

Intersectional and Decolonial Perspectives on an Incorporeal Materialism: Towards an Elemental Philosophy of Art Education

David Rousell , Anna Hickey-Moody and Jelena Aleksic

Abstract

Considering art and its educative potentials as a living experiment with the body's elemental constitution and modes of organisation, this article engages *water*, *earth*, *air*, and *fire* as milieus through which a body learns to sense, move, and act in the world differently. This leads to a series of propositions for an elemental philosophy of arts education, which recognises the intersectional and decolonial potentials of bodies, and strives to amplify and proliferate these potentials through creative pedagogic practices. If, as Elizabeth Grosz (2017) proposes, "the chain of evolutionary emergence is unbroken not only materially but also conceptually" (p. 250), then arts education offers an expression of the body's incorporeal and material potentials as they change and evolve through time. Further to this position, we argue that arts education has the potential to radically reframe relationships with water, earth, air, and fire in ways that resist their co-option as tools of colonialism and intersecting categories of oppression.

Keywords

arts education, decolonisation, elemental philosophy, feminist materialism, incorporeal, intersectionality

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Introduction

This article puts Elizabeth Grosz's (2017) proposition for an incorporeal materialism into conversation with intersectional and decolonial perspectives that problematise and extend practices of arts education within settler colonial nations. To the extent that Grosz's recent work on the incorporeal does not explicitly engage with concepts of race, gender, or sexuality, there is much at stake in negotiating conversations between Grosz's incorporeal materialism and cultural theories of intersectionality and decolonisation. We argue that critical and creative pedagogic practices of arts education are key to this negotiation because they offer significant ways of reclaiming and redirecting incorporeal forces. Arts education is foundationally concerned with how bodies develop and share creative capacities to think and act in the world to transform individual and collective futures (c.f. Atkinson 2017; Naughton *et al.* 2017; O'Donnell 2018, 2022), and this onto-ethical commitment to bodily capacitation and worldly transformation also sits at the heart of Grosz's philosophical project. This makes Grosz's work on the incorporeal potentially transformative for the philosophy and practice of arts education under current conditions of climatological upheaval, social inequity, and political unrest.

The arts, alongside the practices of science and technology, are understood by Grosz (2017) as "elaborations, in potentially infinite directions, of trajectories, lines of development, that are already there, immanent, in the prehuman and nonhuman world" (p. 259). Incorporeal forces and elements generate the potentials for language, story, visualisation, and other forms of creative expression. They are as ancient as life, and indeed, as the universe itself. Grosz's perspective challenges approaches to arts education which presuppose that language, imagery, and performance only arrive with the evolutionary emergence of Man. It also challenges notions of identity as constructed, represented, and made intelligible through essentialised categories of being, including the very category of the human or Man as ontologically distinct and discernible from all other bodies.

In what follows, we propose an elemental philosophy of arts education that mobilises water, earth, air, and fire as milieus through which human and nonhuman bodies individuate, differentiate, and build shared habitats and interdependent relations (Braidotti 2022; Coole & Frost 2010; Shefer *et al.* 2024; Yoon-Ramirez & Ramírez 2024). We discuss the ancient origins of Grosz's concept of incorporeality in Stoic philosophies of elemental matter. We then provide a series of narratives regarding our own positionalities as writers and researchers before discussing alliances and disjunctions between Grosz's incorporeal materialism and cultural theories of intersectionality and decolonisation. Through this work, we explore how Grosz's (2017) focus on Euro-Western and male-dominated traditions in continental philosophy can be extended through perspectives from queer studies (Mortimer-Sandilands & Erickson 2010; Chen 2012; Ahuja 2015; Halberstam 2020), decolonial theory (Glissant 1991, 1997; Quijano 2007; Lugones 2010), Indigenous studies (Birch 2018; Bawaka Country *et al.* 2022), and the radical Black tradition (Bey 2020; Gumbs 2021; Harney & Moten 2021). The second part of the article offers four vignettes of arts education practices in Naarm (Melbourne), which elaborate creative learning encounters through water, earth, air, and fire. In doing so, we build on Braidotti's (2022) recent cartography of posthuman feminist studies as gathered around elemental habitats rather than traditional disciplinary formations. Working with

elemental matters can create a convergence of incorporeal, intersectional, and decolonial perspectives on arts education as a practice which creatively reorganises the body and its potentials.

Incorporeality and elemental matter(s)

In *The Incorporeal*, Grosz (2017) draws her initial conceptualisation of incorporeal materiality from the pre-Socratic Stoic philosophy in ancient Greece. The early Stoics developed a vitalistic cosmology which begins with a configuration of the body as “a balance of the four elements – earth, air, fire, water – that require the right proportions of hot and cold, wet and dry” (p. 22). These four elements each contribute distinctive qualities to this configuration of the body: fire is the hot, water is the wet, air is the cold, and earth is the dry. Within the Stoic elemental cosmology all corporeal bodies (human and nonhuman) are considered *causes* which are entirely material, whereas the *effects* produced by relations between bodies (and resulting changes in bodies) are considered *incorporeal transformations*. One of the Stoics’ prosaic examples is the instance of a human body being cut by a scalpel. Both human and scalpel are material bodies, which *cause* the event of cutting, but the event of “being cut” (and the ensuing wound) is an incorporeal *effect*. As Grosz (2017) elaborates, “the capacity to be cut is a condition of being alive in a world in which metal can pierce flesh ... but metal and flesh are bodies, even as cutting by the metal of the flesh is an event, and as such, incorporeal” (p. 42). Affects, in the Spinozan sense, can be understood as forces that circulate between bodies (causes) and incorporeals (effects) in ways that enliven (joy) or oppress (pain) a body’s capacity to think and act in the world (O’Donnell, 2018).

The expressive capacities of language and law offer commonly recognisable instances of the Stoic definition of incorporeality. For example, a proclamation of marriage changes the terms of relation between bodies without materially altering the bodies themselves. Alternatively, common expressions such as “it is raining” refer to the incorporeal expression of a weather event. “What language *expresses* (rather than refers to, denotes, or designates, which is itself material) is incorporeal, a process, an event, a change of state, a modification, something that adheres to or floats on the surface without penetrating the identity and continuity of the body” (Grosz 2017, 39). This capacity for incorporeal expression is not simply human, but has origins and attributes associated with the elemental forces. Within this cosmology, the elements of water, earth, air, and fire are considered primordial forces with their own distinctive properties and capacities for incorporeal expression.

Writing from an Australian context where Indigenous lands and waters continue to be forcibly held and expropriated by the settler colonial state, the nation’s founding legal determination of *terra nullius* provides a critical example of incorporeal powers. The term *terra nullius* translates from Latin into “land belonging to no one” and was legally instantiated by British colonisers of Australia in 1835 to legitimise the genocide and dispossession of First Nations peoples from their traditional homelands. As Goenpual scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) writes, “the possessive racial logics at play in the application of *terra nullius* work circuitously to rationalize possession by invoking white patriarchal Western standards as measures of civilization and astoundingly finding that Indigenous owners of the land do not possess them” (p. 68). Moreton-Robinson highlights how there is no material

truth or factuality to terra nullius, it is an incorporeal event. The proclamation of terra nullius exemplifies an incorporeal transformation which instantiates an excess of ideality over bodily relations with place, effectively marshalling the incorporeal powers of the false to perpetrate violent, genocidal, and irreparable effects. Recently, the failed national referendum on an Indigenous Voice to parliament demonstrated the ongoing legacy of this incorporeal transformation of land rights in sustaining racial violence and white supremacy.

By considering *bodies as causes* and *incorporeals as effects*, Grosz's intervention into feminist materialism helps us recognise how incorporeals like terra nullius have historically been weaponised as excesses over materiality which create irreparable pain and loss. Attending to the incorporeal dimension of coloniality helps us become sensitised to the wounds wrought by colonisation and the oppression and marginalisation of bodies according to intersectional experiences and categories of difference. This article addresses the question of how arts education can reclaim, reshape, and redirect incorporeal powers and forces towards intersectional and decolonising aims, enhancing capacities to think and act with a relational ethic of care for others and for the Earth. We propose that arts education is a social practice through which bodies learn to live their lives creatively, and as such, it can play a vital role in reshaping incorporeal values and trajectories towards more joyful and less oppressive futures.

Positionality

Bodies carry within them the knowledge and power to shape their own trajectories. We briefly consider our own pathways into and through life, with reflections on how configurations of identity are inherited, redirected, and transformed through transcontinental movements, ethical choices and refusals, political affiliations, and creative practices of life-living.

David Rousell (he/him) was born on lands traditionally inhabited by Algonquian peoples along the northeast coast of the Americas. His ancestry and ethnicity are intermixed with cultural and geographic histories of migration from across the European continent. His mother's family are Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern and Central Europe (Belarus, Ukraine, Latvia, and Yugoslavia) who migrated to the United States during the aftermath of World War 1 in the 1920s. They entered the United States through Ellis Island and settled in Brooklyn, NY, where his mother was raised. His father's side of the family is a mixture of Germanic, English, Scottish, Welsh, and Scandinavian peoples who entered the United States at various points in the 18th and 19th centuries and settled in the colonial frontier states of the Midwest (Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas). David's grandfather was orphaned on the prairielands at the age of 5 years old and was raised by the Cherokee community before being adopted by an agrarian family who gave him the surname Rousell. David is continuing to research these complex stories of migration, diaspora, settler colonialism, frontier violence, survival, and adoption. David left school and travelled nomadically (without a home) as a teenager. He considers this a constitutive act of resistance to the colonial and capitalistic cultures of education in which he was raised. David electively migrated from the United States as a young adult in refusal of the cultures of violence instituted by American political and economic policies. He has since lived and worked on unceded Peramangk, Kaurna, and Bundjalung Country in Australia, the lands of Ngāti Hau in Aotearoa New Zealand, and

the post-industrial city of Manchester in the UK. Today, he lives on unceded lands of the Wurundjeri-Woi Wurrung language group of the Eastern Kulin Nation, close to the Merri Merri (or “very rocky”) creek.

As a child, Anna Hickey-Moody (she/they) grew up with languages from two places: Ireland and England. She was born in Tartanya Warna (Adelaide), Kurna country, to a politically left-wing father from the northside of Dublin, of Catholic upbringing, and a mother born in Harrow, London, raised in the Church of England. Like so many migrants before them, they had left the North to find work. Family debates taught Anna a vernacular history of decolonial history of Ireland that shapes her world views. The process of colonisation in Ireland began in the 12th century when the Normans invaded the island. However, the most significant period of colonisation occurred in the 16th and 17th centuries when English, and later British forces sought to establish control over Ireland. The decolonisation process in Ireland was incomplete until the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which brought about significant political changes and established a framework for power-sharing in Northern Ireland. The agreement paved the way for improved relations between Ireland and the United Kingdom. While Ireland achieved political independence, the legacy of colonisation is still evident in issues such as the partition of the island and the impact on communities. The decolonial history of Ireland involves political, social, and economic dimensions, and the ongoing construction of the dirty whiteness of Irish ethnicity (Gray 2004). The legacy of colonisation continues to shape the country's identity and relationships today. As an Irish citizen and resident, Anna also writes as a neurodivergent, bisexual woman, who thrives while also being chronically unwell.

Jelena Aleksic (she/her) was born in the 1990s in Belgrade in the socialist country of Yugoslavia. The same year war started in various places across that Western Balkan region, leading to displacement and migration of many families, with diverse ethnic, religion backgrounds that lived together in Yugoslavia. The Balkan region has a history of Greek and Roman colonisation and political, cultural influences of Hungarian, Russian, Austrian and Ottoman empires. Additionally, the region has been well known as the intersection and crossroad of the east and west. The history of the first communist and then socialist state of Yugoslavia has influenced Jelenas's understanding of collective, community practices and access to free healthcare and education as well as providing shifting perspectives on lands and waters. Jelena is doing her PhD on the unceded lands and waters of the Eastern Kulin Nations, exploring how people connect to the ocean in Port Phillip Bay in relation to climate change and the Anthropocene. Recently, she dreamed of being an incorporeal body, burning from fire and becoming a body made of drops of salty tears. She felt like this dream came from the liquid experiences she brings from wetlands and fast rivers in lands between east and west in the Balkans.

Intersectionality and the incorporeal

These stories raise questions about intersectionality as a concept that acknowledges the interplay of various social categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability with the material conditions through which these categories come to expression (Crenshaw 1991; Collins 1998). Intersectionality is a concept and method initially developed within Black feminist legal scholarship to address the interconnected nature of social categories of difference. The term

'intersectionality' was first coined by legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw in the late 1980s and has since become a valuable framework for understanding the complex and overlapping systems of oppression and privilege that different bodies experience. Intersectionality recognises that individuals inhabit multiple social identities, and these identities intersect in ways that create unique forms of discrimination or privilege. It challenges essentialist approaches that treat social differences as fixed, separate, and distinct, emphasising the need to consider the interplay between shifting axes of identity, geography, politics, ethics, economics, and culture.

Grosz's incorporeal materialism raises nuanced questions about intersectionality by proposing a complexity in the organisation of matter that goes beyond visible forms and ontological categories of identity. For Grosz, the very question of what constitutes identity has its origins in inhuman forces and primordial elements of nature, which are highly mutable and subject to continuous transformation. This has significant implications for how arts education might be practised as an ethico-aesthetic engagement that modulates the intersectionality of both human (Acuff 2018; Harris & Leonardo 2018; MacGill 2023) and nonhuman difference (Rousell & Fell 2024).

The intersection of Black and queer studies offers an important source of thinking along these lines. In *Incorporeal Blackness* (Bey 2020), Black trans feminist scholar Marquis Bey (they/them, or any pronoun)* probes the radical mutability of blackness as an incorporeal event irreducible to racialised, gendered, or sexualised identity categories.

What is necessary is a more capacious definition of blackness, one that can hold so much more than it is believed to be able to hold, a capaciously inclusive blackness for which the inclusion is predicated not on epidermal sufficiency but on an incorporeality, which is to say an abandonment of the trappings of normative bodyness and its attending ethical strictures, a modality of becoming away from given ontologies. (Bey 2020, 208)

Bey builds on a radical tradition of Black scholarship and creative practice that breaks from Euro-Western identity categories and ontologies of the body as individualised subject (Glissant 1991, 1997; Hartman 1997; Moten 2003, 2018; da Silva 2007, 2011; Nyong'o 2018). This extensive body of work destabilises normative understandings of identity within Western culture by establishing 'para-ontological' alternatives predicated on the radical mutability and improvisational capacities of social life (Harney & Moten 2021). If whiteness institutes the very concept of race as an ontological distinction between bodies to be possessed, governed, and made fungible (Hartman 1997), then blackness operates underneath or outside the ontology of race by refusing to exclude any body from the radical sociality it performs (Moten 2018). By attending to the incorporeality of blackness, this work works "to de-naturalize the concept of race by highlighting the fact that its ethico-political significance does not derive from an intrinsic attribute of 'race' (as a Thing)" (da Silva 2011, 140). This shift from race as ontological category towards modes of collective expression and potentialisation finds a strong resonance with Grosz's work, which similarly calls for a reclaiming of the means of incorporeal expression and social (re)production as both a political and ethical imperative.

Work in queer and trans studies also finds resonance with incorporeal materialism through differentially related movements in theory and practice (Chen 2012;

Ahuja 2015; Halberstam 2020). The refusal of 'chrononormative' time has emerged as a key touchstone in this work (Freeman 2010), or what Ahuja (via Halberstam) describes as "reproductive family time, the temporality organized around the long slog from childhood to adulthood and death marked by bourgeois rituals of ownership, marriage, and reproduction" (p. 378). This work looks to intervene in the incorporeal effects of heteronormative concepts of human development and reproductive futurity, which colonise the temporal unfolding of possibility conditions for life. Queerness is decoupled from essentialised identity categories to open up wilder, more capacious temporalities which resist the chrononormative fictions of linear development across partitioned lifespans (Pasley & Jaramillo-Aristizabal 2023, 408).

Considering possible alliances between incorporeal materialism and intersectional feminism involves a shift towards more elemental understanding of arts education by considering the interconnection of identity with incorporeal powers, forces, and intensities of freedom and oppression, joy, and pain. It asks arts educators to question how the intersections of different social categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability affect the relational capacities of bodies, and to understand how subjectivities are made by the interplay of material causes and incorporeal expressions. Ethically, incorporeal intersectionality calls on arts educators to elevate and amplify the perspectives of marginalised bodies and ecologies, to seek out and listen to modes of expression which have been silenced, and commit to an ongoing learning and ethical revaluation of life as the basis for creative productions of subjectivity.

Incorporeal materialism and decolonial theory

While intersectional theory examines the politics of embodiment and identity in relation to race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality, decolonial thought looks to speak back to the institutionalisation of coloniality and its ongoing impacts on bodies, lands, airs, and waters. Scholars associated with decolonial theory include Quijano (2007), Mignolo (1992), Lugones (2010), Fanon (1952) and Brah (2022). Decolonial theory has its own unique focus on challenging the broader colonial matrix of power and envisioning alternative, non-oppressive futures.

The term 'epistemicide' is used in decolonial theory to describe the deliberate destruction or marginalisation of non-Western ways of knowing (de Sousa Santos 2007). Broadly speaking, decolonial theory aims to recover and valorise diversely situated forms of knowledge that were suppressed or erased during colonial encounters (Fanon 2008). Theorists argue that coloniality is not just a historical event but an ongoing and pervasive global condition that persists in various situated forms, such as economic inequalities, racial hierarchies, and cultural dominance. Decolonial theory often intersects with other critical theories, such as postcolonialism and critical race theory (Bhambra 2014; Go 2018), to address the intersections of race, gender, class, and other social categories in understanding the complexities of colonial legacies (Mignolo & Walsh 2018). This involves dismantling oppressive structures, revaluing marginalised perspectives, recognising and resisting the possessive logics of white supremacy, and restoring stolen lands, languages, and life ways to traditional owners (Moreton-Robinson 2015).

Actions and understandings of decolonisation are situated in relation to different histories, legacies, and impacts of coloniality within specific geographical

locations. First Nations perspectives and knowledges are crucially important, and deeply connected with the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty in relation to ancestral lands and waters (Deloria 1999; Smith 1999/2021; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Birch 2018). The stakes and aims of decolonisation are therefore very different depending on one's intersectional positionality with respect to Indigenous sovereignty, land rights, and determinations of public and private property (Harris 1993). For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from across the Australian subcontinent, the lawful rights of Indigenous sovereignty are held within ancestral homelands of 'Country' rather than by notions of 'property' enshrined by State or Crown law (Moreton-Robinson 2015). As Black legal scholar Cheryl Harris (1993) argued more than 30 years ago, the very idea of 'property' is constructed on "parallel systems of domination of Black and Native American peoples out of which were created racially contingent forms of property and property rights" (p. 1714). Moreton-Robinson (2015) extends a related argument in the Australian context, where she conceptualises the 'white possessive' as a logic through which whiteness *becomes* property (as a bodily attribute to be owned) while simultaneously bestowing the right to expropriate and own land as property. This logic and logistics of whiteness manifests as a mode of rationalisation, which necessitates a continuous defence of the fragility of white claims to sovereign Indigenous lands, and indeed the attribute of 'whiteness' itself, through the pedagogies of the settler colonial state (Sriprakash *et al.* 2022).

A significant body of decolonial studies have also emerged from the 'archipelagic' tradition of Caribbean poetics and thought, including the work of Césaire (1956/2023), Brathwaite (1975), and Glissant (1991, 1997). Throughout this work, the elemental milieus of earth, air, fire, and sea converge in a 'shoreline thinking' constitutive of creolised places and identity formations wrought from the submerged histories of the Middle Passage between Africa and the colonies (Drabinski 2019). Elemental readings of colonial trauma become constitutive of an archipelagic subjectivity that is multi-rooted and multi-grounded, like the mangroves that thrive in the contact zones between salty and freshwater shorelines (Glissant 1991). The question of place becomes mixed with geographies of passage without clear origins or beginnings to return to. Rather than seeking a return to submerged origins drowned by the Middle Passage (as with repatriation or land rights movements), decolonisation for Glissant entails a poetic gesture of 'giving on and with' through the invention of opaque and unrecognisable intermixtures of subjectivity, language, and geography.

We employ Grosz's incorporeal materialism to bring the incorporeal dimensions of coloniality *and* decolonisation into focus in arts education contexts. By proposing that differential claims and understandings of sovereignty and land rights are incorporeal effects arising from material encounters between bodies, Grosz's philosophy models how the effects of coloniality are incorporeally reproduced alongside counter-effects of decolonial resistance, survivance, and thriving. Arts education scholarship drawing on Black and Indigenous studies also complexifies notions of decolonisation in ways that find resonant frequencies with Grosz's incorporeal materialism (see, for instance, Rousell & Hussey-Smith 2024). Decolonisation is, in this reading, as much a poetic as a legal and political project of reconstituting relations with the elements within, outside, and perhaps even *beneath* the colonial logics of white possession and erasure. We follow these considerations into encounters with each of the four elements in the vignettes below.

Water

Our unity is submarine.

(Brathwaite 1975, 90)

Water connects all life and is the condition of existence for life. Water is our shared history and our unity (Brathwaite 1975). The Stoics considered water to be a passive, heavy element, the embodiment of wetness which modulates against the dryness of the earth. Maintaining a workable balance between wet and dry is crucial to the ongoing endurance and capacitation of the body. In the Indigenous Australian context, Yiman and Bidjara scholar Marcia Langton (2006) describes how “bodies of water are constituted by Aboriginal people as being more than just a physical domain ... they are construed socially, spiritually, and jurally” (p. 144). She describes how the incorporeality of water is foundational in Aboriginal understandings of Country, life, law, and the cosmos.

Recent hydrofeminist (Neimanis 2017; Shefer *et al.* 2024) and Black feminist scholarship (Gumbs 2021; Nxumalo 2021) has engaged with colonial histories of oceans, rivers, and seas through place-based approaches, evoking ways of thinking and learning about bodies of water as sites of enslavement, colonisation, and capitalist extraction (Lobo & Parsons 2023). Exploring the submarine sculptures of Jason deCaires Taylor in the Caribbean, DeLoughrey (2016) engages with specific historical and aesthetical connections of an ‘oceanic turn’ in feminist thought through multispecies encounters in the Caribbean seas. Using a decolonial lens, she presents the ocean in Caribbean literature and philosophy as an archive of colonial violence and the opaque re-imagining of identity, calling for poetic engagements with oceans as places of abyssal loss and aqueous (re)beginning.

Recently, Jelena and David offered an arts education event called ‘Drops of Experience’, which aimed to facilitate creative learning experiences on everyday ferry trips between Naarm (Melbourne) and Djilang (Geelong). Both cities are part of the ocean ecology of Port Phillip Bay, a body of water which was once intertidal swamplands and mangrove forest that has since been submerged under sea water. Significant colonial engineering works and drainings have changed the form of the land and hydrological cycle affecting the local climate. As an arts education practice, Jelena and David connected with the oceanic experience of the Bay during a ferry journey lasting 1.5 hours. Working with a group of artists, students, and everyday passengers on the ferry, they explored concepts of oceanic immersion using a customised deck of cards, jars containing local seawater and plant life, and a series of guided visualisations which invited passengers to immerse themselves in the submerged histories and multispecies ecologies of the Bay (Figure 1).

The deck of cards was printed with images of oceanic creatures from the Bay including mammals, fish, sea slugs, seaweeds, and other aqueous life-forms. On the backsides of the cards were quotes from First Nations scholars (Saunders 2021; Bawaka Country *et al.* 2022) and process philosophers (James 1976; Masumi 2011) referring to oceanic flows, qualities, and ‘drops’ of experience. The activity included readings of the cards, visual sensory explorations of the jars, and collective oceanic immersion into the multispecies world of Port Phillip Bay. By diving together into oceanic experience as the ferry skimmed over the water, the event evoked individual and collective memories and affects of the ocean, problematising colonising notions of the ocean as ‘aqua nullius’ (DeLoughrey 2016). The concept of oceanic experience opened into an exploration of diverse knowledges and histories of multispecies engagement with oceans, through creative and

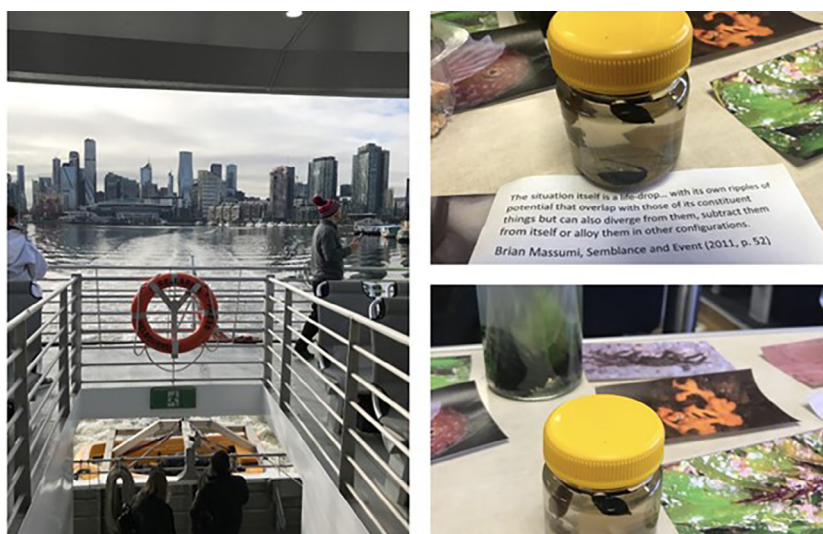


Figure 1

Photographs from the 'Drops of Experience' Arts Education Event on the Ferry Across Port Phillip Bay.

speculative explorations. This simple yet multimodal activity offered a space for exploring the incorporeality of water, where vocalisations, material samples, and visual images of the Bay produced sensations of sliding through the liquid force of water's elemental expression.

The Drops of Experience event offers suggestions for future art education practices, incorporating wet and dry encounters with the hydrological cycles circulating through all bodies as a primordial condition for life. The purpose of the cards and the activity was to stretch human perception and speculative immersion in oceanic experiences beyond the individual body's direct senses and understanding. Using the specific visual examples of species that live in the Bay, participants were able to connect through visual sensorial attunement to different ways of experiencing and inhabiting this body of water, enacting new ways of multispecies intersectionality (Petitt 2023). The water, both below the boat and in the jars, was engaged not just as material but as an incorporeal force of wetness, evoked through oceanic experiences, extending bodily perspectives into liquid volumes and depths.

Earth

When trees are ripped from soil and planted somewhere new, they won't thrive unless they are connected as a community. Like entering new communities, there must be a grafting onto existing life ways, rooted in Country. (Saunders 2021, 31)

If water embodies the fecund mutability of wetness in Stoic philosophy, then it is earth that expresses the qualities of dryness associated with a cooling and hardening of *pneuma* (breath) into inhabitable landforms. Earth figures significantly in Indigenous deep histories and living knowledges of Country, a term used by Aboriginal peoples of the Australian subcontinent and Torres Strait Islands to denote sovereign, intergenerational relations of care with traditional homelands

(Gay-Wu Group of Women *et al.* 2019). Listening to Country (Bawaka Country 2015) is a foundational practice within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and central to understandings of Indigenous sovereignty as a right to care for (and be cared for by) Country, which both predates and resists white possessive logics of ownership. The urgency of recognising unbroken histories of Indigenous sovereignty and restoring Indigenous land rights is at the heart of ongoing discussions and actions associated with decolonisation in Australia (Foley & Anderson 2006; Moreton-Robinson 2015) and other colonised territories (Deloria 1999; Tuck & Yang 2012), where the historical and ongoing dispossession of bodies from earth remains an irreparable, incorporeal wound.

For the past 4 years, David has worked with groups of children on a series of creative projects along the Birrarung river in Naarm (Melbourne). A recent project has centred around a grove of she-oak trees located along Birrarung Marr, an ancient meeting ground for the five language groups of the Kulin Nation. The project follows young children's collaborations with artists as they develop concepts of forest communication and animacy in the urban forest along the river. This led to the co-creation of an immersive 'underground world' installation which invited children to become fungal messengers passing communications between trees (Figure 2).



Figure 2

Children (ages 3–5) Engaging with the 'Dreaming' Stage of Wood Wide Web, an Immersive Theatre-Making Project Exploring Underground Communication Networks Between Trees and Mycelium.

This work exemplifies how intersectional and decolonial concerns come to matter in arts education contexts where children's attribution of personhood to earth-bound creatures, such as trees, can establish relational affordances and understandings of learning and development. By valuing and engaging children's animistic tendencies from a young age, incorporeal relations of dependency and responsibility for earthly places and creatures can be cultivated and nurtured rather than dismissed as 'pre-rational' stages of child development (Mere-wether 2019). David's recent work includes descriptions of how young children can shift very quickly from a primary dependency on the parent into elemental dependencies on light, colour, darkness, seeds, leaves, mushrooms, bacteria, and soil: unknowable, dark, subterranean, pluriversal, opaque relations of dependency, which are incorporeal, and deeply affective (Rousell 2023). This work challenges linear models of child development from dependency to independence, arguing that children never become independent from the element of earth which is their condition for existence.

These examples demonstrate how the element of earth is crucial to a philosophy of arts education, which seeks to reckon with the irreparable wounds of colonisation and their impacts on intersectional identity, both within and beyond human subject positions (Arnold *et al.* 2021). To the extent that earth forms the ground on which the body's ethical and aesthetic orientations towards the world are lived, then arts education provides unique opportunities for bodily relations with earth to become sensitised and responsive within particular sites and situations.

Air

The unravelling of the world is imperceptible – like cancer. This is why we need concepts of atmosphere. (Berlant 2023, 464)

The atmosphere in which we live, including the air we breathe, co-constitutes how we are in the world. The ancient Stoics considered air an active element which moves and cools the element of fire into the constitution of the pneuma. This makes the element of air a central figuration in the Stoic conception of the human body and soul. It can be easy to ignore the invisible atmosphere amidst which we are trapped, and on which our bodies and lives depend. Carbon in the air, known as carbon dioxide (CO₂), is a colourless and odourless gas composed of one carbon atom and two oxygen atoms. It is a vital component of Earth's atmosphere, making up a small fraction of the atmospheric gases but one that is still crucial for all earthly life. Carbon dioxide plays a pivotal role in the carbon cycle, which is the process through which carbon is exchanged among the atmosphere, oceans, soil, and living organisms. Carbon dioxide is produced through respiration, volcanic activity, and decay of organic matter. However, human activities, particularly the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil, and natural gas) for energy, deforestation, and certain industrial processes, have significantly increased the concentration of carbon dioxide in the air over the past century. This increased CO₂ concentration in the element of air is a major contributor to global warming and climate change and a direct impact of colonial domination and control.

Engelmann (2020) examines how air can be weaponised to kill, drawing on research in the trenches of World War One. She canvases gas warfare, arguing it is much older than WWI and demonstrates how gas was used as a means of colonial suppression far before it was used on the battlefields of Europe. We can also

think about the weaponisation of air through poor air quality, smoke, smog, germs, and fumes. Chemical warfare, weather modification, and cloud seeding are also colonial means of control as “status preserving technofixes,” which effectively extend the logistics of whiteness to planetary scale (Demos 2018, 6). So too, is the rise of what we know today as atmospheric science, which is linked to the tracing of radiation in the atmosphere. After Engelmann (2020), we would argue that air qualities and temperatures are not just a means of governance but a means for colonial powers to penetrate both the material and incorporeal depths of bodies. The air that we breathe becomes intersectional as it is shaped by axes of class, race, gender, geography and culture (Ahuja, 2015). Air quality becomes a luxury available to those who can afford to escape cities, for those who can purchase air purifiers, coolers, and buildings that have atmospheric controls.

In a recent project titled *Carbon Cultures*, Anna and David created a living lab for exploring young people’s affective attachments to carbon. The lab involved collaborations with contemporary artists who engage with the affective dynamics of carbon and air pollution in a variety of intersectional and decolonial ways. Staged at dusk, performance artist Zoe Scoglio’s project MASS begins with the arrival of approximately one hundred people who parked their cars in a circle and silently ascended the mountainous terrain of Calder Park raceway, about 20 miles from inner city Naarm (Melbourne). Led by silent facilitators carrying LED light sticks and wearing wireless headphones, participants form a ritualised procession resembling both a funeral train and a spiritual pilgrimage. A series of cars then enter the arena, driven by professional drivers, their faces entirely obscured by reflective carbon fibre helmets. Each car articulates an elegant series of choreographic curves, stops, and starts, raising up clouds of carbon emissions and black dust into the darkening sky (Figure 3).

MASS offered a dynamic exemplification of how participatory arts practices can teach us about the incorporeality of air through encounters which simultaneously critique and celebrate the aesthetic allure of carbon. By connecting the



Figure 3

Still Image from MASS, a Work of Performance Art and Pedagogy by Scoglio (2015, used with permission from the artist).

pleasures of muscle cars, V8 engines, and smoke-drenching burnouts with much deeper dependencies on breathable air across climatological and cosmological time-scales, MASS proposes an intimate choreography of human cultures and technologies as elemental transductions of air in motion, inseparable from the planetary forces, multi-layered histories, and playful material agencies of carbon that give life to matter. Yet MASS can also be read as a requiem which marks the end of petro-capitalism as the dominant system and culture of the current planetary age. It is this sense of funereal ritual and ceremony, which gives MASS its pedagogical depth, as a work of participatory art which brings attention to the certain death of worlds predicated on current attachments to carbon pollution.

Fire

We have here a fire-logos, a breath-seed, a fire that carries within it seeds, material forces that are greatly compressed which shape and direct the emergence of things. (Grosz 2017, 23)

For the Stoics, fire forms the original energetic source of all bodies and incorporeals. The earth was forged in fire, and the sun continues to be the source of all light and heat energy which sustains life. The Stoics believed that the element of fire actively combines with the cooling qualities of air to create *pneuma*, the fiery breath that animates all bodies and souls, including the universe or ‘world-soul’ of which all other souls form a part. Fire is also a highly significant material and incorporeal element within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander philosophies and cultural practices (Birch 2007). Fire features prominently in creation stories as well as practices of cultural burning which are passed down through generations. Trawlulwuy scholar Lauren Tynan (2021) describes cultural burning practices as ways of bringing bodies into unity through their shared relationships with fire. “As a relational practice, cultural burning enables Peoples (or birds, lightening and other entities) to bring their relationship with fire together so that the two (or multiple) entities are more unified as one” (p. 602). Gamilaroi scholar Michelle Bishop (2022) further describes the connections between fire and what she terms “educational sovereignty” as illustrated through the National Indigenous Fire Workshop, which brings together hundreds of people each year to share cultural burning knowledges and practices. Bishop discusses how children and young people learn to engage with fire through creative education experiences which include “the relationships between fire and dance, weaving and creating riddles, running on uneven ground and listening to Elders tell stories in non-linear ways ... Learning is sparked by the relationships between the learner and the infinite entities to learn from” (p. 140).

Our final example relates fire to an elemental philosophy of arts education not through our own research and education practice, but through the work of local Indigenous political organisation Black GST. Established in 2005 by Indigenous intellectual and political leaders Marg Thorpe, Gary Foley, and Robbie Thorpe, the naming of Black GST sought to foreground “genocide as well as sovereignty and treaty – more familiar concepts from ongoing struggles for land rights – a response to efforts by conservatives to downplay or deny the mass slaughter of Indigenous nations” (Birch 2018). In 2006, Black GST and other Indigenous-led activist groups established Camp Sovereignty on the crown lands of the King’s Domain in Naarm (Melbourne). Camp Sovereignty sought to reclaim land which had historically been a site of *corroborree* (gathering and celebration) for language

groups of the Kulin nation, and was in part a protest of what they termed the ‘Stolenwealth Games’ taking place in Melbourne that year (Birch 2018). This place is also the burial site for 38 Aboriginal people from across Australia whose remains were returned by public museums in the 1980s. A sacred fire was lit at Camp Sovereignty in March, 2006, and was kept alight and protected from police interference for 60 days. This included a 30-day protection order obtained from the Supreme Court by Aboriginal Heritage Inspector Vicki Nicholson-Brown (Birch 2018).

Camp Sovereignty organisers have described the fire as “lore, law and culture, [and it] represents justice, too ... Not just place and healing but justice” (Casey 2007, 78). The fire was quenched and the camp disbanded by police on 10 May 2006, despite numerous applications to Aboriginal Affairs Victoria for a permit to maintain the sacred fire. On 26 January 2024, the fire was rekindled and Camp Sovereignty was re-established following the failure of the Australian referendum for an Aboriginal Voice to parliament (Figure 4). Sixty days later, at the time



Figure 4
The Sacred Fire at Camp Sovereignty in Naarm (Melbourne). Still Burning as of April 3rd, 2024.

of writing, the fire is still burning and the camp is a thriving hub for people to gather, learn, and share creative practices of resistance to colonial violence and dispossession.

Conclusion

This article has navigated some of the complex alliances and disjunctions between Grosz's incorporeal materialism and cultural theories and practices associated with intersectionality and decolonisation. This has included elaborations of each of the four elements (water, earth, air, and fire) that comprise the Stoic cosmology of body and universe, with relational connections made between these ancient conceptions in Western thought and the far more ancient and continuous traditions of Indigenous philosophies and knowledge cultures. In each of these elaborations, we have focused on local arts education practices that engage these elements as both material and incorporeal conditions for life. Taken together, these elemental elaborations of practice look to engage a philosophy of arts education which enhances the body's capacities to ethically embrace and care for the future. As Grosz writes, such a philosophy cannot be constructed through normative prescriptions for behaviour. In the end, each body must find and produce its own intersectional and decolonising relations through the elements that compose it. This process inevitably begins where we are, and is never complete (Harney & Moten 2021). The role of an elemental arts education is to "intensify how life feels itself and its world" (Grosz 2017, 258), such that bodies develop capacities to reconstitute themselves and their futures along intersectional and decolonial lines. By attending to the elements of water, earth, air, and fire that are shared across all forms of life, arts education can create new and different directions through which bodies learn to inhabit intersectional and decolonial futures.

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