



The sun is a hot semantic mess. Its apparent universality and inexhaustibility are powers to behold, as in, a sight to behold, as in, to not walk into the picture and ruin it. And not to fly too close to it, yes, yes. Offering a sort of origin story of the “god-trick”, Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke differentiated between the sun’s “natural light” and the “real light” as that which signifies the successful application of reason.¹ Before, if “there was light” it was because the Judeo-Christian God said so; now it was ostensibly up to the reasonable citizen.² The *Lumières* in turn were rather clear as to who could step into the light à la free themselves of their “self-imposed nonage” and, importantly, who could not; Immanuel Kant’s “theory of race” offering but one example of how through enlightenment, “light becomes white”.³ Hard cut to the scene of European overseas expansion, in which its protagonists set sail, murder and loot until they have empires on which the sun never sets. Worn like a badge of pride, this expression of world(s) dominating ambition was particularly popular in the Spanish, Portuguese and British empires of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. “Hideous butcheries” and “gothic invasions,” always in plain sight, under the never setting sun.⁴ To harvest the symbolic power of the sun is to be able to see, but also to render in this vision an inner sense of superiority, *to really see, dude*. It collapses vision with insight, profaning and effectively negating both in the process, and allows the enlightened subject to administer the knowable world. But before any of that, it renders the sun a metaphor, and metaphor-making is what you do when you don’t want to or know how to do the work.

Valued for its innate property to catch and reflect sunlight, gold was of great aesthetic, social and economic significance in many societies of the still-so-called pre-Columbian era.⁵ Pre-Columbian, as in, before-Christopher-Columbus’-inadvertant-discovery-of-the-Americas. Gold’s brilliance is now generally understood to have registered the presence of spiritual entities and, as such, belongs to a world full of shimmering and comparably valuable materials, such as feathers, shells or metals.⁶ Its *Wertförmigkeit*, then, was decidedly not abstract.⁷ A fetish maybe, but metaphor it was not. This too, the conquistadors did not comprehend, thrilled that some of the indigenous chiefs would trade their gold for much cheaper metals and armor. But then, in the impossible scene of colonial trade, what exactly constitutes a bad deal? El Dorado, the most tired of all colonial origin stories, departs from a coronation ritual of the Muisca people, an indigenous people in present-day Colombia that has been largely wiped out but for a few remaining descendants. The ritual saw the future king, covered in “powdered gold from sole of foot unto his highest brow, resplendent as the beaming of the sun,”⁸ taking a raft to the center of the Guatavita lake only to jump into the water, thus offering the gold to the sacred goddess of the lake. Slowly sinking to the bottom, this scene obviously triggered the European onlooker. For here is a subject whose supposed self-possession is hopelessly reliant on ownership, most importantly, that of its Whiteness. Its inversion, “the possibility of becoming property”—so goes the perverse logic of racialization—“is one of the essential elements that draws the line between blackness and whiteness”.⁹ And now, some many years later, still desperately attempting to retrieve this gold from the bottom of the lake, or at least a story as valuable...I, aha, come back up for air again, and with my eyes slowly adjusting to the light...is that a Nordstrom burning?

The hopelessly reductive signifier pre-Columbian denotes a space and time so vast, it might as well be considered fictional. One of the very real inhabitants of this fictional land were the Quimbaya people, a name given to a group of settlements scattered around the Cauca Valley of present-day Colombia who flourished between the 4th and 7th century AD before their destruction in the 16th century at the hands of the colonizers. Famous for their gold and copper craftsmanship, it is one particular group of golden artefacts, dated around 1st century AD that continues to tickle the Western imagination. A group of zoomorphic figurines, no larger than seven centimeters, offer a striking similarity to modern airplanes; some even presenting propellers. Unable to reliably identify all of the resembling animals and thus resisting easy classification, archeology exits the chat, not before

shyly suggesting that these artefacts were probably toys.¹⁰ Enter a group of paras-cientists, who regard these artefacts as more proof that past civilizations were either already familiar with aviation and/or in touch with extraterrestrial life.¹¹ Proponents of this theory classify phenomena such as the Quimbaya artefacts as “out-of-place artifacts (OOPArt).” An excellent acronym, OOPArt denotes objects deemed inconsistent with the contexts in which they were found, temporally or spatially. Notwithstanding the lack of any specificity, this immediately raises the question as to what is—in whatever sense, really—more out of place and time than the colonizer, the archaeologist and, ok, the alien astronaut? And while some researchers—two Germans in 1994—have built life-sized models of these figurines, proving the figurines’ operability, others continue to look for runways in the Amazon jungle. I like to imagine that these tiny airplanes have been up in the air all along, joyously whizzing around, all *Schadenfreude*!¹² that this is, after all, our problem alone, and not theirs. “One of the problems being classification itself, which is always displacement, of everything including ourselves.”¹³

In the graphics by David Reiber Otálora that accompany this text, the Quimbaya artefacts have also taken off, their imaginative potential realized, all without the help of ancient aliens. The landscape they are traversing, however, evokes the deconstructed tropical iconography of exotic lands, fragments of palm trees against backdrops of moody sunsets. This is a fictional land, too, except it is exclusively assembled from logos of major fruit import and export companies, many of whom have colonial and neo-colonial origins. Take for example the logo of Dole Food Company, whose first product was the canned pineapple, successfully branded to this day as *Tropical Gold*. (Wait, what *does* a metaphor taste like?) James Dole, founder of the Hawaiian Pineapple Company, and Harvard graduate, was heir to a family of missionaries that were jointly responsible for the systematic displacement of Hawaii’s indigenous populations and its annexation by the United States in 1898. Dole’s success is often attributed to the company’s marketing strategy of exoticizing the product’s tropical origin. According to Dole, “the pineapple tendered the comforts of sun-kissed lands, soft ocean breezes, nature’s abundance, sensuality, and the sweet scent of paradise.”¹⁴ This paradise of course consisted of segregated plantations where workers from China, Japan and the Philippines, predominantly female, were effectively trapped in cycles of debt, while the Native population was dying from a variety of imported diseases. While Costa Rica and the Philippines have replaced Hawaii as the largest producers of pineapple, Hawaii’s economy now relies almost exclusively on tourism. Dole’s hold on Hawaii remains intact regardless. Its theme park, Hawaii’s Complete Pineapple Experience, is the second most visited tourist attraction on Oahu. This is plantation tourism, offering one of countless examples of how the global tourism industry continues to profit from the violent flattening and accessibility of a colonized world. Activist Haunani-Kay Trask writes of their native Hawaii: “On the ancient burial grounds of our ancestors, glass and steel shopping malls with layered parking lots stretch over what were once the most ingeniously irrigated taro lands, lands that fed millions of our people over thousands of years.”¹⁵

Disculpe, puedo hablar con tu manager?

While the sites of exploitation on the post-colonial map continuously shift, an exotic and tropical imagination powered by the seemingly inexhaustible and universal symbolism of the sun is one of Europe’s longest running and most successful exploitation films. The exoticization of indigenous communities and their lands follows and actualizes the extractive and racist ideology of settler-colonialism. Rendering people invisible and lacking agency, their communities are superimposed with delirious projections of unlimited resources and *natural capital*. Othering pays. A good last-minute deal away, there is a land, maybe an island, where the sun is eternally setting, the gold grows in the ground and the cerveza is always cold. But if and when the sun finally sets on the Western imagination, the darkening horizon may give way to a much better question: How do you see in the dark?

1) Johann Kreuzer, “Das Licht als Metapher in der Philosophie”, in Oscar Loureda (ed.), *Licht*, Heidelberg University Publishing, Heidelberg 2016, p. 79. [own translation]. The “god-trick” by Donna Haraway describes a procedure of objectivization where the subject assumes a kind of disembodied, placeless knowledge. Donna Haraway, *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, in “Feminist Studies”, Vol.14, No. 3 (1988), JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3178066, last accessed December 19, 2020.

2) Genesis 1, in Holy Bible, Biblica New International Version 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011, <https://biblehub.com/niv/genesis/1.htm>, last accessed January 22, 2021.

3) Immanuel Kant, *What is Enlightenment?*, columbia.edu, <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html>, last accessed February 1, 2021.

Sabine Broeck, *When Light Becomes White: Reading Enlightenment Through Jamaica Kincaid’s Writing*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2002, pp. 821–43.

4) Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, (1950) re-issued by Monthly Review Press (2000), JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qfkrm>, last accessed January 1, 2021.

5) For example, Helene Dionne, *Gold in the Americas*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2008.

6) Nicholas J. Saunders, *Stealers of Light, Traders in Brilliance: Amerindian Metaphysics in the Mirror of Conquest*, in “RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics”, No.33 (1998), JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20167010, last accessed January 6, 2021.

7) Warenform = commodity form. English translation from Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, Penguin, London 1976.

8) Juan de Castellanos, “Parte III, Canto II” in *Elejías de Varones Ilustres de Indias*, Madrid, 1850.

9) Saidiya V. Hartman, Frank B. Wilderson, *The Position of the Unthought*, in “Qui Parle”, Vol.13, No.2 (2003), p.188, <https://read.dukeupress.edu/qui-parle/article-abstract/13/2/183/10047/The-Position-of-the-Unthought>, last accessed May 12, 2021. For further reference: Cheryl I. Harris, *Whiteness as Property*, in “Harvard Law Review”, Vol. 106, No. 8 (1993), JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1341787, last accessed December 19, 2020.

And: Zoé Samudzi, *Stealing Away in America*, Jewish Currents June 10, 2020, <https://jewishcurrents.org/stealing-away-in-america/>, last accessed January 7, 2021.

10) Antonio Luis Moyano, *Los Aviones de los Dioses: Otro OOPART Que No Le Es*, El Ojo Crítico November 8, 2013, <http://elajocritico.info/los-aviones-de-los-dioses-otro-oopart-que-no-lo-es/>, last accessed January 2, 2021.

11) For reference: <https://www.thegypsythread.org/quimbaya-artifacts/> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-89RAeITXT0>, last accessed January 22, 2021.

12) Schadenfreude is a German word, denoting a kind of joy over someone else’s misfortune.

13) In 1994, the two Germans Peter Belting and Conrad Lubbers made model-airplane sized replicas, equipped these with motors and were successful in making the replicas fly. <https://arnulfo.wordpress.com/2016/06/07/mysterious-objects/>, last accessed January 22, 2021.

14) Mallory Huard, *In Hawai’i, Plantation Tourism Tastes Like Pineapple*, Edge Effects November 12, 2013, <https://edgeeffects.net/dole-pineapple-plantation/>, last accessed January 1, 2021.

15) *Ibid*.

