

POSTCOMMUNITY

IN 2009 the Native American and mestizo multimedia collective Postcommodity excised a neat square from Arizona State University Art Museum's concrete floor. The hole simply exposed the ground beneath the institution, revealing the Indigenous land on which the museum sits. This gesture of exposure works differently from the critiques that artists usually burden museums with. Artists have been exposing the physical infrastructure of art institutions since the 1970s, revealing their involvement in a dominant economic system that serves the interests of a particular class. Postcommodity also reminds us that museums have long been complicit in settler colonialism, extending the status quo of dispossession, cultural erasure, and genocidal legacy. The same is true for many other institutions. It's less the floor of a specific museum than the foundations of settler colonialism that Postcommodity is looking to remove. But this desire, despite the historical horrors that generate it, is not conveyed in nihilistic terms. It's expressed through continued efforts to build partnerships with institutions, in order to uproot some of the deeply entrenched behaviors and prejudices that organize them.

Postcommodity's most recent project, presented in these pages as a new iteration of a piece published by the Walker Art Center this past spring, is oriented toward the year 2043, when, according to demographic projections, people of color will constitute the majority of the US population. Postcommodity works from that date backward, braiding the past into the future and the future into the present, looping knots of restoration and redemption. The text that follows invites readers to participate in the artists' attempt to insert the future into the present. Through both content and specific rhetorical devices such as repetition and opacity, Postcommodity weaves distinct strands of knowledge and presentation. Their intention seems to be, in part, to highlight the very pattern that is produced, suggesting that future cultural production itself will entail a proliferation of patterns that are not wrapped around the same center. By speaking to future conditions in the United States, Postcommodity entreats us to imagine new relationships between the land and the state, and to develop a new understanding of geography and demographics that collapse the framework sustaining the nefarious legal distinctions between citizens and "aliens" or "illegals." The future majority is, after all, not a majority of any one particular group. One cannot help but sense that as 2043 leaks from the future into the present through Postcommodity's work and in other ways, it begins to perforate the hard borders of our world in the here and now, subverting the hierarchies that have previously been normalized and naturalized.

—Gean Moreno

POSTCOMMUNITY
is an artist collective.
See Contributors
page.

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there is
no linear history

only strategic
remembering

if you look east
or west
or north
or south

the next season
has already been
accounted for
& leveraged

regardless
of intention
or world
view

there is
an accounting
in one form
or another
with disputed
evidence

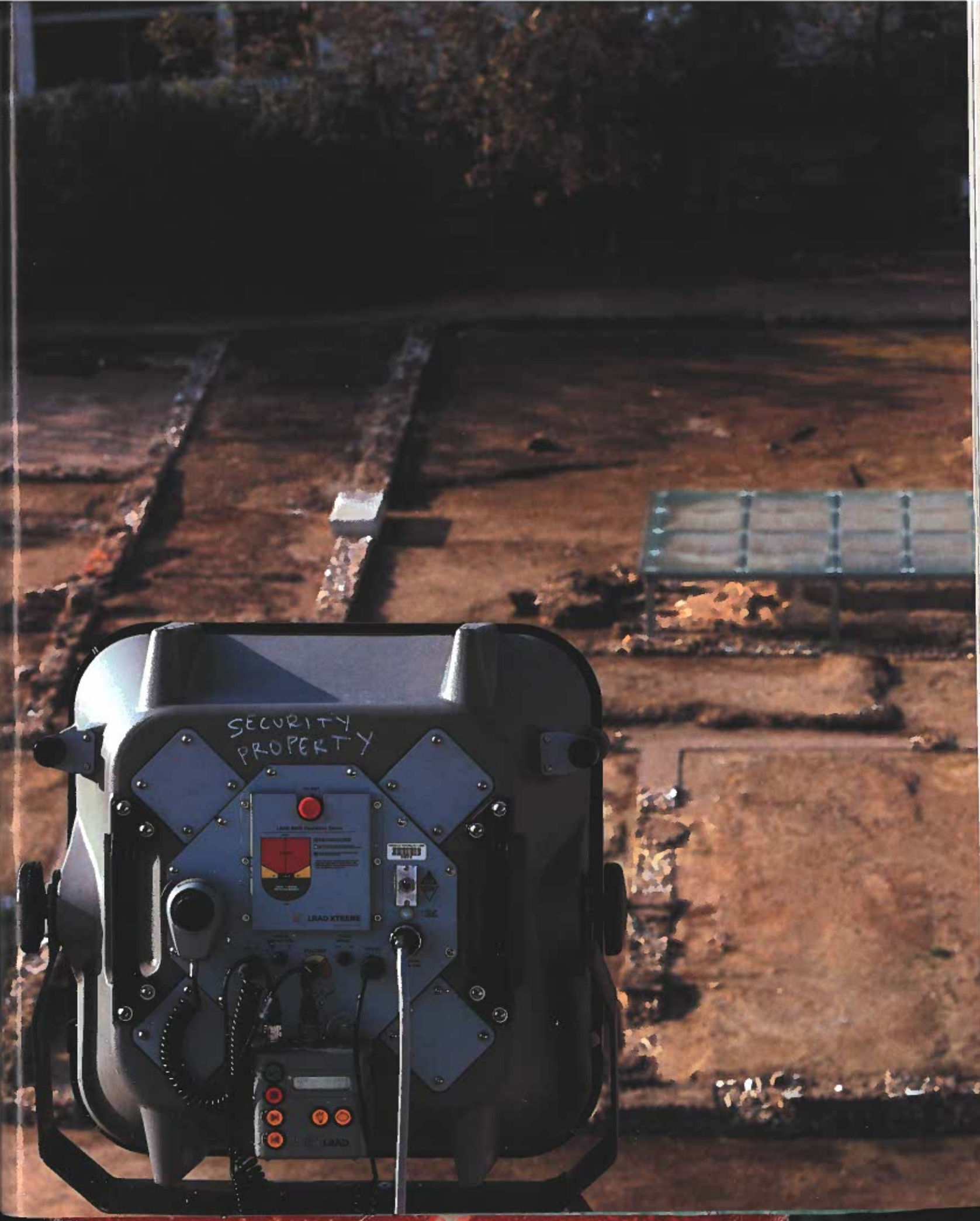
so how do
we remember
together
truthfully
above water
with our land
between us
as the primary
agent of reckoning

Postcommodity:
*The Ears Between Worlds are
Always Speaking*, 2017, two
long-range acoustic devices
and a two-channel opera
projection, eight hours/day,
at Aristotle's Lyceum, Athens.
Courtesy Documenta 14.

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ceum, Athens.
ocumenta 14.



as if you had to be
honest and sincere

how
do you
see
the land

as if you had just
been waterboarded
for one hour

how
do you
see
yourself

as if you had
no other choice

how
do you
configure
reality

It was summer, and my grandfather invited Johnny inside. After he offered his neighbor something to drink, they both sat down at the kitchen table to converse. Dialogue always started this way at my grandparents' house. There was a protocol. My grandfather asked Johnny, "How are you, and how is your family?" He asked this question of all guests to his house. Each time, he, without asserting individualistic expectations, initiatives, or hidden agendas, committed himself to friendship. My grandfather would settle into his chair and listen to his guests with a particular focus that he had been taught by those who raised him. In his time, before Facebook, listening was grounded by protocols of time, patience, place, and goodwill. Dialogues throughout his community were productive because of generative maxims nested within our oral traditions, which require great responsibility. These dialogues were not limited by capitalist metaphors of time (such as "time is money"), nor were they opportunities for competition, or for building a corporate-driven social network. They were about sharing the water so that everyone, including the land, had what they needed.

Perhaps from now to 2043 we will remember to listen in the way that many of our ancestors once did—to the land and to each other with empathy, compassion, patience, and love. Not because doing so follows the market's logic of value, or "connectivity" as understood within the context of the internet, but because active listening is a matter of stewarding the land and the knowledge, relationships, and wisdom that are connected to the land. This is an idea Postcommodity refers to as "capacity."



Rafa Esparza and his father, Ramón, making adobe bricks, as part of the performance *building: a simulacrum of power*, 2014. Courtesy Clockshop, Los Angeles. Photo Jeny Amaya.

as if the realization
of survival is near

how
do you
order
our history

as if you believed
there was another
way

how
do you
live
with all the things
you imagine
to be true

we speak to you
from yesterday
now & tomorrow

it is time
to break
the feed
back loop

not across
your forehead
like a 2x4
with streetfighting
intentions

instead
we're here

to invite
your participation
& complexity
to our table

not as
an ambush
or implication
of force

but as
generative
action



Capacity is a source of indigenous potential to steward relationships, respect, love, and the land. This word reflects an indigenous futurism—it looks ahead to 2043, the year in which peoples of color in the United States are projected to become a national majority. To reclaim greater equity, and to repair our lands, we indigenous peoples—and this “we” includes African Americans, who are indigenous peoples whose ancestors were once forcibly removed from their homelands—will have to work across diversity and divergent political histories, as well as continue to partner with white institutions to build these institutions’ proficiency for transformation. For example, in the art world, structures of power are built on expertise that includes knowledge of theory and criticism. We have observed that many writers throughout the world, disciplined by this institutional knowledge, lack the ability to decode and comprehend contemporary works by artists of color. In the case of the 2017 Whitney Biennial, it seemed easier for most writers to dramatize protests surrounding the white artist Dana Schutz’s painting of Emmett Till than to face the codes in the art of the future majority that permeated the show. Likewise, it was easier for demonstrators to protest Schutz than to analyze and leverage the capacity-building potential of the unprecedented inclusion of the future majority in a historically white exhibition. This illiteracy or inability to decode shades of color impedes our future human ability to transcend the current inequitable state of affairs. To build capacity, we must think more complexly, viewing the world through many shared lenses, even as our visions of the future collide. Any vision can represent a multitude of potentials, which don’t necessarily include fear, weapons, and competition within a zero-sum game like capitalism.

Left to right,
Senga Nengudi
and David
Hammons
in Nengudi’s
performance
*Ceremony for
Freeway Fets*,
1978, Los Angeles.
Photo Roderick
‘Kwaku’ Young.

The land today suggests that listening is one of the capacities we must reclaim. By 2043 in the United States, when peoples of color gain strength as the future majority, we might shed the borders of Western logic systems and honor the trade and migration routes of the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere. Let’s bless each other across national borders by listening beyond our assumptions, which often reflect the disciplining of colonization. Let’s make the familiar strange to recover knowledge—so that we might see ourselves new again.

View of Black Salt Collective's collaborative installation *Infinite Archive*, 2016, showing work by Diyan Bukobomba, Kenneth Brown Jr., Jade Ariana Fair, José Luis Iñiguez, Inéz Ixierda, Titania Kumeh, Amy Martinez, Jeffrey Martinez, Olen Perkins, and Iraya Robles and some times. Courtesy SOMArts Cultural Center, San Francisco. Photo Sarah Biscarra-Dilley.



View of Black Salt Collective's collaborative print archive, 2016. Photo Grace Rosario Perkins.



This is a call for all of us to reimagine the Eurocentric value systems codified by art institutions. This call is for sincere, collaborative, and generative action to redistribute culture and aesthetic power throughout the art world. The future of 2043 is not a dream, and we must begin the work of preparing for it now. The future is a time when art education is no longer defined by privileging Western art history. The art world's current cultural monopoly is restrictive. It often reveals its colonial intentions by positioning works by artists of the future majority in the domains of anthropology, market fetish, identity, and other colonial discourses. By 2043 our cultural contributions will no longer be quarantined in basements or small side galleries at museums around the world.

the question is
do you want to
work together

beyond the
framework
of the extraction
and processing
industries

beyond
manifested
destinies
of white
economies
of taste

for instance
is it possible
to work
toward
something
that isn't
remade
in your
image



Group photo including members of the Museum of Modern Art's board of trustees and staff, 2015. Courtesy MoMA, New York.

Perhaps the first step in building capacity is for us all to reject the interpretation of diverse cultural codes through the machinations of white Western chauvinisms and supremacy. An alternative possibility is for us all to move toward a connected-knowledge approach that emerges from building productive and mutually respectful relationships across worldviews. Productive diplomacy requires great compromises of all stakeholders for transformation to occur. Education in the United States can no longer afford to bear the legacy of the Carlisle Indian School: "Kill the Indian, and Save the Man." We must imagine a new future for education by leveraging the countless gifts of our many heritages to steward the earth. We can no longer afford to allow dominant discourses to cultivate assumptions that certain ways of being, knowing, and believing are superior to others. Being a steward requires goodwill, patience, discipline, being amenable to change, and hard work across generations. We have to decentralize neoliberal power and reclaim our soul by listening to each other, and by embracing noise and complexity. Perhaps our human nature is neither good nor bad, but vexed and complex. Our nature is precisely why we need courage, as well as each other.

Some indigenous peoples of the Americas believe that the tongue is a flint knife, and that this tool must be wielded constructively by listening with care. The media theories that govern internet communication systems are not grounded in indigenous knowledge systems. There is more to dialogue than true and false, than ones and zeroes. There is a more sustainable way of life than surveillance. Until it comes about, it is important to remember that ones and zeroes can be reordered.

White-led institutions have recently undertaken a new period of learning. They are preparing themselves to work with the future majority. Until recently, institutions lacked the skills to engage in dialogue with people of color, and even now they are continuing to work through obstacles as they pass incremental milestones. So on to final exams! Meanwhile, artists of the future majority have been patiently waiting for these institutions to get prepared. For the sake of their own survival, institutions must take responsibility for resolving this problem. Institutions will not survive if they fail to acknowledge human relationships across diverse ways of knowing and being. If institutions do not change, they will not be able to sustain themselves as their inability to partner with the future majority becomes more consequential over time. In the US, people of all backgrounds are publicly demonstrating, with evidence, how institutions often generate racism through their colonial assumptions, systems, and actions. Today the future majority is raising public consciousness about inequitable institutional policies. It is taking note that even institutions claiming to care about inclusion, with their power and privilege, struggle hard to listen with great care. At the same time, there are compelling works by artists of color that have been made outside of institutions. These historical works tend to acknowledge place and reference collaboration. Remember that dialogues once existed beyond fast capitalist metaphors of time. These extra-institutional works of art carry a different perspective of time, land, and people. They speak to knowledge about home, and not about places to fix.



The Propeller
Group: *The Living
Need Light, The
Dead Need Music*,
2014, video projec-
tion, 25 minutes,
15 seconds.
Courtesy James
Cohan, New York.

A community elder once taught me that if we are to listen, we must first take responsibility for hearing. In other words, this elder suggested that we must implicate ourselves in the problems we face, rather than blaming others or assuming a position above an issue. Our community elder also believed that we must become more human by being transparent when facing dilemmas. It isn't until we implicate ourselves that we are able to better listen with empathy and not judgment. This elder's wisdom requires us to be vulnerable, disrupted, and courageous. When we think about art institutions, for example, it is clear that these places are historically a Western European idea, and that they tend to be culturally specific. If we focus on the art museum, we have to come to terms with the fact that the future majority is also implicated in the perpetuation of white institutions by showing our art in them. Life is also more complicated because, to some extent, artists of the future majority have hacked and modified arts institutions in ways that help to redistribute cultural power and aesthetics. For further redistribution to occur we must, regardless of background, acknowledge that we are all implicated, and take responsibility together for the emergent present in ways that honor a healthier and more sustainable future for all peoples on Earth. We have no choice. 2043 is coming.

(for the love
of the creator
each other
& the earth
we share

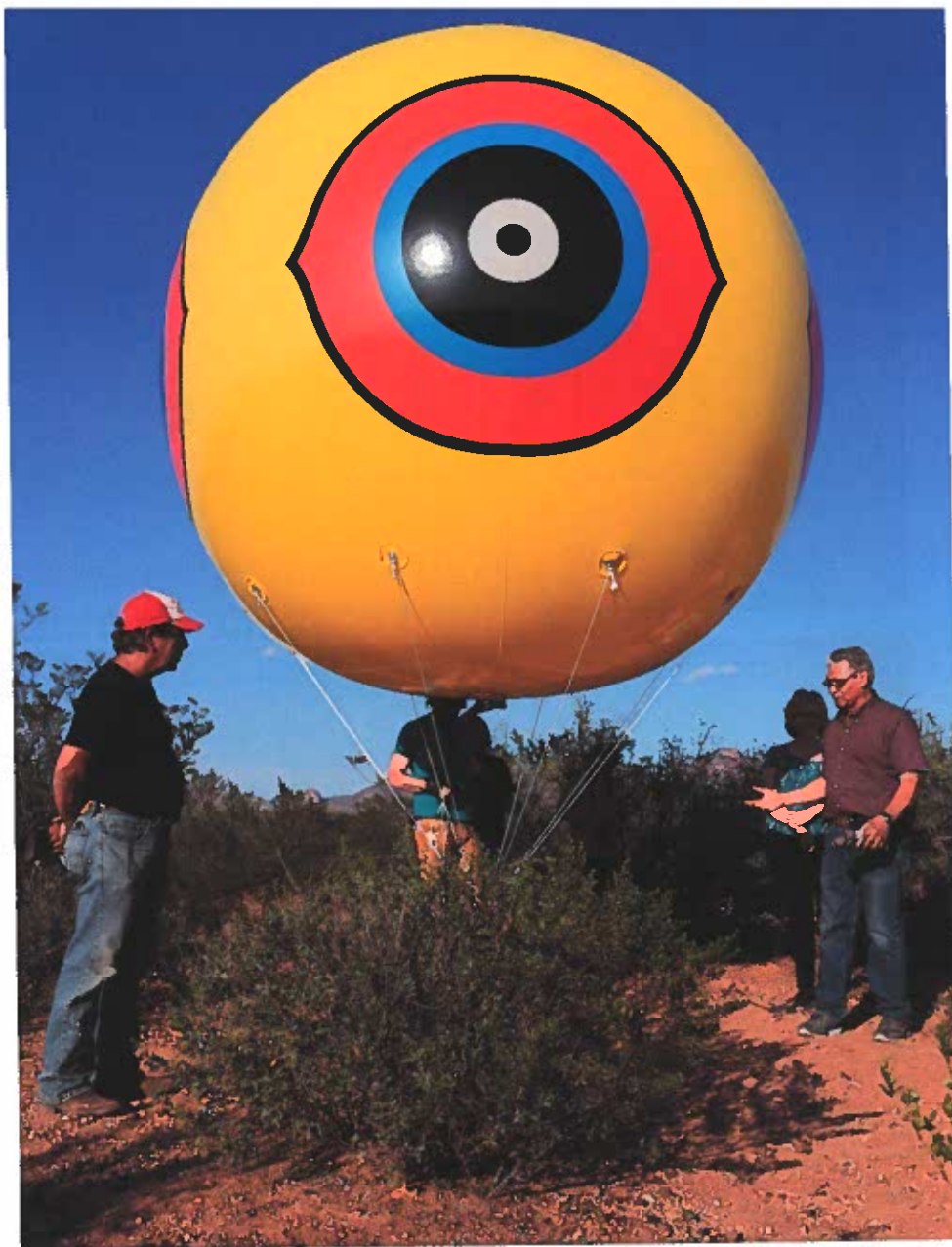
(for the act
of remembering
our future

we need
to build
together
a pedagogy
for listening
like elders

you know
& we know

if white
people can
contribute
to building
nuclear arsenals
space stations
& algorithmic
markets

it's perfectly
logical to believe
white people
can contribute
to building
with us
a reliable
system
to redistribute
aesthetic &
cultural power



View of Postcommodity's land-art installation *Repellent Fence*, 2015 near Douglas, Arizona, and Agua Prieta, Sonora. Courtesy Bockley Gallery, Minneapolis.

NOTES

* Postcommodity does not represent indigenous peoples, nor does it speak on behalf of any indigenous community. It is an artist collective composed of Native American and mestizo artists. The collective draws its power from the many principles by which the artists were raised. The artists constantly reach for consensus, modeling ideas through the exercise of indigenous self-determination. Like listening, self-determination is an emergent capacity requiring a high level of commitment from all who are involved. This is the case for Postcommodity, as well as for any indigenous group serious about a healthier and more desirable future. "2043: No Es Un Sueño."

* It is projected that in 2043 the US will become a "majority-minority" nation, which means that all "minorities" combined will become the majority, surpassing the white population. To us it is funny that although whites will no longer be the majority in 2043, the new majority at that time will continue to hold a minority status! Postcommodity rejects the label "majority-minority." Instead, we propose the term "future majority" to indicate all nonwhite people in the US. We hope that by 2043 all us nonwhite peoples in the US might see ourselves in each other.

* "4R frameworks" come from many different sources. The following 4Rs are a set of principles that we use to define our arts research and practice, especially with respect to our social practices and the listening that we do while engaging publics: "Respect, Relationships, Reciprocity, and Responsibility." This framework comes from *Reclaiming Scholarship: Critical Indigenous Research Methodologies*, authored by indigenous researchers Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy, Heather R. Gough, Beth Leonard, Roy F. Roehl II, and Jessica A. Solyom. In this essay we introduce a fifth R, which is redistribution.