Not About U: Social Dissonance at a Land-Grab University

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November 15, 2023

Abstract

Mattin’s concept of social dissonance and durational concert Social Dissonance offer compelling devices to understand a central tension within institutions of higher education in settler colonial contexts. How can faculty and students support unlearning gestures in their shared work at a ‘Land-grab’ university, a term used in a 2020 report to describe how ‘Land-grant’ institutions created through the federal 1862 Morrill Act were founded the forced expropriation of Indigenous land and life? This article mixes the settler author’s repeated experiences of Social Dissonance at documenta 14, in both Athens, Greece, and its traditional home of Kassel, Germany with its translation to a sequence of teaching contexts at the ‘Land-grab’ university where he works. Amid failures to prevent a rightwing power-grab and create curriculum on global Indigenous arts, the author turns to the concept of social dissonance as a timely heuristic for revealing the levels of a specifically colonial intrusion into educational contexts by an exclusionary settler worldview. At the same time, the author attempts to tune out this colonial noise by gesturing towards echoes of the Social Dissonance in the vital work of living, Indigenous artists.

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