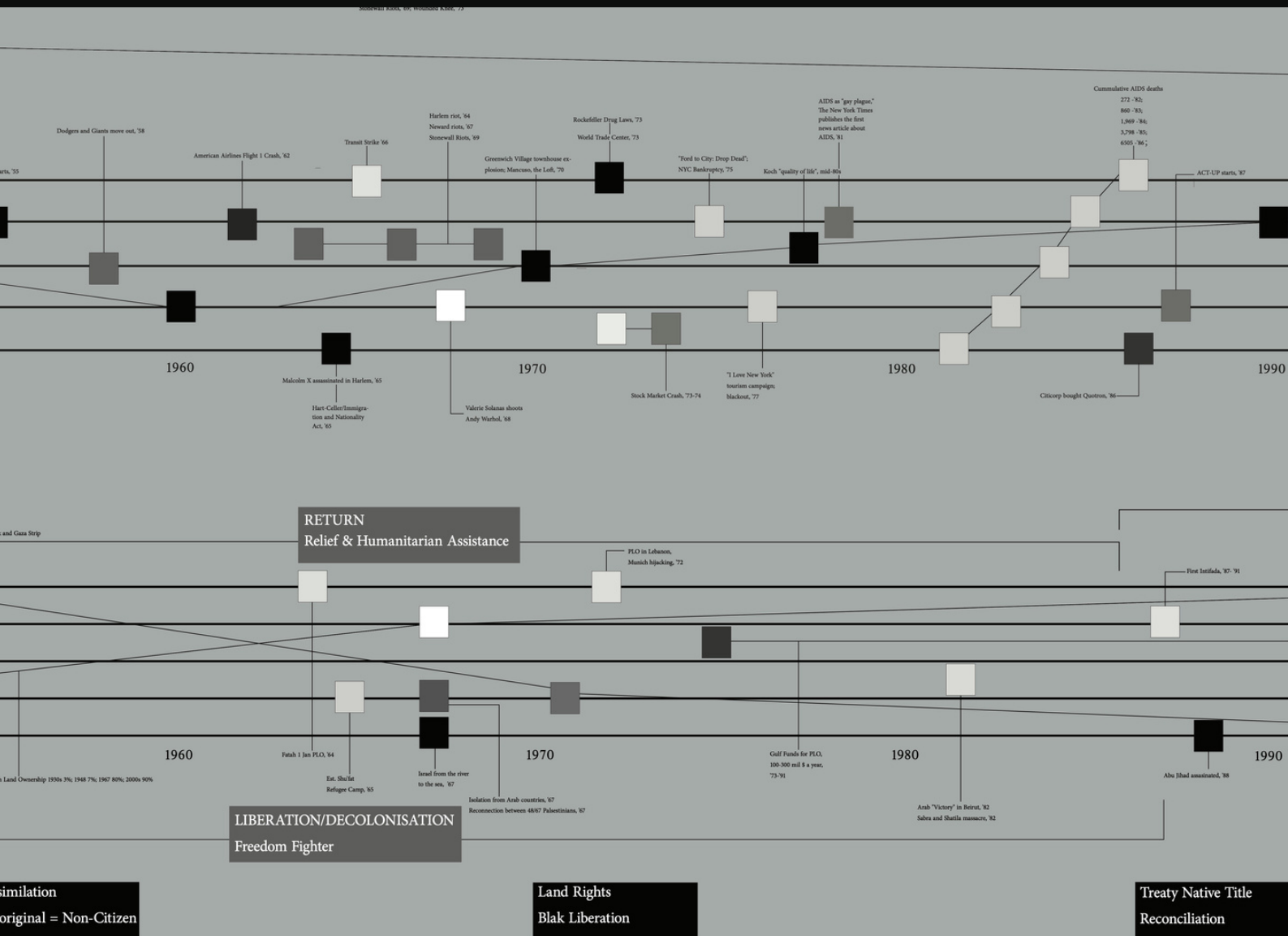


NOTATION, DECOLONIAL RESISTANCE, AND THE POLITICAL SOVEREIGNTY OF 'LATE LIBERALISM'

PARTICIPANTS: ELIZABETH POVINELLI, NADIA ABU EL-HAJ, MORAG GRANT, TOM METCALF, SHAKEEL ANJUM

MUSICAL INTERPRETATIONS RECORDED BY DAVID PALMER



WEDNESDAY 12 APRIL 2023, 6:30PM

Project Room, 50 George Square
University of Edinburgh

PRESENTED BY THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES IN THE HUMANITIES

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ABOUT

A *Symphony of Late Liberalism* appears as a 'concept-image' in Elizabeth Povinelli's *Economies of Abandonment* (2011), one which represents a critique of liberalism in a transnational, historic, and contemporary assemblage of events. It is further expanded in *Geontologies: A Requiem for Late Liberalism*, to demonstrate 'a strange way of periodizing [which] creates an even stranger geography' visible in the image of the *Symphony* (2016: 169). The *Symphony* is presented, in musical terms, as a graphic score: a musical text used for performance which prioritises indeterminacy, pictorialism and/or abstraction, suffused with a maximising of the performer's agency (in lieu of the traditional composer-performer hierarchy).

The *Symphony* is a fusion of anthropological, sociological, and musicological design. This workshop will host five speakers to bring their disciplinary expertise to unravelling the implications of this enigmatic text. These short (7-10 minute) presentations will be interspersed with recorded musical interpretations of the *Symphony*, provided by pianist David Palmer, to demonstrate the radical potential of the text as performative: how can we 'sound' the idea of decolonial resistance?

The key questions to be addressed by this workshop include:

- What is it about the design of the *Symphony* that can further the understandings that Povinelli poses on late liberalism?
- How can, or should, it be read?
- What is gained through performances of the work?
- Having discussed these issues, how can one now see and hear the *Symphony* as critique of late liberalism in both Povinelli's framework, but also in new, experimental and decolonial contexts?

This event was devised by Dr. Tom Metcalf and Dr. Shakeel Anjum, and supported through the Susan Manning Workshop Fund at The Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh.

SPEAKERS



(LISTED IN ORDER OF PRESENTATION)



ELIZABETH POVINELLI

Franz Boas Professor of Anthropology, Columbia University

Elizabeth Povinelli is a critical theorist and filmmaker. Her critical writing has focused on developing a critical theory of late settler liberalism that would support an anthropology of the otherwise. This potential theory has unfolded across five books, numerous essays, and a thirty-five years of collaboration with her Indigenous colleagues in north Australia including, most recently, six films they have created as members of the Karrabing Film Collective.

Her book, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism*, was the 2017 recipient of the Lionel Trilling Book Award and The Cunning of Recognition was a Art Forum Best Book of the Year. Karrabing films were awarded the 2015 Visible Award and the 2015 Cinema Nova Award Best Short Fiction Film, Melbourne International Film Festival and have shown internationally including in the Berlinale Forum Expanded, Sydney Biennale; MIFF, the Tate Modern, documenta-14, the Contour Biennale, and MoMA PSI.



TOM METCALF

Junior Anniversary Fellow, IASH, University of Edinburgh

Tom Metcalf is an interdisciplinary researcher and composer specialising in music and comparative arts from the 20th century to the present day, focussing specifically on textual relationships between musical and visual phenomena. His IASH project, *Photography and/as Music*, explores the relationships between the two media in textual, metaphorical, and philosophical terms, suggesting that photography's material and ontological properties are palpably felt in development of key musical concepts of the 20th century, such as indeterminacy, improvisation, and early forms of sonification.

Tom achieved his DPhil from Oxford University in 2021 with a thesis entitled *Graphical Ekphrasis in Contemporary Music* supported by a portfolio of compositions which demonstrate aspects of his theoretical research. His work has been published in *Music Analysis*, *Tempo*, *Leonardo*, *The Journal of the Royal College of Organists*, *Principles of Music Composing*, and *Question*. Tom taught at Oxford from 2018–2022, and in 2021 was appointed to a Junior Teaching Fellowship at the Ashmolean Museum, focussed on interdisciplinary and object-focussed teaching for undergraduates and postgraduates. In January 2023, Tom was appointed to the DECR Committee of the Association for Art History.

For more on Tom's work as a composer, see his website: www.thomasmkmetcalf.com



NADIA ABU EL-HAJ

Ann Olin Whitney Professor of Anthropology; Codirector of the Center for Palestine Studies, Columbia University

Nadia Abu El-Haj is Ann Whitney Olin Professor in the Departments of Anthropology at Barnard College and Columbia University, Co-Director of the Center for Palestine Studies, and Chair of the Governing Board of the Society of Fellows/Heyman Center for the Humanities at Columbia University. She also serves as Vice President and Vice Chair of the Board at The Institute for Palestine Studies in Washington DC. The recipient of numerous awards, including from the Social Science Research Council, the Wenner Gren Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the Harvard Academy for Area and International Studies, the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, and the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, she is the author of numerous journal articles published on topics ranging from the history of archaeology in Palestine to the question of race and genomics today.

Abu El-Haj has published two books: *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (2001), which won the Albert Hourani Annual Book Award from the Middle East Studies Association in 2002, and *The Genealogical Science: The Search for Jewish Origins and the Politics of Epistemology* (2012). While Abu El-Haj's two books to date have focused on historical sciences (archaeology, and genetic history), her third book, forthcoming in 2022 from Verso, examines the field of (military) psychiatry, and explores the complex ethical and political implications of shifting psychiatric and public understandings of the trauma of American soldiers.



MORAG GRANT

Chancellors Fellow, Reid School of Music, University of Edinburgh

Morag Grant's work combines sociological, anthropological and historical perspectives to investigate what musical communication in the broadest sense can tell us about human social life. Her writing on post-war serial and experimental music, for example, explores how this music challenges Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment ideas about what music is. She has also worked extensively on the historical anthropology of music in Britain, with a particular focus on Scotland, and on songs and singing.

Currently, most of Morag's work investigates music and violence – specifically, how music is used to promote, facilitate and accompany collective and political violence. From 2008-2014, as a junior professor of musicology at the University of Göttingen, she led the research group "Music, Conflict and the State": alongside projects on music and genocide, in armed conflict and in the context of colonialism, the group helped pioneer research into the use of music to torture. Morag's work in these areas has also been supported by a fellowship at the Käthe Hamburger Centre of Advanced Study "Law as Culture" at the University of Bonn, a research visitorship at the at the University of Vienna from the Balzan research project "Towards a Global History of Music", and a major grant from the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. Together with Dr Diljeet Kaur Bhachu, she co-organised the 2020 conference *Decolonising the Musical University* (<https://www.ed.ac.uk/edinburgh-college-art/reid-school-music/decolonising-musical-university>)

Previously, Morag has taught musicology at the European College of Liberal Arts (now Bard College Berlin), and the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in addition to the University of Göttingen. She has also delivered training on human rights and human rights activism, and taught political and religious rights at the Leuphana-Universität Lüneburg. She is a member of the Editorial and Advisory Board of the Musica Scotica Trust and the Editorial Board of Contemporary Music Review.



SHAKEEL ANJUM

RACE.ED Postdoctoral Fellow, IASH, University of Edinburgh

Dr Shakeel Anjum's scholarship concerns the relation between love and politics in the decolonial imagination. His work engages with the structures of love as a counterpoint to the biopolitical conditions of restraint, adopting an intersectional framework to look at the relations, tensions and possibilities for the future. Dr. Anjum's scholarship focuses on the peripheral geographies of wound, addressing the affective relation between people and political movements, cutting across spatio-temporal structures and forms, notions of subjectification, violence, and writing. He is interested in the intertwining of aesthetic forms and politics, cultures of resistance, hermeneutics of love, and sensuous spaces of decolonial sovereignty, geographically tethered to Black radical traditions and Palestinian Sumud (steadfastness).

Dr Anjum has written and published in various journals, including the *Indian Journal of Politics and International Relations* (2016), and *Summerhill Journal* by the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla (2015). His book, *Politics of Space and the Question of Palestine* (New Delhi: Adroit Publishers, 2018) is a weave-work of memories, time and space on the political and historical subject geographically torn into shreds. It is attentive to the problematiqués of spatial representations of violent geographies in the autobiographical works of the Israeli and Palestinian writers Amos Oz, Raja Shehadeh and Mourid Barghouti. Dr Shakeel Anjum earned his PhD from the School of International Relations and Politics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

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PROGRAMME

Elizabeth Povinelli:

'The Symphony of Late Liberalism was inspired by the compelling diagram that introduces Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *Un Mille Plateau* and the haunting Gregorian chants of my Catholic youth. Less complex than the rhizomatic nature of Deleuze & Guattari's score, but more haunted by the figurative power of late liberalism, *The Symphony of Late Liberalism* was always intended as a score in process open to the recomposition of each stanza, desirous of more stanzas, wishing to be written over and against. In 2016, Vivian Zihel curated Edition No.1 of her *Frontier Imaginaries* project, laminating a vinyl version of *The Symphony* on one of the venue walls. I invited visitors to write their entries. These images were some of the first audience additions.'

- Interpretation 1 -

Tom Metcalf:

'What is it about the Symphony's musical and textual form that can inform our understanding of resistance? Through a brief introduction to the 'graphic score', I will propose that this recent form, emerging in the second half of the 20th century, amounts to a form of sociological iconoclasm (drawing upon Bruno Latour), and that Povinelli's *Symphony* is a multi-layered and enigmatic musical text that crosses various disciplinary boundaries to create an unstable performative space, one which necessitate shifting perspectives and approaches, applicable to both specialists and non-specialists.'

- Interpretation 2 -

Nadia Abu El-Haj:

Nadia will discuss the idea of the Symphony from a Palestinian perspective, noting how 'frames of resistance' are a process of constant mediation and negotiation, and thus necessitate a continual pattern of shifting.

- Interpretation 3 -

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PROGRAMME

Morag Grant:

'How does Povinelli's Symphony look from the perspective of discussions around the decolonisation of music? The symphony as musical form, and music notation as the paradigmatic expression of musical knowledge, emerge in tandem with the discourse of European/white supremacy that underpin(ned) colonial practices. My contribution, therefore, will scrutinize the recourse to music as emblematic of resistance and freedom, and how this may reflect the very legacies it seeks to leave behind.'

- Interpretation 4 -

Shakeel Anjum:

'Elizabeth Povinelli's Symphony as it traverses many signatures; (im)personal, historical, geopolitical and the ethical, simultaneously opens the continuum of sound towards an idea of love and politics freed from Judeo-Christian-secular absorption. How might we listen to the sounding of deaths and it's opposite, love in the realm of an openness that strives for another sounding of the "intramural" world. Reading Symptomatically; How are the Palestinian and Black lives far from the Greeks and the "forgeries" of "gifts" "deaths" knowledge and time?'

- Geometric Interpretation of A Symphony of Liberalisms (Metcalf) -

Discussion

Chaired by Lesley McAra

(Professor of Penology; Director, IASH, Edinburgh University)

Refreshments

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NOTES ON MUSICAL INTERPRETATIONS

A Symphony of Liberalisms presents no fixed musical interpretation and therefore can offer multiple and varied performances. These notes offer brief insights into the thinking that went into transforming the score into performance.

Palmer

Interpretation 1

Each square is a single note. The performance is approximately rhythmically proportional.

The horizontal lines are read as conventional staves. The clefs are as follows: upper staff = treble clef transposed up one octave; middle-upper = staff treble clef; middle-lower staff = bass clef; lower staff = bass clef transposed down one octave. The four 'staves' are read simultaneously. Accidentals are improvised at random.

Dynamics correspond to shade. The staccato (/non-legato) articulation reflects the disconnected squares. The interpretation ends abruptly, as does the graphical timeline.

Interpretation 2

The tone is uniformly expressive; dynamics no longer correspond to shade. The rhythm, though loosely proportional, is relatively free.

The horizontal lines are interpreted as staves, as per Interpretation 1. However, (mostly!) only the white notes of the piano are used.

The occasional rests are as long as it took me to read the boxed information, and occur when I reached these points in the score.

Interpretation 3

The squares and horizontal/vertical lines are ignored. The extremes of the page correspond to the upper/lower notes on the piano.

Diagonal lines correspond to glissandi. On the recording, the sound of my nails on the keys can be heard.

The above is physically impossible; at most points I have to prioritise certain lines over others, and the glissandi are often so slow as to not be heard as such.

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NOTES ON MUSICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Interpretation 4

The squares correspond to chords. Darker squares become more densely-packed chords.

The horizontal lines are read as staves. Unlike a conventional staff, each five lines cover the range of the entire keyboard. There are four systems/lines, so the interpretation ends at the lower right-hand corner of the page.

This interpretation was recorded in two tracks, played simultaneously. One track contains the upper staff followed by the upper-middle staff. The other track contains the lower-middle staff followed by the lower staff.

The rhythm is approximately proportional.

Metcalf

Geometric Interpretation

As the description suggests, I wanted to create as literal a mapping of the time and space that the Symphony's text presents. I note also that the y-axis is representative of years (i.e. a uniform time unit), and therefore I decided to choose a fixed rhythmic unit to correspond with geometric distance (in this case, 1mm = semiquaver/16th-note). Since the staves (stanzas) are bracketed together on the left, I took this to mean that an up:high/down:low pitch orientation is implied (following the standards of Western art music, in which I'm trained). Positions of the events on the staff gave distinct pitches, and those few events that do not sit cleanly on a staff line are chromatically inflected. The sustaining pedal is depressed throughout, blurring the sounds together.

In one sense, this is close to methodologies seen in 'sonification' studies, turning data into sound, and could perhaps be seen as an impersonal version of the score. Nonetheless, I believe it helps to clearly demonstrate Povinelli's polyphony of late liberalism, and serves to offer further opportunities to explore the score in a less formalist way.

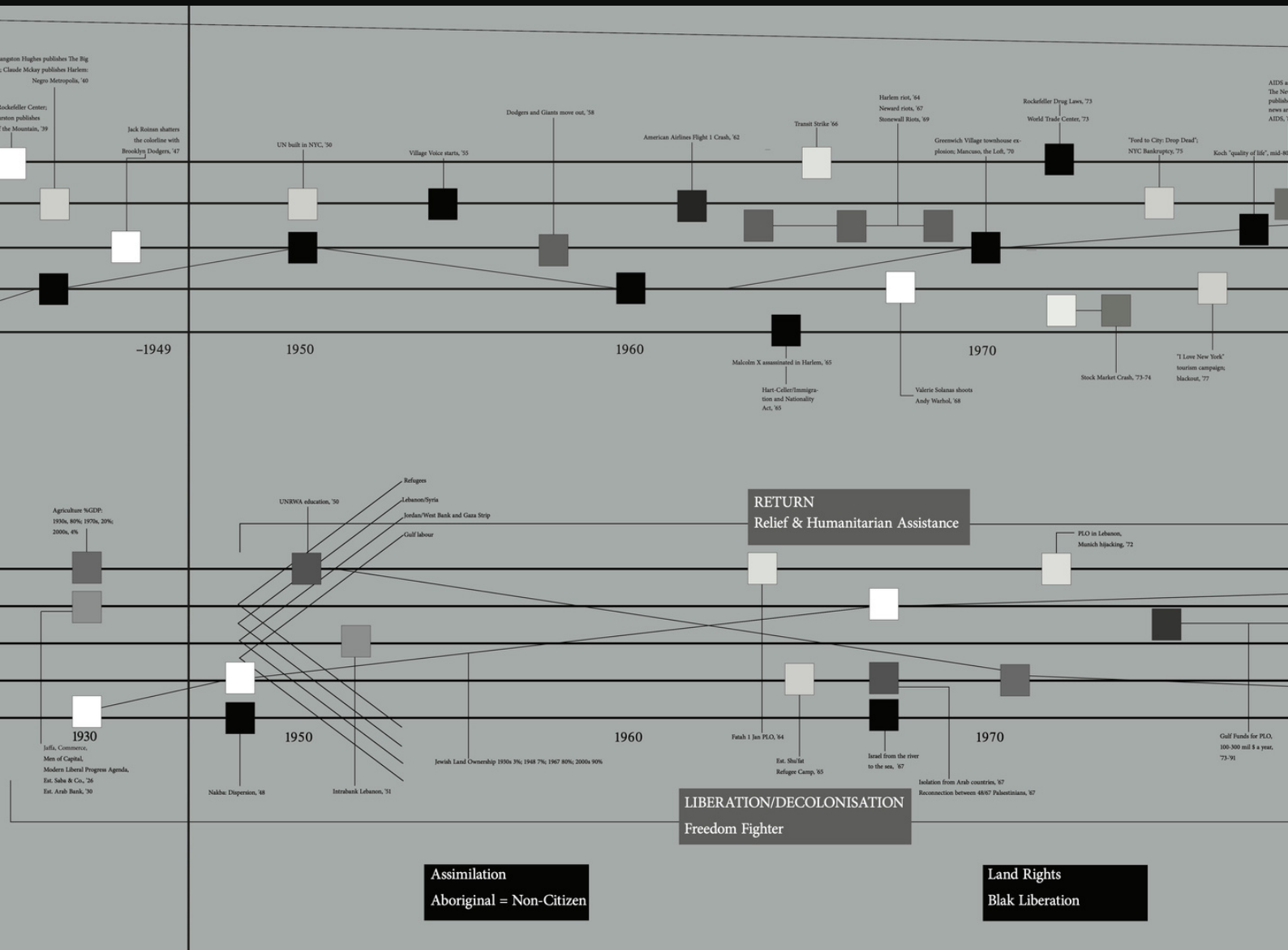


Image Credit:

Elizabeth Povinelli
A Symphony of Liberalisms

Programme Design:

Tom Metcalf