adding a great deal of learning and institutional critique in the process. In 2015 we started in earnest to implement a long-term connection with Sapmi.



Symposium at the Sami Parliament, 2016.

Panel discussion with Hans Ragnar Mathisen, Britta Marakatt Labba and Synnøve Persen together with Jan-Erik Lundström.

An address on the rhetorics of Western law and indigenous philosophies of justice by Ánde Somby.

Along the way, we have been amazed by the generosity and inspirational practices of Sami artists, scholars and institutional leaders, as well as other Sami thinkers, civilians and allies to Sapmi. We are deeply grateful to them all for sharing their perspectives with us. During this time, we organised OCA's programme based on professional collaborations with institutions and communities both large and small in Sapmi.

Whilst continuing our many widespread tasks in OCA in general, the projects we have developed over the last three years concerning Sapmi have aimed to do various things. On one hand, to increase the knowledge, awareness and competence of our OCA team regarding Sapmi to a sustainable level; and on the other hand, to engage in a variety of roles as supporters, facilitators, and at times curators. Our goal has always been to empower different Sami practitioners and narratives nationally and internationally, through visibility platforms, channelling OCA's resources into projects building experience and knowledge, as well as connecting Sapmi and Norway to the essential and current global discourse, and vice versa.



'Museums on Fire': Web interventions by Carola Grahn.

There have been many projects: documentary film commissions portraying Sami thinkers; discussions and screenings in Tromsø as part of *Pile o' Sapmi*;



'Museums on Fire!': symposium taking place within a scenography by Anders Sunna, 20-21 April, 2017.

a symposium challenging Western museology in the face of the Indigenous turn in global discourse;



'Museums on Fire': Concert with Sofia Jannok

and artworks commissioned from Sami artists.



Čoahkkaneapmi. Working towards Máze Dáiddasiidii
An Indigenous Artist Residency in Máze.

We are co-catalysing a future Indigenous artist's residency in the heritage town of Maze (the initial phase featured three workshops with a strong emphasis on Indigenous methodologies); and internationally we also supported Sami speakers in the prestigious Creative Time Summit in Toronto this year, and the forthcoming "Indigenous Curator Network" project (organised by the Canada Arts Council), both taking place in Turtle Island/Canada.



**LET THE
RIVER FLOW**

**THE SOVEREIGN
WILL AND
THE MAKING
OF A NEW
WORLDLINESS**

Our commitment continues into the future. In 2018, we will launch “Sovereign Words”, during the Dhaka Art Summit, bringing together Indigenous art writers from across the globe, including four Sapmi peers; and we will inaugurate the exhibition “Let the River Flow. The Sovereign Will and the Making of a New Worldliness”, focusing on Alta and its global legacy today, working together with a Sami Advisory Group. Furthermore, we are building new working methods with our sister agencies in Finland and Sweden to engage with Sapmi together across the Nordic region and internationally, as well as collaborating with arts councils in Australia, Aotaroa/New Zealand and Turtle Island/Canada. Our commitment is systemic: early next year we will announce the first mandate for a Sami advisor on the artists and curators grant jury. Furthermore, we are discussing how to align our internal structures with best decolonial practices internationally.

Conclusion

During this year of Tråante 2017, and in the context of this essential edition of the Arts Council Congress, both of which I applaud full-heartedly, I make this appeal:

We have the obligation to work collectively to make a new action plan across Norway. Let us indigenise our mission statements, indigenise the three Ps of our institutions for the long term; let us bring a de-colonial reality to our midst and secure the path towards reconciliation. Let us find the Sami within us all. In so doing, we will recapture the promise of a future that was heralded 38 years ago.

“I thought I would peep
into the future
I saw the sun”

Aillohas (Nils Aslak Valkeapaa), 1985

Let us pledge to action, so that together we may transform Áillohaš's mourning tones of 1985 into a powerful celebration that if I may be so bold, would read as follows:

“I thought I would peep
into the future
I saw the sun.”

Gihtu!

All Sami terminology used in this paper is written in Northern Sami.