

Freedom by Other Means: Art as Archives of Decolonisation

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Freedom by Other Means

My intervention in this forum addresses *decolonial freedom*, as developed through the histories of anticolonial freedom movements in the twentieth century, via the questions posed from visual art as material and a field. Freedom *by other means* is an invitation to readers to think of postcolonial freedom and the historical time of the decolonial twentieth century beyond nation-state driven transfers of power, and via the peculiar questions, horizons and problems of the archive as posed by (visual) art. I write from the perspectives – and possibilities – of intellectual histories of modern art practices in twentieth-century South Asia, and the question of the archive within that. More particularly, I attempt to address how the question of the archive poses potentially dynamic sites from where such histories of postcolonial artistic modernities can be written, transforming in the process how we understand the deep histories of decolonisation today. I do so by outlining three ways to animate understandings of decolonial freedom *by other means*: firstly, via archives *astray*; secondly, via archives of *absence*; and thirdly, via *arts of decolonial time*. In these entry points the mechanism of ‘by other means’ both complements arguments being developed within a growing rich field of postcolonial modernisms,¹ and introduces new, dissonant sites for thinking about art, decolonisation and the archive. I will close by making some preliminary methodological and historiographical propositions from my ongoing work, elaborating on what art as archive of decolonisation implies and why decolonial freedom can draw fresh rigour and dynamism from the concept of living archives.

1 via archives *astray*

In 1967, the Secretariat of the Afro-Asian Journalists’ Association (AAJA), a front organisation of the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Association (AAPSO), published a catalogue of anti-

¹ For the growing critical field of postcolonial modernisms, see, among others, Elizabeth Harney, *In Senghor’s Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960–1995*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2004; Iftikhar Dadi, *Modernism and the Art of Muslim South Asia*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2010; Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2015; Sonal Khullar, *Worldly Affiliations: Artistic Practice, National Identity, and Modernism in India, 1930–1990*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2015

imperialist caricatures. The publication was a selection from a wider corpus exhibited earlier in 1966 in Beijing under the ‘Afro-Asian anti-imperialist caricature exhibition’, which was known to have attracted a million visitors, with more than 180 cartoons from twenty-four nations across the Afro-Asian world and the Middle East (see **Figure 1**).² The catalogue, titled *Selections of Afro-Asian People’s Anti-Imperialist Caricatures*, began with a foreword by Mao Zedong, exalting the ‘people of the world’ to ‘be courageous, dare to fight, defy difficulties and advance wave upon wave’.³ With captions in four languages – Arabic, Chinese, English and French – the album entered the transnational circuits of the AAPSO, with circulation across Asia, Africa and the Middle East. In the ‘Introduction’ to the catalogue, the Secretariat of the AAJA asserted their firm belief that ‘this exhibition of caricatures will further promote revolutionary caricatures serving the Afro-Asian peoples, strengthen the militant unity among the caricaturists, journalists and the people of all Afro-Asian countries and encourage them to employ caricature and various other means of propaganda as effective weapons with which to unite and educate the people, and to attach and destroy enemy’.⁴

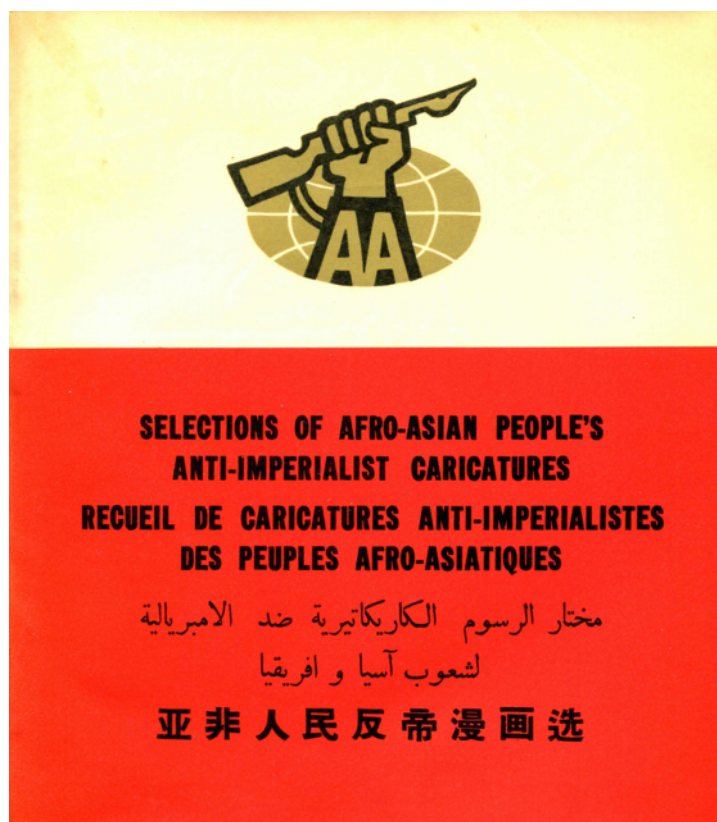


Figure 1: Cover page, *Selections of Afro-Asian People’s Anti-Imperialist Caricatures* exhibition catalogue, Beijing, 1967

- ² See discussion of the exhibition in the context of the wider work of the AAJA in Taomo Zhou, ‘Global reporting from the Third World: the Afro-Asian Journalists’ Association, 1963–1974’, *Critical Asian Studies*, vol 51, no 2, 2019, pp 166–197, 23–24
- ³ *Selections of Afro-Asian People’s Anti-Imperialist Caricatures*, exhibition catalogue, Secretariat of the Afro-Asian Journalists’ Association, Beijing, 1967, p 2
- ⁴ *Ibid*, p 6

When I began work on this body of imagery and the larger archival corpus of the Afro-Asian solidarity forums, I was struck immediately by an uncanny familiarity with some of the cartoons published in the *Selections of Afro-Asian People's Anti-Imperialist Caricatures* catalogue. Anti-imperialist iconographies, and particularly Cold War-era anti-US-imperialist caricatures, share protagonists, metaphors and slogans. My quandary was not about a resonant body of work I would have encountered elsewhere in my broader work around socialist iconography, but, rather, exact caricatures from this album (in order to respect privacy as much as I can, I have chosen to only show here original caricatures from this catalogue; see **Figure 2**) that seem to appear as works by a noted South Asian artist, being displayed as part of their own original political work from the 1970s. When I tried out to point out this discrepancy, I was told instead, somewhat curtly, that these images came from days prior to the 'archive fever', and as political posters or cartoons, reveal fluid political dialogue among artists. I assured my correspondent that my interest as a historian (ie of the political in twentieth-century decolonial art practices) lay not in engaging with the rattles of art world accusations per se, but purely in the archival, even conceptual/methodological implications of such slippages. For in these erasures/re-authorings, lie questions of how we develop lineages of the political in postcolonial art. Our correspondence rounded off smoothly enough, and in the process, I realised (and hopefully communicated, too) that my discomfort lay less with what was clearly a field of copies and more with the pulsating historiographical implications this had.

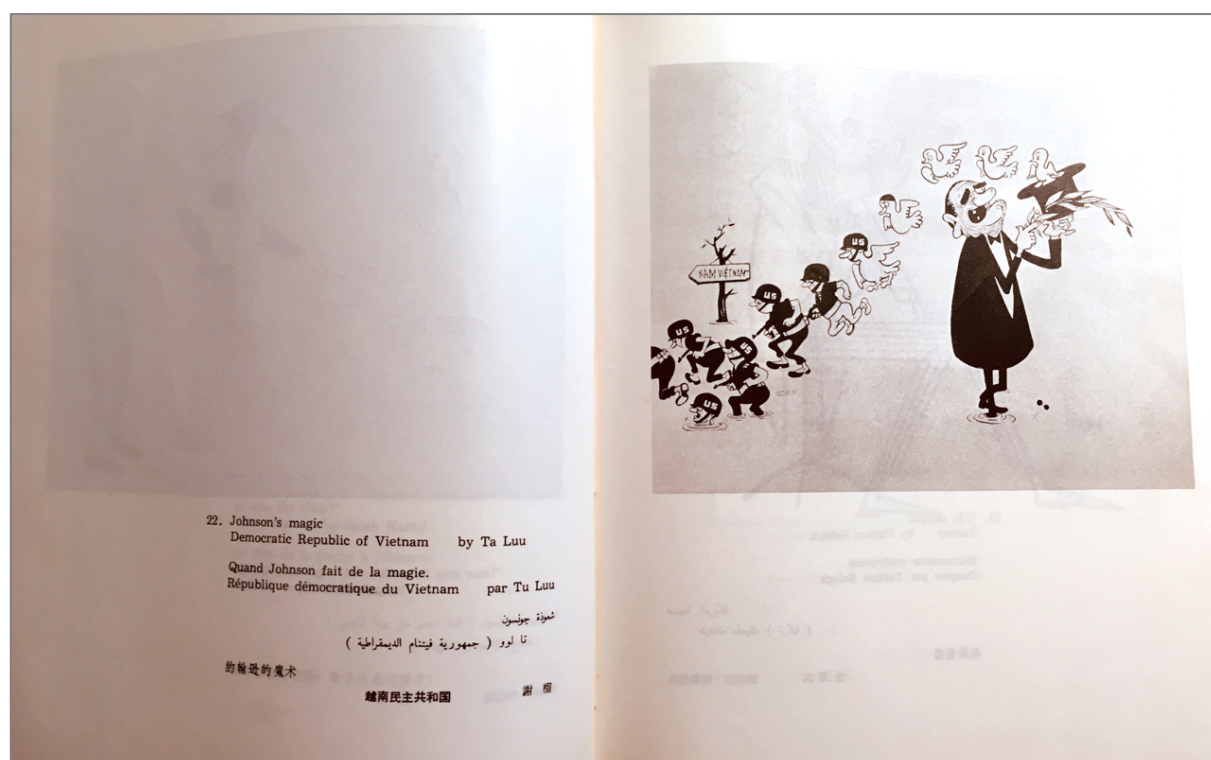


Figure 2: Cartoon in the *Selections of Afro-Asian People's Anti-Imperialist Caricatures* exhibition catalogue, Beijing, 1967

On the one hand, this was an affirming and striking proof that: i) this album was indeed circulating in early-1970s South Asia – possibly via committed niche circuits of the AAPSO – a detail that is not easily accessible in any *archive*; and ii) it excited fascination among the younger set of politically inspired artists working in such milieus, who felt inspired enough to copy/use/circulate in their political work, alongside their own developing art practice at early stages of their now-renowned careers. The Maoist politics, student activisms, grassroots level resistance and growing Dalit activisms under the Dalit Panthers in the early 1970s, within which artists were then participating in this part of the sub-continent, reveal, in fact, what Mao's foreword in the catalogue, and the AAJA Secretariat's introductory text, stated about the global mass appeal of the caricatures in the catalogue. On the other hand, this archive *astray* – via transit, copy, inspired work, misnaming, as much as my own serendipity and the encounter – all revealed *another* archive, albeit ephemeral and perhaps even compromised, of transnational art of decolonisation. Can this art/act of the copy or appropriation itself of anti-imperialist caricature from late-1960s China in mid-1970s South Asia be called art of solidarity, as we, as scholars of aesthetics and decolonisation, pursue in the field today?

I would argue that yes, it can, and particularly as I work more with conceptualising the transnational aesthetics of twentieth-century decolonisation. And unlike the misinformed rage of my correspondent in question, my attempt at correction was not about the obsession with origins or original authorship, or 'archive fever' as I was told, but an encounter – an uncomfortable one, personally – with a *living archive*: one that goes astray, reappears, takes on new identities, and in doing so animates forgotten pasts and origins. In the twenty-first century, with a degree of remoteness from the unique ideological worlds of the twentieth century, when this body of material was exhibited, it becomes an *artist's* private archive. And it can be assumed (bolstered by an art world that still privileges the individual as protagonists of art history) that this archive has the authentic signature of the artist, and thus is a quick resource in narrativising a stable postcolonial lineage of political art – a desire of both the art market and postcolonial/decolonial cultural theory.

But can this body of (copied) imagery claim this conventional notion of authorship? Or does solidarity here require another kind of question? I have no answers at this stage, but articulating the problem of archives *astray* seemed critical. Questions around the arts of solidarity, I would argue, must not grow around authentic authorship but the very fluid nature of images, and, indeed, the desire for activist address among artists. It is about how arts of solidarity can create their own visual field, and about morphing authorship. Most certainly it is about the inadequate or errant archives of decolonial imaginaries materialised in the transitory field of images. These archives *astray* also reveal the hidden asymmetries of the political – political lineages in art, in other words, defy linear logics of authorship, commitment or affiliation. Elsewhere I have tried to understand the political in mid-twentieth-century Indian art via the conceptual proposition of 'partisan aesthetics' – a modality of contradictory affiliations that develop as fields of art and

politics converge during particular historical conjunctures.⁵ In this uncanny encounter with caricatures of the AAJA catalogue, the political in art appears again as a desire ridden with contradictions, even compromising desires to speak the same (visual) language. If decolonisation (like colonialism itself) is seen as an implicitly transnational process, how we capture this energy of the ‘trans’ in art is an open methodological question that needs multilinear engagement, even ones that demand of us particular generousities.

2 via archives of *absence*

In my work on left-wing aesthetics in twentieth-century South Asia, the initial encounter between art and the archive had initially been destabilising, making me stretch and bend as it were, with my initial question around Communist art in 1940s India. What I ended up with was the impossibility of the ‘political’ as a defined marker – even *within* the iterations of a singular artist, no matter how ‘committed’ to socio-political issues they might have been. My go-to artist at the start of my doctoral work was Chittaprosad – an ‘artist-cadre’ tied to the Communist Party of India (CPI) and key to its forays into visual art and cultural activism during the climactic decade of famine and popular protests in the closing period of anti-colonial struggle in India in the 1940s. I was drawn to Chittaprosad’s works when around 2004–2006, I began encountering his works in exhibitions in New Delhi, where the art auction houses and private galleries, such as OSIAN and the Delhi Art Gallery, began exhibiting his striking works on famine victims and socialist propaganda, amidst various paraphernalia of nineteenth and twentieth century art, visual culture and film material. Struck by the absence of this genre in the art histories we studied (even in the little that had emerged on modern Indian art in the early 2000s), I decided to start working on socialist art practices such as Chittaprosad’s. Yet when it came to finding engagements with his work from his own contemporary period, I was confronted with a stark absence. In the 1940s, Chittaprosad was illustrating the CPI political organs, decorating peasant congresses, writing profiles on other contemporary artists for the CPI’s own organs, even writing himself occasionally – but no critic wrote on him, he hardly exhibited with his fellow artists, and his works, displayed in political spaces, were never reviewed.

Chittaprosad’s complete discursive absence in the 1940s – the peak period ironically, of his own visibility – became more confounding once I stepped into the 1950s in my research. As India entered independence, and the CPI’s own cultural activism petered away under new party rigidities from the late-1940s, Chittaprosad disappeared almost entirely – from the party’s cultural circuits (where he had been most active), and most definitely from the conversations of (postcolonial) Indian art. Some of his former comrades would occasionally publish the odd linocut or a set of letters in a vernacular journal or a *little magazine* (see **Figure 3**), but these were marginal platforms, hidden away from the key art periodicals of postcolonial India. The artist

⁵ See Sanjukta Sunderason, *Partisan Aesthetics: Modern Art and India’s Long Decolonization*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2020

himself continued to work in obscurity, grappling with fresh possibilities of socialist iconography – at times critical, at times comic, at times purely melancholic. However, such works were made almost in absentia, outside the developing art worlds of postcolonial India, even when Chittaprosad himself was located in a vibrant centre of art production such as Bombay/Mumbai. While the artist's own reticence remains a factor in his absence, it is striking, too, that he received no patronage from the artists working within either the modernist or the activist circles in the city.⁶

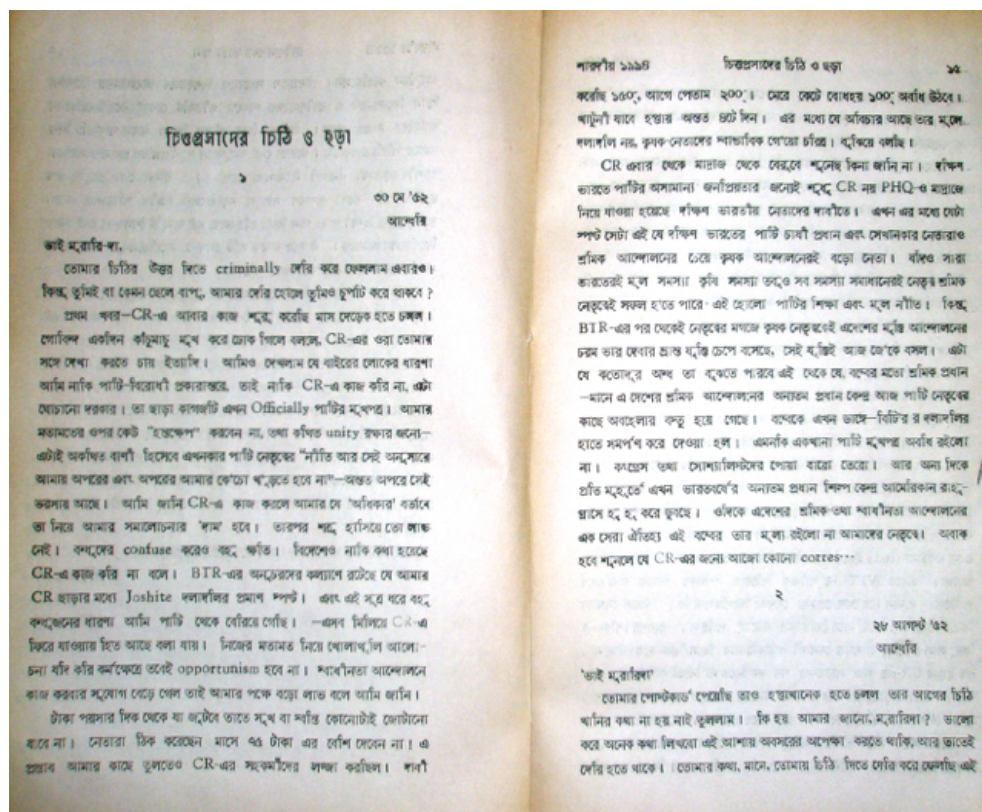


Figure 3: Chittaprosad's letter published in the journal *Parichoy*, 1994

In the 1950s, Chittaprosad made a series of anti-imperialist linocuts – some were sent to the international conference for the defence of children in Vienna, some to the World Peace Congress, while some were exhibited across the Socialist World and ended up in collections at the National Gallery in Prague. These images – with their active agency in visualising child labour, displacement, Cold War politics and socialist internationalisms – have not entered conceptualisations of postcolonial internationalisms⁷ or political art in India – not least because an artist like Chittaprosad found no patronage, either from his party comrades or from a postcolonial art world in Nehruvian India. Something happens in the 1950s – in India at

⁶ For Chittaprosad's absence from the art worlds of postcolonial India, see Sanjukta Sunderason, 'A Melancholic Archive: Chittaprosad and Socialist Art in Postcolonial India', in Sanjukta Sunderason and Lotte Hoek, eds, *Forms of the Left in Postcolonial India: Aesthetics, Networks, Connected Histories*, Bloomsbury, London, 2021

⁷ On Chittaprosad's internationalism in the 1950s to the 1960s, see Simone Wille, 'A Transnational Socialist Solidarity: Chittaprosad's Prague Connection', *Stedelijk Studies 9, Modernism in Migration. Relocating Artists, Objects, and Ideas, 1910–1970*, Gregor Langfeld and Tessel M. Bauduin, eds, Fall 2019; see also Sunderason, 'A Melancholic Archive', op cit

least – whereby the very question of activist art gets displaced, only to be reconfigured, probably, via other frames. Speaking from my specialisation on anti-imperialist iconography, and the histories of political art in the sub-continent, this displacement appears both discursive and historiographical – not because the iconography disappeared, but because its visibility or engagement did. Hence, the histories of this displacement of activist iconography need to be gleaned from dispersion, not collection, and via *absence* not visibility.

In the past two decades, however, as the artist's works and papers have been salvaged from the obscurity years after his death in 1978, by a private art gallery circuit,⁸ and his works exhibited across the country and internationally, a political potentiality of his works – absent within his lived history itself – has become activated. Chittaprosad becomes – as in my own work – an archive, of absent histories, of a radical imagination that grappled with the darker underbelly and incomplete struggles of postcolonial 'freedom'.⁹ Should one seek to harness him in haste – as in the contemporary curatorial euphoria around seeking 'Third World' activist art – to lineages of India's politically engaged art, what would still be missed are such textures of absence, reticence and erasures. How are such lived histories of art, whether modernist or activist, captured in the way we conceptualise postcolonial art histories? I argue that we need to develop a methodology for writing on absence itself, and seek traces of such absence within what we see as the archival corpus. Our writings of art histories of marginal or absent figures within postcolonial contexts could ask, for instance, whether *writing* or *curating* must always be about *writing in* or *giving place* or *salvage*?

Constructing lineages or genealogies of the political in Indian art are increasingly common – both in art historical and curatorial writing. There is a demand, as it were, from the politics of the present to seek such lineages of activist art from the past. We see such tendencies as tied to historiography – for instance, in retrieving histories of art and decolonial solidarities from the twentieth century, or in developing transnational analytical frames for producing connected art histories *of and from* the Global South. We also see such tendencies as tied to *writings on* individual artists (modern or contemporary), consciously or subconsciously invoking or even constructing a lineage of political art and activism from the long twentieth century within which new artists are then harnessed. Often grounded in such tendencies are the growing and otherwise much-needed texts of cultural theory emerging from, in this context, South Asia. As a historian writing on art, my concerns are around the lineages and genealogies of activist art and the roles acts of archiving play in such re/producing of them. I am interested in understanding how lineages of art could be constructed outside signposts and key figures of modernism or modern art, and how cultural theory from postcolonial artistic contexts must engage with marginal figures, reticent figures, as well as the historical textures of sources that remain dispersed in anecdotes, fragments,

⁸ See the Delhi Art Gallery (DAG) *Retrospective* on Chittaprosad and accompanying publications, 2011–2012; see Sanjoy Mallik, *Chittaprosad, Vol 1 and 2. Yours Chitta: Translated Excerpts from Select Letters of Chittaprosad. A Sketchbook of 30 Portraits by Chittaprosad*, Delhi Art Gallery, New Delhi, 2011

⁹ See Sanjukta Sunderason, 'As Agitator and Organiser: Chittaprosad and the Art for the Communist Party of India', *Object*, no 13, 2010, pp 75–95; Sunderason, *Partisan Aesthetics*, op cit; Sunderason, 'A Melancholic Archive', op cit

or even the ephemerality of the performative gesture of the artist/s. For me, the living archive becomes a way of understanding how artistic subjectivity – memory, affiliations, dissociations or encounters – or retrospective harnessing of twentieth-century artists in contemporary art worlds can become analytical frames in writing histories of postcolonial art. This is also critical if we want to move beyond key-figures-driven histories of postcolonial modernism, and complement them in the best cases, with textured histories of artistic discourse or of art historiography itself.

3 via arts of decolonial time

Twenty-first-century cultural praxis seems to carry a Janus-face: facing at once persisting power structures, struggles, ruination and utopias from the twentieth century, and an accelerated future with momentous popular movements that echo the past and its incomplete struggles in renewed claims. We see the toppling of statues marked by legacies of slavery and colonialism; our students protest for a curriculum that is *decolonial*; museums and archives struggle to negotiate repatriation of colonial collections; posters and murals of popular protests spread across the (digital) urban landscape from Hong Kong, Delhi, Cairo, London, New York; activists of Black Lives Matter rise time and again – and across geographies – to remind us that we are haunted, by present pasts.¹⁰ In academia, as scholars working on postcolonial histories we are facing growing calls for *decolonial* epistemologies – *de-linkings*¹¹ of modernity that bind the ‘Non-West’ with the ‘West’ in unequal ways: an epistemic decolonisation, the horizon of which remained incomplete, despite chaotic (and nation-statist) resolutions of twentieth-century political decolonisation. Contemporary artists, curators, exhibitions and institutions are animating art’s agency in decolonising narratives, institutions, epistemes. Yet, this activated present of contemporary art, with its calls and tools for decolonial praxis, carries long echoes from the twentieth century, when radical political transformations had created a life-world where art entangled with struggles and utopic imaginations of freedom.

Entanglements – of art and political change – in the twentieth century were both dialogic and dialectical, as artists as vanguards, activists or citizens sought to negotiate meanings of political, social and cultural freedom. Such ideas of freedom were framed by the politics of decolonisation – the retreat of European colonial empires, the Cold War and the struggles for ideological control over nations. Yet, rather than reflecting political ideologies, or national identities or *realpolitik*, such conversations around freedom were rooted in both lived experiences of the historical past and the present, and imagined utopic futures. Freedom

¹⁰ See Reinhart Kosellek, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Keith Tribe, trans, Columbia University Press, New York, 1985; and Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2003

¹¹ See Walter D Mignolo, ‘The De-colonial Option and the Meaning of Identity in Politics’, *Anales*, vol 9, no 10, Instituto Ibero Americano, Universidad de Gotemburgo, 2007; Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vásquez, ‘Decolonial AestheSis: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings’, *Social Text Online*, 15 July 2013, https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/decolonial-aestheSis-colonial-woundsdecolonial-healings/ accessed 28 April 2018

mobilised imaginal and aesthetic registers where its own scopes and contradictions of plural visions would be negotiated. Thus, to decolonise in the twenty-first century we need to historicise twentieth-century decolonisation itself. What will this historicisation look like? Where will it anchor its questions: in the national modernities/and histories of postcolonial nation-states? In the global geopolitics of decolonisation and the Cold War? Should it be in the locational, vernacular registers of thought, movements and experience? Or perhaps in global circuits of thoughts and movements?

I propose here that art has been a site for negotiating the historical transition of decolonisation by opening up a dialogic space for understanding lived histories of ‘freedom’ – parallel to, or even in opposition to, realpolitik-driven histories of decolonisation. Art has generated imaginaries of freedom through which artists, critics and activists have participated in a world in transition, and such imaginaries reflected the ‘conjunctural time’¹² of decolonisation and the Cold War between the 1940s–1980s, with wars, partitions, genocides and arrivals of new postcolonial nation-states. Yet, art as archive must not be read as the passive reflectors of realpolitik or ideological agendas, but rather via its ‘aesthetic dimension’: not by virtue of pure socio-political content, nor by pure form but by the ‘content having become form’.¹³ Artistic practice, I will propose, captures the unique nature of imaginal labour: finding, that is, aesthetic *forms* for translating negotiations of displacement, memories of ruptures, and, at the same time, imagining histories that never were or could be transformed. Capturing such dreams, hopes and imaginations as entrypoints is key to capturing twentieth-century decolonisation as an imaginal, even utopic project – outside the realpolitik that overtook it under the shadow of the Cold War. Unearthing this labour unique to art is key – for reimagining postcolonial (the ‘post’ signifying both time after and epistemes beyond colonialism) histories via potential futures rather than arrivals into freedom; and more urgently, for understanding, as historians, why the spectres of twentieth-century freedoms still haunt our twenty-first-century struggles as unresolved questions and as persisting battles.

Seeing aesthetics as this field of deliberation makes it attuned to both spatial and temporal pull, and remaining, at the same time, a mechanism of freedom via its implicit imaginal push. Art as archive of the imaginaries of freedom can connect what Reinhart Koselleck has called lived ‘spaces of experience’ with imagined ‘horizons of expectation’.¹⁴ This dual nature of art – at once rooted and free – makes it a potentially dynamic entrypoint for understanding

¹² See Stuart Hall’s discussion of the Gramscian notion of the conjuncture in Stuart Hall, ‘Black Diaspora Artists in Britain: Three “Moments” in Post-war History’, *History Workshop Journal*, no 61, 2006, pp 1–24, p 3; and Stuart Hall and Doreen Massey, ‘Interpreting the Crisis’, *Soundings: A Journal of Politics and Culture*, vol 44, no 1, Spring 2010, pp 57–71; see also Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971

¹³ Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, Beacon Press, New York, 1979 [1977], p 8

¹⁴ See Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, translated and with an introduction by Keith Tribe, Columbia University Press, New York, 2004

the historical experience of decolonisation. This has historiographical implications: what, for instance, should be the *nature* of the history of decolonisation? Art, I will argue, allows us to see history *as form*. It also creates a fluid archive where images can travel and lose roots, provenance, home, identity. This fluidity of images constitutes a transitory history, becoming in itself, a historical agent.

Art as Living Archives of Decolonial Freedom

A living archive, Stuart Hall reminds us, are marked by ‘ruptures, significant breaks, transformative, new and unpredicted departures’.¹⁵ They contradict the ‘fantasy of completeness’.¹⁶ Instead, ‘heterogeneity, multiplicity of discourses, not only of practice but of criticism, history and theory, of personal story, anecdote and biography, are the “texts” which make the archive alive.’¹⁷ Attention to multiple plays of visibility, of ideologies and ruptures in art are thus critical to our own efforts in drawing lineages of the political in postcolonial art. If the archive is read in Foucauldian terms, as the system governing the appearance of statements, it is also the structure that supplies the terms of discourse, limiting what can and cannot be articulated at given historical junctures.¹⁸ Archives are neither affirmative nor critical per se, as Foucault would argue; what questions and imperatives we take to the archive shapes its dynamics or livingness for a history or lineage. Attention to the idiomatic and ideological textures of art discourse – particularly via the dissonances rather than the descriptions – allows for a more tangible understanding of the historicities of artistic modernity and the place of political art therein. The idea of the archive here suggests both collections – institutional and private, as well as images in dispersion or the unconscious archive of unordered, untitled papers in private collections, or even what stays outside the ‘presence’ (collected or otherwise). It is also worth asking what becomes a ‘collection’, and, connected to that, what gets used and what remains outside narratives drawn from them are also critical considerations. If archives are seen as fragments in dispersion, the issues of who it is that does the work of gathering, and how such gatherings correspond with acts of drawing lineages, are important to remain alert to. Our engagement with the question of the archive also needs to emerge from the particularities of contexts (geographical, intellectual, infrastructural), the state of the holdings, the collections, and issues of access. We must, in other words, *provincialise* the archive discourse – both from the peculiarities of visual art in the region, as well as from the values or blind spots of art history as a discipline.

¹⁵ Stuart Hall, ‘Constituting an Archive’, *Third Text*, vol 15, no 54, Spring 2001, p 90

¹⁶ Hall, ‘Constituting an Archive’, p 91

¹⁷ Hall, ‘Constituting an Archive’, p 92

¹⁸ See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, Alan Sheridan Smith, trans, Pantheon Books, New York, 1972

I would like to close with two propositions: firstly, that colonialism as well as decolonial movements were both productive sites where national, regional and transnational identities were being imagined; and secondly, that art and cultural production – through imaginative potentials – became integral to visualisations of postcolonial and decolonial futures. Such visualisations are not (necessarily) tangible, realised national destinies, but imagined horizons, visible and aspired to by our twenty-first-century movements for freedom, too. *Art as archive* thus activates the desires of what we see today as decolonial theory – one where aesthetic manoeuvres are seen as modes delinking colonial binds. Art as archive can *historicise* this theoretical dynamism and perhaps direct us to sites of imagining freedoms that lie in the depths of the twentieth century – whether with or without resolution, or ridden with contradictions.

Sanjukta Sunderason is the author of *Partisan Aesthetics: Modern Art and India's Long Decolonization* (Stanford University Press, 2020) and co-editor (with Lotte Hoek) of *Forms of the Left in Postcolonial South Asia: Aesthetics, Networks, and Connected Histories* (Bloomsbury, 2021). She teaches art history at the University of Amsterdam.