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Imperial Debris, Vibrant Matter

Plastic in the Hands of Asian American and Kanaka Maoli Artists

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Every year, up to 12 million metric tons of plastic enter the ocean, where they disintegrate, bleed toxins, and are eaten by various creatures (Jambeck et al.). The carcasses of birds and whales burst with rainbows of plastic bits. Some plastic returns to land by washing ashore or traveling from fish bellies into human bellies. Most plastic will swirl as ocean confetti for centuries. Plastic has become a prominent member of Pacific ecosystems. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch, Kamilo Beach in Hawai'i, and Henderson Island are but a few well-publicized sites: the patch is presently estimated to be twice the size of Texas; 90 percent of the 1,500-feet-long Kamilo shoreline is covered in plastic; and Henderson Island, just 14.4 square miles in area, hosts approximately 38 million pieces of plastic that weigh 18 tons.[1]

Plastic is often treated as consumer excess, environmental hazard, and philosophical problem. Environmentalists have campaigned against the use of plastic (e.g., bottles and straws). Philosophers have considered how the longevity of plastic compels meditation on large scales of space and time (e.g., Morton). Yet the relationship of plastic to race, colonialism, and empire is not often discussed even as racialized and Indigenous peoples have been associated with the qualities of plastic to disqualify them from citizenship and the body politic. Michelle Huang astutely observes that Asian Americans have been racialized through attributes of plastic: inauthentic (perpetual foreigner), endlessly pliable and yet durable (model minority), and uncontainable and swarming (yellow peril). Indigenous peoples also have been imbued with plastic qualities. Waves of Indian removal and the "logic of elimination"

that defines settler colonialism have treated Indigenous peoples as elastic and disposable (Wolfe). Settler law and culture have made Indigenous peoples inauthentic by default, demanding proof of Native identity through blood quantum and circumscribed performances of tradition (Kauanui; Povinelli).

If colonialism and imperialism have been animated by dominant strands of Western thought in which culture is the site of meaning and creativity, if nature is devoid of value and purpose, and if racialized and Indigenous peoples are positioned here or there depending on sociopolitical needs, then where does plastic fit? What happens when racialized and Indigenous peoples work with the fraught substance to address empire and ecology? This chapter offers a preliminary response to these big questions by exploring Asian American and Kanaka Maoli artworks: Wiena Lin's *Disassembly Line* and *Altar/Retail Kiosk*; Maikaʻi Tubbs's *Under My Skin*; and Linh Huỳnh's and my *Earthly Correspondences*. These artists use the very wastes they have been racialized as in different and perhaps incommensurable ways.[2] In their work, plastic is not only an emblem of wasteful consumption and environmental upheaval. It also functions as "imperial debris," Ann Laura Stoler's term for refuse abandoned by colonists and endured by Native and racialized peoples, and as "vibrant matter," Jane Bennett's term for material things functioning as potent forces rather than passive objects. The artworks show that while plastic marks the duration and transformation of coloniality, it can also be a vital co-participant in building alternative futures from within ecological ruination.

This chapter proposes that plastic can expand and unsettle colonial orders of being that underpin the Anthropocene. Rather than distancing themselves from plastic to ascend into humanity, racialized and Indigenous peoples might rework the material despite its status as consumer waste, ecological threat, and racializing substance. Doing so may generate futures for racialized and colonized entities, both human and not.

Imperial Plastic

Plastic first enjoyed widespread use following World War II due to its utilitarian and aesthetic features. The substance proved to be durable and manipulable while also strikingly colorful and seductively smooth, if needed. Plus, it was cheap. Consumer capitalism facilitated the integration of plastic with ordinary life in many parts of the world. It can be hard to imagine a future

without plastic; the material is in clothing, packaging, toys, furniture, tools, prosthetics, vehicles, electronics, buildings, weapons, protective gear, sports equipment, musical instruments, cosmetics, and medical equipment—to name just a few things (Zurkow). By 2011, 300 million tons of plastic were being annually produced and only 10 percent of it was being recycled (Taylor). Plastic does not biodegrade. It will disrupt ecosystems as it breaks down over hundreds of years.

I treat plastic as imperial debris to situate ecological ruination in the ongoing life of coloniality. According to Stoler, imperial debris is abandoned in formerly colonized regions, where its effects unfold over long stretches of time, as seen in Agent Orange in Vietnam and nuclear radiation in the South Pacific. The duration of imperial debris means that colonialism and postcolonialism are neither smoothly continuous nor sharply discontinuous. Imperial debris shows how coloniality may continue to affect sociopolitical and environmental issues even if self-determination has been achieved.

Plastic does not become imperial debris only by being discarded by colonizers. It can become imperial debris as it passes through and accumulates in Native waterways and when it arrives from abroad in once and still occupied lands. Plastic in the United States enjoys a brief life before sizable portions are whisked away to recycling centers in Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, and, until recently, China (Taylor). Unsurprisingly, these and other areas of Southeast Asia are where most plastic bids farewell to land (Jambeck et al.). The transpacific life of plastic is shaped by a global industry of waste and recycling. It is also shaped by natural forces. As plastic breaks down, it becomes more susceptible to the push and pull of animals, wind, and water. It is blown into rivers and carried out to sea, ferried hundreds of miles by pelagic currents, held captive in ocean gyres, and heaved en masse onto distant beaches.

As it travels and settles down, plastic contributes to imperialist and colonialist disruptions of Native relationships to land, water, and nonhuman life. It afflicts humans through years of chemical exposure and ingestion, especially those who live near recycling and waste sites in the Global South, and proves fatal to animals who confuse it for mouthwatering food. These effects are akin to "slow violence," Rob Nixon's term for violences that unfold incrementally and subtly, and thus cannot be tied to immediate causes and specific events. The durability of plastic means that racialized and Indigenous groups will endure its slow violence for centuries to come.

As it transforms the Pacific without an end in sight, plastic exhibits a

peculiar liveliness. "The focus," Stoler thus writes of imperial debris, "is not on inert remains but on the histories they recruit and on their vital refigurations" (348). Imperial debris welcomes the insights of new materialisms, which discern an effectivity of matter that does not rely on human guidance. According to Bennett, everything is forceful. The potency of matter depends on the assemblages of which it is a part, not whether it exhibits reason, intentionality, consciousness, or even life. Plastic interweaves histories of its transformation across production, consumption, and disposal; histories of colonialism; and earthy histories of water and wind currents.

As imperial debris and vibrant matter, plastic does not reproduce but extends and transforms colonial structures. It calls for patience with a strange idea: coloniality is partly shaped anew by matter. Western modernist, colonialist parsings of life and matter hold the latter to be passive; matter might put a check on colonial projects, though humans can establish control by marshaling enough ingenuity and willpower. However, in this new materialist twist to imperial debris, matter also positively expands the reach, power, and trajectory of coloniality. Imperial debris is not a mere tool or vessel for colonial plans. It shapes coloniality even if it is not presided over by colonizers and settlers. Its effects cannot be fully intended, anticipated, or controlled. Plastic attests to the persistence and metamorphosis of coloniality and thus, as Stoler notes of imperial debris, calls for conceptual revision, attention to nonlinear temporalities, and exhumation of alternative futures. How does plastic shift the ongoing life of coloniality?

Plastic has carried a modern racist and colonialist order of being that disentangles certain humans from dehumanized peoples and nonhuman entities in order to secure mastery. "Plastic represents the promises of modernity," writes Heather Davis, "the promise of sealed, perfected, clean, smooth abundance. It encapsulates the fantasy of ridding ourselves of the dirt of the world, of decay, of malfeasance" ("Life and Death in the Anthropocene" 349). These fantasies allude to the modern subject as masterful: the malleability of plastic suggests a (racialized and gendered) triumph of mind over matter, while the durability of plastic signals a transcendence of finitude, resilience, and a capacity to shield against the muck of the earth. We might recall that hygienic fantasies of modernity are bound up with racist concerns over sanitation in encounters with the colonized (e.g., Ahuja). We might also recall Sylvia Wynter's insight that modernity is defined by the overrepresentation of white, colonialist Man for humanity, which has abjected racialized and Indigenous peoples and, one might add, nonhuman entities. The modern-

ist rise of liberalism initiated a transvaluation of beliefs, practices, and life-worlds, the carving of the planet into zones of civilization and primitivity, the displacement and slaughter of Indigenous peoples, the enslavement of Africans and Native Americans, and the indentured servitude of Asians in the Americas (Lowe). The insatiable colonialist hunger for resources and land evinces a drive to mastery, which, according to Julietta Singh, disentangles all beings and sorts them into dominant subjects and subordinated objects (10). The widespread dissemination of plastic extends a colonialist order of being. Plastic hails us all as masterful subjects in rapid, thoughtless cycles of use and toss as though our waste cannot affect us.

Plastic reshapes discussions of the Anthropocene, the hotly debated epoch defined by the geological impact of humanity attributed to industrialization, nuclear testing, electronic wastes, and the advent of agriculture. Some people have offered "Plasticene" to underscore the planetary imprint of plastic (Reed). This sweeping notion obscures those who shoulder the burdens of plastic, such as its accumulation throughout the Pacific, the extraction and catastrophic spillage of oil, and the dumping of plastic waste across the Global South. Indigenous scholars and allies have argued that the Anthropocene is a late reverberation of colonial violence that had been isolated to Native peoples and ecosystems. As Heather Davis and Zoe Todd insist, the "logic of the Anthropocene" originates in the Western colonialist "severing of relations between humans and the soil, between plants and animals, between minerals and our bones" (770). They invoke climate scientists Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin's evidence for humanity's geological impact dating back to 1610, when global carbon dioxide levels plummeted due to the extermination of millions of Native Americans. Tying Lewis and Maslin to Wynter, Dana Luciano reminds us that colonial genocide in the Americas began in 1492 with "the spread of a humanism that has failed much of humanity, a failure to which even the Arctic ice cores can bear witness, and that in doing so has deeply damaged the planet as well." Plastic is a geological marker of colonial orders of being, but unlike ice core samples it is not a passive record. It is a vibrant residue of colonialist mastery proliferating beyond control that racialized and colonized groups in particular, human and nonhuman alike, must learn to live with. From the point of view of plastic as imperial debris, the Anthropocene is the fallout of colonialist Man's efforts to master all that he is not.

Colonial orders of being are extended by environmentalist and humanist positions that do not treat plastic as imperial debris. For example, a deep

ecologist response to plastic might seek to curb its production in order to scale back human impact on the earth. However, as Davis observes, "The desire to create for ourselves pristine environments has either dangerously backfired . . . or has been dumped elsewhere, where toxicities are accumulated at unprecedented rates by racialized, feminized, and impoverished bodies" ("Imperceptibility and Accumulation" 192). For racialized and Indigenous peoples, perhaps saying "no" to plastic, by holding distance from the racialized substance and keeping apace with environmental modernity, may be a path to humanization. That response leaves intact conjunctions between race and plastic. It does not address how settler states have treated the racialized and colonized as incompetent for ecological stewardship despite centuries of living intimately and sustainably with land and water. What other relationships to plastic could there be? Can plastic unsettle colonial orders of being? Although it has been an icon of ecological ruination, might plastic lead to other futures in and beyond the Anthropocene?

The rest of this chapter explores reconfigurations of plastic by racialized and Indigenous peoples. It focuses on artworks produced for Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center culture labs, which are pop-up museums of art, music, films, performance, and lectures that seek to build community (Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center). Lasting several days and attended by thousands of people, each culture lab explores a theme. Wiena Lin's *Disassembly Line* and *Altar/Retail Kiosk* were made for CTRL+ALT: A Culture Lab on Imagined Futures in New York City on 11–12 November 2016. Maikaʻi Tubbs's *Under My Skin* and Linh Huỳnh's and my *Earthy Correspondences* were for ʻAe Kai: A Culture Lab on Convergence in Honolulu, Hawaiʻi, on 7–9 July 2017. Refusing the call of mastery behind plastic and negotiating their treatment as plastic objects, these artists engage plastic as imperial debris. They rework plastic from a vessel of slow violence to a vital source of relations and futures unbound from colonial orders of being.

Disassembly Line and *Altar/Retail Kiosk*

Wiena Lin's *Disassembly Line* and *Altar/Retail Kiosk* use electronic wastes to address the ecological impacts of imperial debris. Composed of plastics and metals, e-waste becomes imperial debris as it traffics across global networks of extraction, consumption, disposal, and salvage. The planned obsolescence of electronic devices and cultivated desire for the latest gadgets have accel-

Fig. 13.1. Wiena Lin, *Disassembly Line*, 2016.

erated consumption cycles, such that cell phones often enjoy the lifespan of a pet hamster. Deathliness haunts the brief life of electronics: the dangerous mining of rare metals in Africa, the dismal labor conditions in Asian factories like Foxconn, and the distribution of toxic materials throughout the Global South. Because it is often disposed of intact, does not biodegrade, and is produced in massive quantities, e-waste may compose a future strata of earth, yet another marker of the Anthropocene (Parikka).

Disassembly Line addresses circuits of e-waste. Visitors wear Hazmat suits, sit around a workshop carousel, and pick apart keyboards, cell phones, and circuit boards. The endless rotation of the conveyor belt and the longevity of plastics and metals envelope participants within the inescapability of imperial debris. The activity shifts participants from consumers to workers and salvagers by altering relationships with electronics that are in many hands yet unfamiliar beyond use. *Disassembly Line* foregrounds the disposal side of consumer electronics; closes the gap, often so wide for privileged groups in

the Global North, between human and trash; and bridges consumers in the United States and recipients of e-wastes across the Pacific. If electronics are supposed to flow into the United States and e-wastes are meant to flow out, then Lin reassembles a transpacific geography of imperial debris by bringing trash back home.

Altar/Retail Kiosk provokes a closer look at the reworking of imperial debris. It is a collection of artifacts that are at once technological and spiritual, trash and relic, dead object and vital thing. Composed of reclaimed wastes glued together by plastic resin, they gesture to plastiglomerate, or composites of rock, sand, coral, shells, and wood fused by molten plastic that may serve as a geological token of human activity (Robertson). They blur the line between commodity fetishism and animism, between the reverence afforded to technological goods and the sacredness of objects held to be alive. They may evoke outrage over slow violence, but their ornamentation evokes play and even whimsy. Lin complicates the affective reception of imperial debris, suspending moralized reactions to plastic that obscure how racialized and Indigenous peoples creatively rework waste from the Global North.

Altar/Retail Kiosk intersperses colonial orders of being with alternative relationalities. One of the pieces, *Sparkle Chicken*, is a white bucket of drumsticks, whose meat is a shiny ball of compact disc shards melded to chicken bones. The fusion of "meat" and bone binds together sharp contrasts: the synthetic and the organic, jagged lines and smooth curves, lively sparkles and dull decay. By evoking fast food and increasingly defunct analog media, *Sparkle Chicken* juxtaposes speedy consumption practices with different rates of decomposition. It also underscores the entanglement of expendable lives: nonhuman animals that are factory farmed and human consumers of fast food, especially lower-class, racialized laborers defined by "slow death" (Berlant). Finally, from the standpoint of the white bucket, the drumsticks appear as racial excess to be contained. Yet from that of the drumsticks, the bucket seems peculiar due to its lack of detail and seeming inability to hold an unwieldy assemblage of refuse. *Sparkle Chicken* evokes these incompatible viewpoints to leverage an aggregation of racialized humans and nonhumans against the colonial order of being.

Altar/Retail Kiosk emphasizes that mastery is antithetical to endurance within ecological ruination. It challenges faith in scientific innovation to solve ecological crises, for techno-utopian fantasies committed to human mastery over nature ignore a key problem of plastic: how to live within the ecological ruination induced by imperial debris. *Altar/Retail Kiosk* underscores that

Fig. 13.2. Wiena Lin, *Sparkle Chicken*, 2016.

Fig. 13.3. Untitled from *Altar/Retail Kiosk*, 2016.

racialized and colonized peoples cannot wish away this problem. For example, one talisman made of wood, circuit board, cowrie shells, string, cables, and a resin amulet recalls the repurposing of waste from the Global North into tools and toys. Endurance within ecological ruination may depend upon intimate connections between the wastes of empire (racialized humans, discarded nonhumans) that are defined by living with, not living over.

By refiguring relationships with plastic and e-wastes, *Disassembly Line* and *Altar/Retail Kiosk* point to futures defined by endurance with imperial debris. Racialized and colonized peoples can and have repurposed imperial debris to disidentify from colonialist Man, defined by mastery, bodily integrity, and bounded subjectivity. Plastic may help to reassemble dehumanized peoples and nonhuman entities; develop alternative practices, affects, and entangled embodiments; and pursue futures shaped by collaborative endurance.

Under My Skin

Kanaka Maoli artist Maikaʻi Tubbs also reclaims waste. "I think a lot about how my ancestors worked with trash," reflects Tubbs. "Until we got colonized we used everything" (Krafft). Colonialism did not only categorize types of being; it also divided beings into valuable and discardable parts, into resource and garbage. As Singh points out, mastery is "a splitting of the object that is mastered from itself" (10). These partitions are left untouched by deep ecologists who posit that scaling back human impact will restore harmony to nature as though one could address environment and empire separately. Working instead with Kanaka Maoli notions of relationality, Tubbs decolonizes usefulness by repurposing imperial debris amid colonial theft, deprivation, and ruination. He enables the materials abjected by colonial orders of being to work against those very orders.

While Lin gestures to plastic shipped overseas, Tubbs invokes the oceanic itself in *Under My Skin*. The piece is composed of plastic marine debris encased in a large, wrinkled slab of "microbial leather." Tubbs cultivated bacteria cultures that grew into sizable panels, which he left to dry out in the sun. Because bacterial and solar powers helped to shape the end product, *Under My Skin* is anti-mastery. The piece affirms the generative capacities of bacteria in conjunction with plastic. *Under My Skin* is a vivid rendition of the "plastisphere," a term for bacterial ecosystems thriving on plastic marine debris shorter than five millimeters (Zettler, Mincer, and Amaral-Zettler). The piece's appearance as a stomach references the ingestion of plastic by human and nonhuman animals and also the 2016 discovery of *Ideonella sakaiensis*, a bacterium that has evolved to metabolize polyethylene terephthalate (the material of water bottles) (Yoshida et al.).

By foregrounding entanglements of humans, bacteria, and plastic, *Under My Skin* defies colonial orders of being. What Neel Ahuja calls "bioinsecurities" associate racialized humans and microbes with each other, driving Western imperialism to quarantine them in order to protect certain (white) humans.[3] To reconfigure the sensorium of bioinsecurities, Tubbs encourages people to touch the brown, gritty microbial leather. This is intimate contact with what is under our skin. We humans carry two to three pounds of bacteria in and on our bodies and consume plastic almost every time we eat seafood or drink water (Tyree and Morrison). In an age of chemical and biological toxicity, colonialist partitions against waste, bacteria, and those humans and animals rendered as such cannot be maintained (e.g., Zahara

Fig. 13.4. Detail shot of Maikaʻi Tubbs, *Under My Skin*, 2017.

and Hird). *Under My Skin* embraces toxicity, not as affliction but as intimacy with microbes, plastic, and other waste: a queer condition made tactile in the wrinkles, folds, and textures of a rescaled microbiome that unsettles colonialist sensoria (Chen).

This sensorial shift dislodges the hold of colonialist Man through keener attunement to nonhuman worlds. While *Altar/Retail Kiosk* emphasizes human endurance, *Under My Skin* attests to the capacity of nonhumans to reclaim imperial debris for their survival. It enfolds its audience into the aquatic lifeworld of microorganisms for whom plastic is not waste but home and good food. This "submerged perspective," as Macarena Gómez-Barris might call it, disrupts the sensorium of extractive capital in which the affective range of plastic is reduced to use and toss or, in deep ecologist responses, to condemn and refuse. But what is plastic to the microbe? Evoking a kind of "alien phenomenology," Ian Bogost's term for experience turned inside out due to communion with an alien element within humanity, *Under My Skin* places people in touch with nonhuman worlds beyond colonialist frames—worlds that are "out there" but also "in here."

By underscoring entanglement, toxicity, and nonhuman affect, *Under My Skin* untethers futurity from dead-end responses to the Anthropocene that advance the colonialist separation of humanity from nature. In the face of anthropogenic climate change and mass species extinction, it is easy to believe that humanity has overpowered nature; as Jedediah Purdy dramatically puts it, humans have "denaturalized nature." Such a view reifies colonialist partitions that render nature mechanical and purposeless, imbue humanity alone with freedom and supreme value, and have consequently furnished ecological damage. Tubbs offers a different view in the description for *Under My Skin*: "In a world of post-consumer waste, what counts as nature?" Plastic is not an artificial threat to a static nature but a component of nature under transformation. In this view, which intertwines with a minor strand of Western thought, nature is dynamic, self-generative, and incomplete; its exteriority is constituted not by what is human or artificial but by its own future forms.[4] This figuration diffuses the colonialist racialization of countless beings as premodern, inauthentic, and to be mastered by those who are humanized. By foregrounding a Kanaka Maoli ontology in which all beings are kin, Tubbs insists on forms of relation that have endured among colonialist orderings and that, if activated, may summon other futures (Goldberg-Hiller and Silva).

Earthy Correspondences

Earthly Correspondences engages plastic to explore possibilities for contact, connection, and care within ecological ruination. Artist and environmentalist Linh Huỳnh and I collaborated on the piece for ʻAe Kai, a culture lab in Honolulu, Hawaiʻi. Our installation replicated a shoreline like Kamilo Beach of which trash has become a constitutive feature. We adorned the walls with a colorful wave of marine debris from 808 Cleanups, an Oʻahu beach cleanup organization. Huỳnh crafted jellyfish sculptures from discarded plastic bottles and a geological structure made of reclaimed cardboard and bottle caps. She hung up the jellyfish and "living" time capsules, which would be kept open rather than sealed and buried. I composed an ocean of over fifteen hundred plastic bottles that were bound by salvaged fishing net and buoys. I screened a slow-motion video of ocean waves over the bottles. The video and its audio were desynced to mark the unhinging of nature in the plastification of oceans.

While seeking to deepen awareness of rapid consumption and extreme wastefulness, Huỳnh and I underscore the entanglement of humans with the earth. The title "*Earthly Correspondences*" refers to our acknowledgment, shared by Lin and Tubbs, that humans, plastics, and wastes are all earthly beings. We hope that the status of earthling (Bennett, "Earthling, Now and Forever?") might activate forms of care unrestricted by colonial orders of being by race, species, and materiality; the earthling crosses boundaries between colonialist Man and his others. The title also references two epistolary activities. Huỳnh's *Honua: A Living Time Capsule* invites visitors to write messages to the earth or to write a message as if they were the earth speaking to humans. Participants deposit messages into the living time capsules, which others can peruse. Here, the earth serves as a repository of lively traces. My *Message in a Plastic Bottle* involves the sea of plastic bottles, some of which contain messages. Participants select a bottle, replace the message inside with one of their own, and return the bottle to the plastic ocean. They use the bottles as protective barriers to imaginatively preserve a message for centuries. The activity of picking and returning bottles positions visitors as wasters and salvagers, forcing confrontation with the fact that plastic can be moved around and reworked but not fully extricated or mastered.

Earthly Correspondences sensitizes participants to their reach, discernible in plastic and underwritten by the missive. Plastic may be in our hands

Fig. 13.5. Linh Huỳnh and Chad Shomura, *Earthy Correspondences*, 2017.

only as long as it takes to unwrap a candy bar, but it will linger for centuries. If our influence is extended through the duration of plastic, then our touch is felt by others across space and time. *Earthy Correspondences* foregrounds this connectedness. In the epistolary activities, one can receive a message only because someone else wrote it. Messages are deposited without guarantee of reception and without knowledge of their potential effects. Even if we never meet, we are present to each other through what we leave behind, whether it be trash or a message. This stranger intimacy could play a vital role in our lives. It binds together what precedes and follows us, whether human or not, whether alive or not. *Earthly Correspondences* invites reflection on how imperial debris will impact those in the future and how the spatiotemporal scale of care has been likewise expanded.

Earthly Correspondences emphasizes that we share a planet. Plastic can separate and contain, as Davis points out, but it may also forge powerful

connections ("Life and Death in the Anthropocene" 348). *Earthly Correspondences* repurposes plastic from imperial debris into connective tissue between earthlings across space and time. Rather than offering a cleanup effort to restore the natural world, it immerses participants in a nature reconfigured by imperial debris. It teases out relations, futures, and forms of care undefined by colonialist orders of being.

Archives of Plastic Futures

Anna Tsing writes, "We are stuck with the problem of living despite economic and ecological ruination. Neither tales of progress nor of ruin tell us how to think about collaborative survival" (19). Imperial debris underscores the racialized and colonialist dimensions of this problem. Just as imperial debris expands and intensifies ecological ruination, so too, if reworked, can it develop alternative relations and futures. What might be learned from Asian American and Kanaka Maoli artists who have used plastic to address empire and environment?

Ecological ruination can be confronted without striving for subjectivity and bodily integrity defined by colonialist separation, enclosure, and a ranking of being by race, species, and materiality. Rather than trying to contain or jettison imperial debris, we might explore all that falls to the wayside of colonialist Man. We might identify as part of nature rather than separate from it. We might take up imperial debris as a problematic though inescapable ally as we strive to mitigate its slow violence. We might refuse positions of mastery long wielded against us. We might develop relations and modes of endurance that leave us transformed. We might grow vigilant for the metamorphosis of coloniality. We might develop a sense of connection across space and time. We might calibrate our range of care to the life of imperial debris.

"Our Plastic Age confronts the issue of duration," writes Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent. "While the manufacture of plastics destroys the archives of life on the earth, its waste will constitute the archives of the twentieth century and beyond" (24). While plastic entails the persistence of coloniality and its damage, imperial debris is not destined to only spread slow violence. It can be creatively incorporated into new forms of collaborative endurance, and that may be one way to deposit care into archives of the future that are presently in the making.

Notes

Many thanks to the editors and reviewers, whose suggestions helped to improve this essay.

1. I thank Yi-Ting Chang for bringing Henderson Island to my attention.

2. Space constraints here do not allow much discussion of the differences between Asian American and Kanaka Maoli engagements with plastic. I want to honor the incommensurability between Asian American and Kanaka Maoli positions that, in my estimation, chiefly arises over issues of land and sovereignty. Hence, I do not use "decolonial" as an umbrella term for these artworks even though they align in collective opposition to colonial orders of being.

3. Similarly, Rachel Lee has asked "whether one can act white toward people of color but not act white toward microbes; and vice versa, whether one can act white toward microbes, but not act white toward people of color" (238).

4. Examples include Spinoza's notion of *natura naturans*, Kant's brief gesture to "anomalous creatures" in his teleological judgment, Thoreau's concept of "the wild," William Connolly's "immanent naturalism," and Jane Bennett's "vital materialism."

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