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From the cosmos to the polis: on denizens, art and postmigration worldmaking

Marsha Meskimmon

School of the Arts, English and Drama, Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK

ABSTRACT

The concept of “postmigration” as a non-binary way of understanding the exchange and movement of people and ideas across imaginative and materially enforced boundaries, is a compelling way to engage with contemporary politics, art and culture. It also has much to say to a contemporary cosmopolitanism that stresses the significance of embodied, responsible and intersubjective agency as the basis of an ethical worldmaking project. This essay deploys an alternative figuration, the denizen, as a means by which to materialize the imaginative force of art beyond the limits of representation and, in so doing, propose it as an active mode of experimental worldmaking. Arguing with and through a small number of specific case studies, the text brings the insights of feminist corporeal-materialism together with a post-colonial praxis of reading, writing and making within, and yet against, the grain of the exclusive limits of the “nation” and “her citizens”. The wilful act of the denizen in making herself at home everywhere becomes a way of imagining and materializing creative ecologies of belonging that are neither premised upon an essential call to blood nor an authentic claim to soil. Rather, the postmigration worldmaking explored here posits a radically open cosmos that emerges in mutual exchange with a response-able and responsible polis.

KEYWORDS

Denizen; citizen;
worldmaking;
cosmopolitanism; feminism;
new materialism; public art;
figuration

The concept of “postmigration”,¹ understood as a non-binary description of the movement, exchange and settlement of people and ideas across both imaginative and material boundaries, is a compelling concept through which to engage with contemporary politics, art and culture. In addition, it has much to say to a contemporary cosmopolitanism that stresses the significance of embodied, responsible and intersubjective agency as the basis of an ethical worldmaking project. Bringing the insights of feminist corporeal-materialism² together with a decolonizing praxis of reading, writing and making within and yet against the grain of the exclusive limits of the “nation” and “her citizens”, this essay develops an alternative figuration, the worldmaking denizen, as a means by which to think with the imaginative force of art beyond the limits of representation, towards an active mode of experimental agency. In the act(s) of making herself at home everywhere, the denizen becomes a way of imagining and materializing creative ecologies of belonging that are neither premised upon an essential call to blood nor an authentic claim to soil. The postmigratory (post-authentic) worldmaking explored in this essay posits a radically open *cosmos* that emerges in mutual exchange with a responsible (and response-able) *polis*.

This essay argues that moving from the cosmos to the polis through the figuration of the denizen

enables a dialogue to emerge among the arts, world citizenship, intersectional agency and global demographic change. In particular, it suggests that art can materialize spaces in which it becomes possible to engender forms of embodied and participatory worldmaking that challenge the limits of exclusive and normative citizenship. Such an argument assigns a strong role to the creative and imaginative practices of the arts and to their ability to experiment within the material parameters of the world without being wholly constrained by them. Indeed, it is central to the thinking that drives this text that art not be seen as outside the world, standing at some distance and representing it as a kind of mirror held up to reflect a pre-existent reality. Rather, the arts here are understood to demonstrate diffractive or ecological agency in action; they provide experimental opportunities to materialize the mutual emergence of transversal worlds and intersectional subjects: the open-ended “cosmo/polis” of the worldmaking denizen.

While it is possible to see the commitment to exploring forms of belonging that move beyond the limits of the sovereign nation-state as hopelessly utopian and idealist,³ that would be to misapprehend the critical materialist trajectories that inform this argument and many others. For example, in making their compelling case for the critical role of constitutive imagination to an ethics premised upon embodiment

and intersubjectivity, Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd wrote this of “world citizenship”:

... [T]he exercise of the capacity to see the specificity of one’s own world as one among many others ... would be to conceive of one’s own form of sociability as a valued but contingent way of life that does not cancel one’s responsibilities as a “citizen of the world” ... On this view, “world citizenship” does not involve an “idealistic”, or unattainable, transcendence of embodied being, but rather an immanent, embodied and ongoing negotiation between multiple forms of sociability.⁴

This is not a retreat from the world, but a profoundly responsible worldmaking, an engagement with (and within) the material constraints of the past that yet fosters the emergence of open and different futures. Before developing the arguments around world citizenship as an immanent and embodied form of cosmopolitanism by turning to specific works of art produced for public spaces, it is worth expanding briefly on the idea of worldmaking being deployed in this text. To say that art is worldmaking, rather than a mere reflection of a pre-existent world, is intended to emphasize the affective agency of art and suggest that, through its imaginative fictions (of the most powerful sort), art can materialize different possibilities for the future from within the material legacies of the past and present. Following Nelson Goodman, worlds do not “come from nothing, after all, but *from other worlds*. Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking.”⁵ Recent scholarship by Michelle Antoinette and Caroline Turner has developed the idea of art as worldmaking with exceptional nuance to engage with contemporary art, politics (particularly in Asia) and questions of human rights.⁶ As will become clear as the present argument unfolds, these insights into art’s worldmaking potential and its ability to participate in processes of social change have important ramifications for rethinking normative citizenship beyond the nation-state.

By calling for an “embodied and ongoing negotiation between multiple forms of sociability”, Gatens and Lloyd emphasize process over object; responsible world citizenship is not a thing that one finally, once and for all, produces, attains or owns. It is, rather, a process of continual dialogue and interaction, an iterative and intersubjective form of engagement whose specific materializations over time and in space are substantive but never final. In what follows, I will argue that works of art can provide especially provocative insights into these multiple and mutable processes of materialization and, moreover, that where the formal and conceptual qualities of the artworks pose searching questions of belonging with others in the world, they act less as representations of “world citizenship” than as forms of diffractive

agency through which the world and the citizen/denizen (the cosmos and the polis) emerge in mutuality.

The terminology deployed throughout this text is deliberately evocative. Tracing trajectories from representation to articulation⁷, exploring materialization and diffractive forms of agency⁸, and drawing the lines of a new figuration⁹ are used here both to argue for the potential of art to materialize creative ecologies of belonging beyond the limits of the masculine-normative citizen *and* to hold a dialogue with the rich work of those feminist theorists who, over the past three decades, have unravelled the intellectual stalemate of dualist thinking. This body of work has developed ways of engaging productively with the entanglement of matter and meaning in process without falling into the trap of radical relativism or ineffectual idealism and, as such, is critical to the argument being made here. As a way of opening the dialogue between art and the materialization of multiple forms of sociability in a more concrete way, I want to turn to a particular work at this point: Monica Ross’s *Anniversary—An Act of Memory* (2008–13).¹⁰

Anniversary—An Act of Memory was a multisited, participatory performance piece in 60 acts that took place between 2008 and 2013. Each act of the work was a singular instance and no two performance-recitations were precisely the same. However, the work as a whole was underpinned by certain structural continuities and these can provide a useful starting point for a description of the work. The central action of *Anniversary* was the recitation from memory of the Preamble and Articles of the United Nations’ (UN’s) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), either solo (by Ross alone) or collectively (Ross and others). The collective recitations were often multilingual, including the use of sign language. The work was convened within various communities and contexts and the recitations took place in various public and community spaces (both indoor and outdoor), such as libraries, museums, galleries, churches, schools and grounds, and there were versions streamed live or filmed and screened to other audiences. Visually, the staging of the work varied from quite loose recitations in parks or at festivals with an *ad hoc* audience of passers-by to closely rendered recitations resembling small choral or theatrical performances, with a stage, lighting and more defined sense of audience (Figures 1 and 2).

Conceptually, there was a direct precursor to *Anniversary*; the work *rightsrepeated—an act of memory*, which was performed by Ross in November 2005 in response to the police killing of Jean Charles de Menezes, the young man mistaken for a fugitive “terrorist” and shot dead on the London underground in July of that year. The tragic case of



Figure 1. Monica Ross, *Anniversary—An Act of Memory*, Act 01 (07.12.2008) solo recitation, performed as part of *Ours By Right*, an event celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, presented by the Equality and Human Rights Commission and The British Library as part of the exhibition *Taking Liberties: The Struggle for Britain's Freedoms and Rights*, British Library, London (photograph: Alex Delfanne; reproduced by kind permission of the family of Monica Ross).



Figure 2. Monica Ross, *Anniversary—An Act of Memory*, Act 38 (10.12.2011) group recitation, performed for *We Are All Equal*, an event in honour of International Human Rights Day, with the Sheffield Socialist Choir and Northern Refugee Centre, Nelson Mandela Room, Sheffield Town Hall, presented by Site Gallery, Sheffield (photograph: Bernard Mills; reproduced by kind permission of the family of Monica Ross).

Menezes has become a touchstone for many people concerned that our fear of others is leading inexorably to an erosion of human rights, dignity and empathy; countering this fear is itself an act of cosmopolitan solidarity. It was in seeking the words to remember Menezes in *rightsrepeated* that Ross first recited the Preamble and 30 Articles of the UDHR from memory as a two-fold act of remembrance: for the loss of this man's life and of our commitment to the continual and collective reinstatement of the rights of ourselves and others in the world.

The recitation from memory of the Preamble and Articles of the UDHR remained the cornerstone act that later constituted *Anniversary—An Act of Memory*

through its 60 particular iterations between 2008 and 2013. *Act 1*, the first recitation of *Anniversary*, was a solo performance by Ross in the British Library undertaken as part of *Ours By Right*, an event celebrating the 60th anniversary of the UDHR. The event was staged within the wider context of a British Library exhibition supported by the Equality and Human Rights Commission called *Taking Liberties: The Struggle for Britain's Freedoms and Rights* (2008). It was not surprising that Ross would work in this context; as a feminist, artist, activist and educator, she had a substantial track record of exploring the histories and rights of marginalized people through public and performance works.

Over the next five years, *Anniversary—An Act of Memory* was performed across many acts in a variety of public venues and in support of various causes; recitations took place, for example, at events to mark International Women’s Day, in support of Amnesty International’s campaign for prisoners’ rights, for World AIDS Day and as part of the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art’s 2011 festival *To Reverse the Usual Order of Things*, where the articles were signed rather than spoken. That the “act of memory” residing at the heart of the work was undertaken both by Ross and by many other participants across a variety of spaces, contexts and languages demonstrates *Anniversary*’s complexity as a dialogic form of socially engaged art and a “negotiation between multiple forms of sociability”, whose embodied performance materialized both specific, “local” concerns and a shared commitment to human rights and their continual instantiation.¹¹

As noted earlier, the “anniversary” to which the title refers is particular: on 10 December 1948, the UDHR was adopted by a Proclamation of the UN General Assembly. Although scholars are right to argue that Ross’s work is more than just an interesting way to re-present the UDHR in a performance piece,¹² the document is central to the work and retracing some key aspects of the UDHR’s history helps to illuminate the relationship between this living document and the significance of its recitation in *Anniversary*.

Drafted in the wake of the Second World War and in the full awareness of the atrocities committed during that conflict, the UDHR was written under the auspices of the UN’s Commission on Human Rights, chaired at the time by Eleanor Roosevelt. Despite some issues of “dated language” (and Ross used the plain speech, gender-neutral version of the UDHR as her core text in English), the UDHR is still considered to be a foundational document and one that sets out to define a set of world principles that transcend nation-state authority. Significantly, it is still widely used to enable human rights violations to be prosecuted across national borders. While it remains subject to ongoing debates concerning the details of the Articles (e.g. the absence of an article to protect the right to “refuse to kill”) and the potential conflict of the UDHR with Sharia Law, it has nonetheless been adopted formally by 192 countries¹³ and is invoked even more widely. Indeed, it is said to be the most widely translated document in the world; there were, at last count, 466 official translations, including into sign language.¹⁴ The issue of translation is significant; at its proclamation, the UDHR appeared in the five official UN languages and following that, an emphasis was placed on ensuring that the document was widely translated into the vernacular, living languages of the world in an attempt to

make certain that it could be read, heard and understood in real and local conditions.

Performed, *Anniversary* also took shape across many sites and among many different groups of people whose specific circumstances were as important to the recitation as the central text itself. In its local, polyvocal and corporeal performance, *Anniversary* reanimated the living, vernacular and local dynamic of the original constitution of the Declaration, or as Louise Purbrick put it, *Anniversary* “gives abstract ideas, such as the rights to freedom, equality, dignity and personhood, a physical presence”.¹⁵ The entanglement within the work of the *universal* declaration made by *specific* bodies, in *particular* locations, is remarkably resonant with a statement made by Eleanor Roosevelt to mark the 10th anniversary of the UDHR in 1958:

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. [...]

Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.¹⁶

If Roosevelt’s plea for “concerned citizen action” to uphold human rights “in small places, close to home” finds its aesthetic parallel in the myriad of voices brought together through the recitations of *Anniversary*, then both can be understood as demonstrating what sociologist Ruth Lister, in her work on feminism and citizenship, has called “differentiated universalism”. Differentiated universalism is the proposition that any collective (“universal”) concept of citizenship only emerges through the diverse practices of embodied subjects negotiating particular local dynamics.¹⁷ Or, as the editors of *The Limits of Gendered Citizenship* have argued:

In the authoritative body of theoretical work, citizenship is typically conceptualized in a universal and, at the same time, often abstract manner, which leads to a very general and supposedly “objective” construal of this notion. Its decontextualized nature tends to locate the concept of citizenship within the nation-state and, simultaneously, signifies a lack of attention to the actual and diversified contexts in which citizenship in general, and gendered citizenship in particular, is practised, articulated and experienced.¹⁸

The shift of emphasis in this passage towards conceptualizing citizenship as a lived and practised experience is significant. However, suggesting that citizenship is more than an abstract status associated with rights/responsibilities upheld through legal or “nation-state” regulation, is not an attempt to argue

that the legal status of citizenship as it is currently (inconsistently) applied throughout the world is of no significance. Far from it; at a time when large numbers of people in the world are refused the rights and status accorded to “citizens”, subject to unequal treatment under the law and, in many instances, economic exploitation and/or political and other forms of violence, the matter of citizenship has never been more urgent. At no point in the present argument is this being discounted. However, legal rights form only one part of a more complex set of material relationships that constitute and enable (or disable) any sense of inclusive “citizenship” to emerge. In addition to legal status, affective practices of belonging, collective identifications and the imaginative forms of participation in public life are also brought into play as modes through which “citizenship” is practised and experienced, and these modes bear no simple or singular relationship to the legal status afforded (or not) by citizenship rights.

If attending to difference in practice, articulation and experience provides a compelling argument against an abstract and disembodied “universal citizenship”, it further underpins the centrality of intersectionality to any conceptualization of an immanent world citizenship—not just in the cases of non-normative subjects who cannot easily be incorporated into the “universal”. It is important to stress in this regard that “intersectionality” is not being taken here as a “thing” or “quality” that some subjects “have” or “are”, but rather, as a process or operation of corporeal-materialist agency in the world. This is not an inconsequential point; rather than seeking to identify categories of subjects who *are* citizens, this suggests that subjects *become* citizens through the very interactions that enable the concept itself to emerge and crystallize. Neither “subjects” nor “citizenship” are a fixed category, but rather, they are contingent constellations of meaning, materialized in multiple instances. In this way, I am proposing that exploring the embodied processes of intersectional belonging central to a reconceived citizenship facilitates a critical intellectual move away from a logic confined by “representation” (both political and aesthetic) towards a more productive engagement with articulation/materialization.¹⁹

The shift towards *materializing* rather than *representing* world citizenship in an emergent, and potentially inclusive, critical public sphere facilitates new forms of collectivity that rely upon neither disembodied universalism nor essentialist identity politics, but instead deploy processes of intersubjective interaction, or what Nira Yuval Davis and Pnina Werbner, in their groundbreaking work on gender, nation and citizenship, have called “transversal dialogues across difference”.²⁰ Arguably, the “transversal dialogues” delineated in the work of Yuval Davis and Werbner

share affinities with the “embodied and ongoing negotiation between multiple forms of sociability” that Gatens and Lloyd described as central to an immanent world citizenship. I would like to pursue these theoretical affinities a stage further and bring forward the notion of “ecological thinking”, as developed in the work of Lorraine Code. As Code argues, ecological thinking is materially situated, premised upon embodiment, *and* has ramifications for reconceiving citizenship:

With its conception of materially situated subjectivity for which embodied location and deliberative interdependence are constitutive of the very possibility of knowledge and action, ecological thinking opens the way to a renewed conception of responsible citizenship, as responsible in its knowing as in its doing.²¹

It is not my point here that the arguments of Code, Gatens and Lloyd, Yuval Davis and Werbner can simply be reduced to a single simplistic position; rather, what is compelling about their positional affinities is that these emerge across a broad territory of thought, connected by a non-dualist feminist materialist enquiry into questions of subjectivity, collectivity, responsibility and political agency. That their thinking resonates around a reconceived, embodied and worlding citizenship that is still and ever becoming—not a thing, but a process of intersubjective and intersectional belonging—challenges us to find adequate forms for its articulation. And it is here that I am arguing that art can make its appearance as a full voice within the dialogue.

Turning back towards Ross’s pivotal work through its resonances with feminist corporeal-materialism and ecological thinking, it is possible to see its myriad recitative invocations of the UDHR as tracing the lines of a differentiated universalism, articulating transversal dialogues across difference and beginning to materialize an inclusive, embodied and intersectional mode of world citizenship that emerges in mutuality with/in a critical public sphere. Each participant in the work brings to the text (and to the space of recitation) a particular and embodied subject position, itself a dynamic, intersectional nexus formed by multiple (and not always seamless) exchanges between histories, cultures, languages, class, sex, gender, age and so on. These differences are not abandoned in the collective acts of remembering and speaking the Articles of the UDHR in the course of the performance of *Anniversary*, but rather, the shared form of attentive speaking *and* listening required by the recitation necessitates *both* an acknowledgement of the specificity of each speaker *and* the collective negotiation of the space and time of the performance as a shared act. I am arguing that the simultaneity of difference and coalition produced

through the work *performs* intersectional belonging and dialogue as mutual (and intersubjective) processes, rather than *represents* them as qualities or objects “owned” by monadic individuals.

In the many small acts of speaking the UDHR in the here and now through the particular gestures and voices of selves and others, *Anniversary* did not ignore or reject the material conditions of the past and present, the contexts and institutions through which rights and responsibilities are enshrined and ensured or neglected and negated. But neither did it fall at these limitations; the united voices speaking in time and space, sometimes faltering, hesitating,²² did not merely *represent* a coalition in and through difference . . . they *performed* it, in the strong sense of a performative iteration that instantiates as it voices. In this, *Anniversary* is a materializing performative (rather than a representational performance) and is profoundly worldmaking.

In arguing that *Anniversary* performs, rather than represents, a differentiated universalism and an emergent form of embodied and intersectional citizenship, it is important not to elide the materializing agency of the work’s performativity with a typological categorization of the work *as* a recitation or a live performance. In other words, the use of ephemeral, performative and/or participatory strategies in art made for public spaces does not in itself ensure a dialogue with/in difference, a challenge to the concept of public culture, a redefinition of the contours of art’s “publics” or a move towards a more inclusive public sphere. I am not arguing that *Anniversary* is “performative” simply because it was enacted as a performance, or that it constitutes a move beyond representation just because its formal qualities are not “representational”. Moving from representation to materialization is a matter not of typology, but of refocusing on what art “does” rather than what it “is”. The present argument for the potential of particular art practices in the public sphere to materialize a postmigratory, cosmopolitan worldmaking does not in any sense entail a wholesale rejection of “representational” or “figurative” forms of art.

To unpack this point, it is useful to look at a work of art designed to engage with the production of histories in public spaces that deployed more conventional forms of biographical narrative and representational image-making: *Biddy Mason: Time and Place* (1989) by Sheila Levrant de Bretteville with The Power of Place. Arguably, the work both commemorated an individual and, at the same time, created a critical public space in which the rights, responsibilities and status assured through normative versions of “citizenship” could be considered. *Biddy Mason: Time and Place* is one part of a multistranded project (The Biddy Mason Project²³) produced collaboratively by Dolores Hayden, Bettye Saar, Susan King, Donna

Graves and de Bretteville through The Power of Place, an experimental non-profit corporation founded in 1984–5 by Hayden while she was working in the Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of California—Los Angeles. The Power of Place undertook projects centred on making visible the public histories of women, workers and people of colour in Los Angeles, starting with the development of a walking tour of the city that focused on spaces associated with significant individuals or activities that had shaped the multicultural profile of the city—one of these sites was the former home of Biddy Mason.

It is worth rehearsing Mason’s biography briefly here. Mason was born a slave in 1818, on a plantation in Mississippi owned by Robert Smith. Following Smith’s Mormon conversion, he moved his family and slaves first to Utah, in 1847, and then, in 1851, to San Bernardino, California. As a slave, Mason herded cattle, acted as a nurse and midwife, bore three children (her owner’s) and trekked on foot behind the family’s carts from Mississippi to California. Unbeknownst to the Smiths, slavery had been abolished one year before their arrival into the state and, in 1856, Mason pursued a successful legal case for herself and her children to be granted free status. As a freewoman, Mason moved to Los Angeles, worked as a domestic servant/nurse for Dr John S. Griffin, and continued to provide healthcare and midwifery services in the local community. She was one of the first African-American women to own property in the city, was a founding member of the First African Methodist Episcopal Church, supported charities that provided food and shelter for the poor residents of her neighbourhood, and died in 1881 leaving a substantial legacy to her heirs.

The Biddy Mason Project celebrated the life of this one woman and her remarkable story through the production of a decidedly figurative and narrative set of work, including a journal article by Hayden, an artist’s book by King, a poster designed for wide distribution by de Bretteville (*Grandma Mason’s Place: A Midwife’s Homestead*) and two works of public art located at the site of Mason’s former homestead on Spring Street: the installation *Biddy Mason’s House of the Open Hand* by Saar, and the mural wall *Biddy Mason: Time and Place* by de Bretteville (Figure 3). The mural wall is main focus of attention here, but it is crucial not to lose sight of the fact that the work is part of a bigger project that operated through research and collaborative dialogue among scholars, artists and the wider local community, and the legacy of the project resides both in the public space constructed through the sited artworks and in the published archival material that has helped to ensure Mason’s place, and the place of African-American women, in the urban history of the USA.



Figure 3. Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, with The Power of Place, *Biddy Mason: Time and Place*, 1989 (photograph reproduced by kind permission of Sheila Levrant de Bretteville).

Biddy Mason: Time and Place is a wall, 81 feet long, comprised of poured concrete with inset slate, granite and limestone panels that narrate Biddy Mason's biography in a series of simple statements, low relief images and embedded documents, including a photograph of Mason (also used in Saar's installation) and copies of her Freedom Papers and the title deed to her homestead. The narrative is constructed in straightforward sentences that develop a sense of Mason's agency over time. The first, "Biddy Mason born a slave.", uses her name and notes her status in no uncertain terms. The later texts, however, emphasize her deliberative actions: "She learns midwifery.", "She walks to California behind a wagon

train.", "She wins freedom in court.", "She owns land.", "She delivers hundreds of babies." (Figure 4). The final text, marking her death, places her at the centre of a community: "Los Angeles mourns and reveres Grandma Mason."

Participant-spectators are, literally, walked through this narrative; following the wall, the tale unfolds in space, through marked decades, each statement accompanied by an elegant motif in relief—a midwife's medical bag, four interlaced wagon wheels, a picket fence (a motif taken from a photograph of Mason's home and used again in Saar's installation to great effect). Mason's photograph, her papers and a mix of maps and images of Los Angeles from her



Figure 4. Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, with The Power of Place, *Biddy Mason: Time and Place*, 1989, detail (photograph reproduced by kind permission of Sheila Levrant de Bretteville).

lifetime are also embedded in the wall and, with the motifs, form a legible narrative bricolage that brings the fragments of one specific life into vital connection with the histories of other lives lived in this space in the past and, significantly, in the present.

The space has been successful; visitors walk through the story, read the panels, touch the motifs, look at the image of Mason and are brought, bodily, into connection with a specific instance of the worldmaking agency of a non-normative subject, denied access to full public participation as a woman and an enslaved African-American. The decision to focus on one specific woman's life story in this project was deliberate, as this first hand account by Hayden explains:

Using Bidy Mason's biography as the basis of the project was the key to finding a broad audience. . . . the record of a single citizen's struggle to raise a family, earn a living, and contribute to professional, social, and religious activities can suggest how a city develops over time. This is especially true for Bidy Mason. Her experiences as a citizen of Los Angeles were typical—as a family head, home owner and churchgoer. Yet they were also unusual—since gender, race, and legal status as a slave increased her burdens.²⁴

Using Mason's biography, articulated in direct language and figurative imagery, captured the imagination of viewers, but Hayden's quote indicates more—that the story asks questions about *citizenship* and it is that aspect of the work that links it to the argument being pursued here and to which I will now turn through the worldmaking evoked by *Bidy Mason: Time and Place*.

Mason's biography is an empowering story, but not an easy history. As a slave and as a woman, Mason was subject to hardship and abuse. Despite becoming a freewoman in 1856, Mason was not a citizen of the USA until the 14th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified in 1868. She died before African-American women gained suffrage in 1920, one marker of full citizenship rights in a democracy. Yet Mason, despite being unable to read or write, fought for her legal rights, worked in a skilled occupation, enjoyed economic independence, established a home and community and, through her generous caring activities, found a place of belonging in her own right during her lifetime. Her legacy was and is empowering, but it does not fit a normative model of US history or the corollary ideals of citizenship. Hayden's use of the term in her statement above is characterized by qualifications—Mason was "typical" but also "unusual"—this case does not quite fit the norm.

This is hardly surprising; much of the feminist and decolonizing work on citizenship points to the inadequacy of our limited and historically determined vocabulary in understanding the experiences (particularly, but not only) of women and people of colour

who have not conventionally been part of the normative models of "citizenship" in the developed world. As discussed at some length earlier, current debates frequently see qualifiers being added to the word "citizen(ship)", such as "active", "participatory", "cultural", "affective" and, of course, "world", in order to render the term more appropriately inclusive or descriptive of the evolution of alternative models of identification and belonging.

Thus, if *Bidy Mason's Place* materializes a worldmaking, it is not one in which the "world", or the subject made through the visual and spatial unfolding of the narrative, conforms to a fixed notion of "citizenship" premised upon claims to authenticity and/or originary status. Neither, however, was Mason a "migrant"; she was born within the nation, yet excluded from its defining category of belonging. Mason's story defies either term in the conventional binary logic of insider/outsider. Her relationship to the space of the burgeoning and multicultural nation of her times was not singular or unchanging. There is no one authentic identity/location that assures Bidy Mason's claim to belong.

As her tale unfolds, Mason *makes and is made*, in acts of intersubjective community-building: her belonging *becomes*. This is a story of the continual making and remaking of the future in the small acts of the present; this "small" story then transcends its particularity to become something bigger, a widely legible tale of the differentiated universal, a demonstration of an "ecological" way of knowing and acting that unites the possibilizing action of imagination with the minute material legacies of history. The work does not negate the past, but neither is it lost in it; rather, it establishes a new and different discursive space, a space in which we might all imagine our worldmaking belonging as an ongoing and perennial process of dwelling with others. In celebrating the life of Bidy Mason, the mural wall does not represent her or a form of idealized citizenship. Rather, viewers engaging with the fragmentary texts and images through which Mason and her world were made simultaneously, materialize a past history in the present tense.

For me, this non-representational worldmaking points towards an alternative figuration for a vastly expanded concept of "citizenship": the worldmaking *denizen*.²⁵ *Bidy Mason: Time and Place* provides a physical and material locus through which to think about alternative ecologies of belonging, collectivity and intersubjective agency. In calling this a figuration, I do not mean that it is a figure or merely figurative, nor do I intend the term "denizen" to be limited to its legalistic use as variously "naturalized" or "resident" persons with lesser rights than "citizens". Rather, I am drawing on the work of Rosi Braidotti in deploying the idea of the figuration as a

radically extended, yet materially situated, trope that permits experimental thinking through process. As Braidotti wrote:

Figurations are not figurative ways of thinking, but rather more materialistic mappings of situated, or embedded and embodied, positions. By figuration I mean a politically-informed map that outlines our own situated perspective. A figuration renders our image in terms of a decentred and multi-layered vision of the subject as a dynamic and changing entity.²⁶

In Braidotti's feminist materialism, the power of imagination and affect are crucial to the process of opening up the spaces of the past and permitting movement towards the future. *Biddy Mason: Time and Place* articulates "Biddy Mason" as a dynamic and changing entity, a subject who emerges through affective, if fragmentary, transversal dialogues between the past and the present; the work opens a colonizing history to contemporary discourse and critique, but does not simply "over-ride" it. "Biddy Mason" cannot accede simply to the fixed category of the citizen, yet articulating her agency and legacy challenges us to find a way of mapping her situated subjectivity.

The figuration of the denizen enables this process to begin. Embodied and enworlded denizenship is not an object, but a process, capable of encompassing intersectional identifications and transversal dialogues across difference. Any attempt to represent Biddy Mason as a normative citizen, a category premised upon a model of the subject that is deeply exclusive and homogenizing, is doomed to failure. But that does not mean that Biddy Mason failed, or that her life and story are not exemplary; they exemplify the limits of our imaginative categories to do justice to the complex and intersectional identifications that characterize agency as a process of continual becoming. Using the figuration of the denizen to map an alternative trajectory is thus instructive.

Denizens are always becoming; denizenship is not a thing or quality one has or attains. The denizen is mobile, mutable and forward looking; there is no "origin" that guarantees "belonging" through a claim to an essential identity. Denizens demonstrate the limits of the binary thinking that pits "citizens" against "migrants". Denizenship is a post-authentic claim to belonging that does not seek a "truth" in either blood or soil and does not set up the brutal exclusions that those models of authentic and essential identity so commonly do. As a process, worldmaking denizenship focuses on participation and the continual action of making oneself at home through different collectivities able to be formed and changed in and through transversal dialogues over time and across spaces. The denizen and the world come into being in mutual exchange; neither is a preformed real and both are altered in their

encounter. In our worldmaking and our postmigratory dwelling, we are all of us denizens, whether cast as "citizen" or "migrant". In its rejection of a dualist ontology, worldmaking denizenship has affinities with notions of agential realism where subject and object emerge simultaneously through inter- and intra-action in the shared cosmos.

Worldmaking denizenship is centred on the intersubjective activities of belonging; denizens themselves at home not through "colonizing" or assimilating other subjects and objects but through mutual exchange. Hosts become denizens become hosts; both positions change and accommodate through responsible (and response-able) engagement, where differences are acknowledged but not deemed to be fixed. The implication of this way of thinking about intrinsic intersubjectivity and interobjectivity is that denizenship extends beyond the human. Worldmaking denizenship incorporates the human and non-human (indeed, it does not recognize that dualist categorization as in any sense fixed) and suggests an ecological model of living within the world that is comprised of a full range of human and non-human actors/agents.

But what has this to do with art and postmigration? This essay opened with the dual claim that art could materialize spaces in which it may be possible to engender forms of embodied and participatory worldmaking that challenge the limits of exclusive and normative citizenship, and that art could provide experimental opportunities to explore the mutual emergence of transversal worlds and intersectional subjects—or worldmaking denizens. *Anniversary—An Act of Memory* and *Biddy Mason: Time and Place* do not deploy the same formal strategies, nor do they refer to the same historical circumstances. Yet each of these works demonstrates the problematic of fixed or universal concepts of citizenship that ignore the specificity of multiple forms of sociability, the dynamic processes of intersectional identifications and the affective forms of belonging that enable worlds and subjects to find a voice and a place. By creating critical public spaces in and through the materiality of art, these two very different works set up transversal dialogues across difference and posit a figuration of extraordinary resonance with a non-dualist exploration of worldmaking and world-dwelling in the present: the denizen.

Denizen belonging does not look back to where we have been, but looks forward to where we are and will go. All of us are postmigrants, each of us a denizen, and our work is never-ending. Clearly, part of the work of postmigratory worldmaking centres on engendering a critical public sphere that enables transversal dialogues across difference to take place. This is not a universal panacea; there are long-standing and embedded inequities of power deeply inscribed within, to paraphrase Nancy Fraser²⁷, both systems of *recognition* (and social response-ability) and *redistribution* (socio-

economic responsibility). However, an important first step is to move away from binaries that pit selves against others, “citizens” against “migrants” and even identifications against economic access. These forms of thinking propose intellectual, political and ethical dead ends; we cannot rethink the present conditions of violence enacted through radicalization, religious fundamentalism and the rise of extreme forms of exclusive nationalisms by remaining within the very logic that underpins them. And changes of minds are also changes of heart, of affective and imaginative renegotiations of the boundaries of ourselves and our worlds.

Art is not an innocent bystander in these processes, but a potential agent of active (and activist) experimentation. However, its potential will not be realized through “representations” of, for example, singular, transcendent subjects or “ideal” citizens. Mobilizing the materializing force of art to produce inclusive, yet critical, public spaces in which transversal dialogues can take place is an important first step towards the development of a wider sense of shared denizenship and the forms of care, attention and responsibility towards others in the world that this entails.

Notes

1. I am indebted to Moritz Schramm for this preliminary definition of the concept of “postmigration”, which I heard him develop in his paper “Postmigration: A New Turn in Cultural Studies?”, delivered as a keynote during the Research Seminar Trans-Formations: Travelling Cultures, Cosmopolitan Identities and Migratory Memories, Sandbjerg, Denmark, April 2016.
2. I have developed this particular terminology elsewhere; see Marsha Meskimmon, “Art Matters: Feminist Corporeal-Materialist Aesthetics,” in *The Companion to Feminist Art Practice and Theory*, ed. Hilary Robinson and Maria Elena Buszek.
3. In her Conservative Party Conference Speech of October 2016, British Prime Minister Theresa May said: “If you believe you’re a citizen of the world, you’re a citizen of nowhere.” This was not spoken without riposte: see, for example, letters to *The Guardian* (9 October 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/oct/09/theresa-may-rejection-of-enlightenment-values>
Angela Dimitrakaki has also been critical of cosmopolitanism as idealist; see Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, Art Work and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique*.
4. Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza Past and Present*, 149.
5. Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 8.
6. Caroline Turner and Michelle Antoinette, eds., *Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions: Connectivities and Worldmaking*; Michelle Antoinette, *Reworlding Art History: Encounters with Contemporary Southeast Asian Art after 1990*.

7. Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*; Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*.
8. Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*; Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*.
9. Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Toward a Materialist Theory of Becoming*.
10. There is a very good website for the project that documents the many recitations: <http://www.actsofmemory.net/>. This website also makes clear that Acts 1–60, where Ross performed and led others in recitation, constitutes the initial work, but further iterations and screenings of the work following the artists’ death are part of the living legacy of the piece and are ongoing.
11. The final act of the 60 recitations was especially poignant, as it took place in Geneva at a meeting of the UN’s Human Rights Council on 14 June 2013—the day that Monica Ross died. Subsequent performances of the work have taken place in memory of Ross, and its prolongation by others following her death demonstrates its continuing power and relevance to many different groups of people.
12. There are three critical texts on *Anniversary* that are especially eloquent in their appraisal of its affective power and these all make the point that it is more than just a vehicle for the “content” of the UDHR: Louise Purbrick, “Museums and the Exercise of Human Rights,” *Transnational Justice Institute Research Paper*, 2010, no. 10–17, University of Ulster, <http://ssm.com/abstract=1685334>; Alexandra Kokoli, “Remembering, Repeating and Working Through in Anniversary—An Act of Memory by Monica Ross and Co-Recitators (2008–),” *Performance Research* 17:5 (2012), 24–30; Rachel Withers, “‘By Dint of Repetition’: Rachel Withers on the lasting legacy of artist-educator Monica Ross,” *Art and Christianity*, 77 (Spring 2014), 2–5.
13. There are 195 “official” countries in the world today (i.e. Taiwan and the Cook Islands are not officially recognized as countries), 193 of which belong to the UN, with two (The Holy See and Palestine) being non-member observers.
14. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/AnewworldrecordUDHR.aspx>. As of April 2010, there were 370 versions.
15. Purbrick, “Museums and the Exercise of Human Rights”, 2.
16. Eleanor Roosevelt, “In Our Hands” (1958), speech delivered on the 10th anniversary of the UDHR, <http://www.fdrfourfreedomspark.org/blog/2015/2/18/human-rights-day-december-10>.
17. Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* (2003), 10.
18. Jeff Hearn, Elzbieta H. Oleksy, and Dorota Golanska, eds., “Introduction,” in *The Limits of Gendered Citizenship*, 1–26.
19. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women* (esp. chap. 9, “Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”, 183–202); Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (esp. chap. 5, “Getting Real: Technoscientific Practices and the Materialization of Reality”, 189–222).
20. Nira Yuval Davis and Pnina Werbner, *Women, Citizenship and Difference*.

21. Loraine Code, *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location*, 200.
22. Kokoli, "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through," 24.
23. There are a few key sources that document this project, including an essay by Dolores Hayden, "Claiming Women's History in the Urban Landscape: Projects from Los Angeles," in *Design and Feminism: Re-visioning Spaces, Places, and Everyday Things*, ed. Joan Rothschild. A Power of Place website for the project: http://www.publicartinla.com/Downtown/Broadway/Biddy_Mason/Hayden refers collectively to the varied work undertaken for this commission as The Biddy Mason Project and I am adopting that nomenclature here.
24. Hayden, "Claiming Women's History in the Urban Landscape," 49.
25. The use of the term "denizen" as a figuration to think beyond normative citizenship is an on-going concern in my work; see, for example: "As a woman, my country is . . . : On Imag(in)ed Communities and the Heresy of Becoming-Denizen," in Marion Arnold and Marsha Meskimmon, eds., *Home/Land: Women, Citizenship, Photographies*, 253–68.
26. Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, 2.
27. Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?: A Political-Philosophical Exchange*.

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Notes on contributor



Marsha Meskimmon is Professor of Art History and Theory at Loughborough University (UK). Meskimmon's research focuses on transnational contemporary art and transdisciplinary feminist theory, with a particular emphasis on women's practice, feminist corporeal-materialisms, and the politics of home in a global world. Her publications include: *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (1996), *We Weren't Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism* (1999), *Women Making Art: History, Subjectivity, Aesthetics* (2003), *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination* (2010), *Women, the Arts and Globalization: Eccentric Experience* (co-edited with Dorothy Rowe, 2013), *Home/Land: Women, Citizenship, Photographies* (co-edited with Marion Arnold, 2016) and *Drawing Difference: Connections between Gender and Drawing* (co-authored with Phil Sawdon, 2016). With Amelia Jones, she edits the series *Rethinking Art's Histories* for Manchester University Press.

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