IN FOCUS: Decolonizing Media Studies

Decolonize Media: Tactics, Manifestos, Histories

by Nicholas Mirzoeff and Jack Halberstam, editors, for the Decolonizing Media Collective

Figure 1. Photo used by permission of the MTL Collective.

Decolonize media! Inspired by Standing Rock, the Decolonize the Curriculum movement in South Africa, and long histories of resistance in the Americas, Palestine, and elsewhere, we propose that the next step for media activism as a whole is to place these spaces of opposition and refusal into extended engagement with current decolonial thought and practices. The "object" of study for this In Focus dossier is not the dominant (media) forms of racial capitalism, but rather decolonial action, thinking, and organizing. In short, putting your thinking body in space of all kinds—public, intellectual, academic—where it is not supposed to be and trying to

decolonize it. We witness the abuses of Harvey Weinstein's Hollywood and the insidious market uses of Mark Zuckerberg's social media, and we refuse to engage. In terms of media as such, we propose open-access publishing, open-source software, a return to independent filmmaking, and more strategic and informal uses of social media—all to resist the politics of the casting couch on the one hand and the market domination of all intimate and social relations on the other. We recognize the powerful interventions of hacktivists and the continued potential of web media and their copresence with organizers in reclaiming spaces of all kinds.

In South Africa, media studies is committed to decolonizing, including decolonizing the curriculum. In similar fashion, we propose moving "media activism" from critical and political engagements with specific media and regulatory bodies, such as the Federal Communications Commission, to understanding activism in all its forms as media and mediation. Media is such a dominant, powerful, and daunting set of representational apparatuses that we cannot simply overturn them all. So we must hijack the spaces they colonize and decolonize the sites that they have infiltrated. Decolonizing is not a metaphor. It requires beginning with the dispossession of the Indigenous.

This work is long term and short term. Aníbal Quijano proposes that coloniality is modernity.[1] Coloniality, as we know, is not only territorial; it is a way of thinking, a mode of desiring, a set of relations. Perhaps for this reason, decolonization in the twentieth century did not end coloniality. The Americas are still settler colonies, and modern democracies produce neocolonial understandings of freedom and enclosure. If Palestine remains the paradigm of "classic" colonialism, there is now the new colonization of Africa, especially by China; the neo-colonization of finance capital; and the long legacies of colonial rule, epitomized by the recolonization of Puerto Rico post–Hurricane Maria as a "plantation future."[2] Indeed, the current regime in the United States forces activists to update their thinking about decolonizing North America, now a site of multiple settler colonial forms, including the prison, the free market, the banking system, and social media. In this moment of revived white supremacy, with Nazi flags in the streets and right-wing "free speech" exploding online, we remember Frantz Fanon's observation that fascism is colonization in the metropole. It's St. Louis police chanting "Whose streets? Our streets!" not just as a rebuttal to Black Lives Matter protestors but in echo of the fascists at Charlottesville, who also used that chant. But fascism now is not the fascism of the twentieth century. Certainly, it resides in the racial logic of our current crisis and in the incorporative mechanisms of neoliberalism, but fascism is also visible in new economic consolidations of power. In the past, a fascist regime might come to power through a coup or a declared state of exception. Now, a fascist regime rides in on a tax bill.

If early pronouncements about Facebook and Twitter located social media platforms right in the heart of decolonizing movements in Tunisia, Egypt, and the Arab Spring, we now find that all social media has been permanently and thoroughly (re)colonized and infiltrated. Certainly new media allows us to, in the words of the

1   Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–580.

2   Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *Small Axe* 17, no. 3 (November 2013): 1–15.

Invisible Committee, "find each other," but it also allows them to find us! It is unclear whether new multitudes lurk within the digital networks and byways that we have created and populated or whether all such avenues are blocked, ambushed, invaded and occupied already. We need a new social media, offline or in the recesses of the dark web, a vault for information dumps and the site of informal and often "criminal" economies. We need more face-to-face activity, but we also need to learn where to hide from the surveillance technologies that currently exploit our desire for recognition, celebrity, and exposure. As forms of governance shift from online to off, from IRL to URL, we too must gather in the shadows, finding one another but also losing one another, learning how to hide, how to wait, where and when to be together, where and when to work on multiple platforms all at once.

When people pull down Confederate statues or occupy the American Museum of Natural History on Indigenous Day (aka Columbus Day), that's decolonizing media. When Howard University cheerleaders all take a knee. When football players across the country sit out the national anthem, when we turn our backs on right-wing speakers, when we take the streets yelling "Not my president," when local communities speak out, when we meet and work and reimagine space, when we practice mutual cooperation and use gift economies in place of money . . . that's decolonizing media. When millions of men, women, and others speak back to those who have harassed us, those who have demanded our silence, those who have benefited from our willingness to keep secrets, that is decolonizing intimacy. By means of #MeToo.

Decolonize the (media) curriculum! People fear that this means never teaching the work of Europeans, the famed dead white men and the Enlightenment. We're not saying that. We are saying that the structures produced by disciplinary coherence force us to think in very particular ways about life, death, and freedom. Lisa Lowe, for example, in her magisterial book *The Intimacy of Four Continents*, argues that disciplinary training holds apart the different histories of colonialism, making it difficult to read outside of the nation-state and outside of periodization.[3] And archival research tends to be constrained by the placement of archives according to arcane colonial logics of organization. This has, over the years, made it difficult to see how shifts and changes in relation to, say, colonial rule in India affects and is affected by the importation of "coolie" Chinese labor to the Caribbean and influenced in turn decisions about the slave trade. Other scholars, like Saidiya Hartman, have shown how "emancipation," far from ending slavery, extends its power through "new forms of bondage" and new modes of thought embedded in our concepts of the human.[4] Decolonizing the media curriculum will, then, mean thinking outside the logics of freedom established by slave-holding classes. It will mean disrupting the disciplinary logic used to center Euro-American forms of knowing. It will mean grappling with the material foundations of knowledge production. And so, remember that your institution probably rests on stolen land and may have benefited from the labor of stolen people. Think from Global South to Global North. Disassemble the figure of "Man" with Sylvia Wynter, not Michel

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3 Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

4 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection, Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Foucault. Read the masters and the enslaved; learn from both. Learn the tradition you seek to oppose; know the master you seek to overthrow. Master the logics that bind you and imagine those that will free you—even, especially, when they seem impossible.

Decolonizing learning is method. The African Leadership University in Mauritius proposes a set of inflection points that we have both adopted and expanded here:[5]

- Listen. To the colonized, to the historically underrepresented, to your own body.
- Use and create open-source materials. (This dossier is freely available online.)
- Study or learn in languages beyond English (and other colonial languages).
- "Text is not enough." Produce in many forms.
- Collaborate in your research: faculty with students, academics with the communities they serve.
- Be "producers not only consumers" from the outset of learning.
- And try to live up to the injunction "ethics above all."

Figure 2. Photo used by permission of the MTL Collective.

In what follows you can read and see six different approaches to these proposals from as diverse and international a group as we were able to assemble in this format. One dossier cannot do all this and cannot speak to all the issues, let alone give voice to all those who should be heard. In its inevitable failure, it is an invitation to you to do better, or at least to fail better. Failing better means failing together, a collective moment of disorderly conduct.   ✳
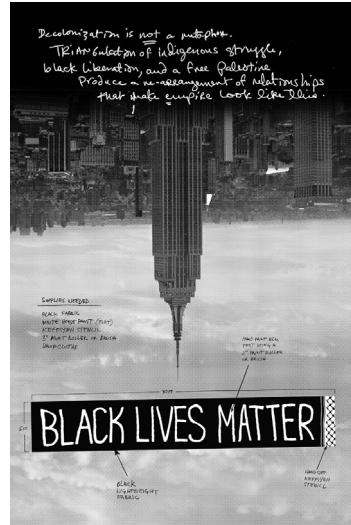
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5   See Jess Auerbach, "What a New University in Africa Is Doing to Decolonise Social Sciences," *The Conversation*, May 13, 2017, https://theconversation.com/what-a-new-university-in-africa-is-doing-to-decolonise-social-sciences-77181.

Countermanifestos and Audibility

by Macarena Gómez-Barris

B y now "Decolonize _____!" is a familiar formulation. "Decolonize" is placed in front of a word to describe it as an object of oppression, and the phrase is then followed by an exclamation point. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang predicted, in the academic move to decolonize everything, specific claims by Indigenous peoples to territories fall out of the political demand. If we are serious about changing the structural relations of colonial power, which the call to decolonize media implies, we must first raise the problem of foundational violence and dispossession, remembering how settler Law protects the privatization of property as a foundational underpinning of the capitalist racial order.

Let's not follow the "commonsense" next move, which would make a universal claim to common lands. As the radio programmer and Kanaka Moli scholar J. Kēhaulani Kauanui reminds us, the concept of the commons dates back to a seventeenth-century English context. It was transferred into North America by British settlers in order to manage Indigenous lands during the founding of early towns. The commons, then, is "a historically and racialized concept as well as one implicated in colonial structures."[1] In other words, in the Americas there is no common media, no common property—except as Indigenous communal territories and Indigenous technologies. To decolonize media, we should first reposition the normative claim on land as the original corporate ownership, mediated by and organized for settlers. We might call this group of ideas countermanifesto point number 1.

Countermanifesto point number 2 invokes Nicholas Mirzoeff's term "countervisuality" as a way to look back on the mediations of colonial power.[2] I use the term "the extractive view" as a way to see how terrains are mapped as digital colonies.[3] Rather than the panopticon, which assumes a disciplinary society, the extractive view

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1 See J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's contribution in this dossier and her in-progress manuscript "Nothing Common about the Commons." Kauanui presented ideas from the manuscript at Brown University, on October 9, 2013, in the talk "Nothing Common about 'the Commons': Settler Colonialism and the Indigenous Politics of Land Dispossession."

2 See Nicholas Mirzoeff's *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

3 In *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017) I discuss the extractive view as a colonial-modern and neoliberal technique of mediated power.

names how corporate states use military and surveillance technologies. We might also insist on decentering ocular and Eurocentric representation through decolonial visions. The Mapuche filmmaker Francisco Huichaqueo works with the *machi* healer Sylvia Kallfüman to slow the speed of accelerated capitalism by visualizing temporal lag in the videos they make together. Embedded in the Bío-Bío River, the *machi*'s body becomes a way to inhabit the sensorial world. We might turn the original demand to decolonize into a question, changing the language slightly to adjust for vibration and frequency: What do decolonial media look like? What do decolonial media feel and sound like?

Countermanifesto point number 3: originally, the genre of the manifesto referred to a verbal declaration of intention, political motives, or viewpoints, be it by an individual, group, or the state. I use the term "countermanifesto" to invoke the antistate and anticolonial historical usages of the manifesto, rather than its mediation as a tool of power. We might think with the decolonial critique of Emma Pérez, who queers the documents of archival research that reproduce colonial and heteronormative ways of seeing and knowing.[4] Pérez asks, How do we retrain colonial visions? Which modes work beyond, rather than on behalf of, the technologies of racial and extractive capitalism?

For this, the manifesto may be a useful genre, although it, too, is steeped and entangled in a history of power. For masculine revolutionaries in the Americas, the countermanifesto has often been the privileged site of enunciation and a new site of dispossession, excluding Black, trans, queer, female, and Indigenous populations, to instead speak on behalf of the oppression of "the working man" or *lo popular*. In other words, the manifesto, depending on standpoint, could become another site of mediation on behalf of all, but it often functions to lift the positionality and knowledge locus of only the speaker.

Although the human microphone used by the Occupy movement amplified this idea by echoing the voices of many, it still amplified the voice of a singular speaking subject. Put simply, the manifesto was the original leftist mansplaining technology. I would even go so far as to suggest that the manifesto, with a few exceptions, leaves out the complex trace of queer and decolonial feminist and submerged perspectives. In the vein of Caribbean philosophy, poetic mediation perhaps draws on Afro-diasporic sonic genealogies and escapes this problematic by beginning with a different relationship to the performance of language.

This takes us to countermanifesto point number 4. My own ears have tuned out the sonic frequency of the manifesto. I can literally no longer hear the monotone of the political screeching decree. In fact, the political rant has become an inaudible chain of monotonous speech. Much like the monocultural view, the manifesto-countermanifesto duality gives in to one mode of doing, being, and thinking. That said, I am deeply committed to decolonial communicative modes of listening, hearing, and engaging that produce alternative socialities and modes of doing politics.

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4 For important insights into normative disciplinary training, see Emma Pérez's *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

What if, in this time of rule by the scariest clown, we refused the mediated genre of the manifesto, realizing that while it can come from submerged viewpoints, it can also reproduce the monocultural logic and idiom of the extractive zone?

Colombian *mestiza* video artist Carolina Caycedo brings this problem forward in a poignant scene in *Land of Friends* (2014) in which, as a technocrat continues to explain the importance of hydroelectricity and damming for the Cauca region, she drowns his speech out from the audio track using the *gurgle, gurgle, gurgle* sounds of the Magdalena River below.[5] The masculinist political rant that depends so heavily on the singular, technocratic, and—why not say it—boring speech act becomes instead submerged speech. As the camera dips below the water to show us a blurry under-the-river view, rather than seeing like the state, in this scene we are retrained to see from a fish-eye perspective. As I describe in *The Extractive Zone*, this is a submerged viewpoint that is enveloped by the river's current and that inverts the deadening monocultural logic of extraction.[6] Perhaps this is countermanifesto point number 5.

Countermanifesto point number 6. I also find Ana Ochoa Guatier's formulation of aurality enormously generative for decolonial media, wherein song becomes a way to listen to collective knowledge production in Afro-descended and Indigenous space.[7] Ochoa Guatier describes the entangled and musical linguistic terrain of the sensorial, where the production of personhood is not made through the unilateral knowledge position of "do this," "produce that," or "refuse capitalism." Instead, audibility is an embodied experience that mediates beyond the individualized reception of a central speech act.

A key part of "decolonizing" media for Mapuche peoples in southern Chile is finding a way to connect to ancestral sounds in forests that have been emptied of the complexity of biodiversity and historical meaning by the designs of neoliberal fundamentalism. By bringing forward mournful cries, as the Mapuche experimental filmmaker Francisco Huichaqueo does, we hear the sounds of the ancestral past as warnings of the dystopic present-future. By transiting in the parallel worlds of ancestors who mourn the colonial catastrophe, we might presence other ways to organize economic and social life.[8]

Countermanifesto point number 7 is a good place to end and begin, with a number that can sit alongside cyclical futures. What if we hover in the space beyond duality to which I have been led by the media of Indigenous and *mestiza* artists? What if we think about how sound, like the Mapuche radio about which Luis Carcamo-Huechante has written so beautifully, connects territories and possibilities beyond the boundaries of the liberal nation-state?[9] I have also learned much about the relational poetics of

5   See Carolina Caycedo's website at http://carolinacaycedo.com/land-of-friend-2014.

6   For a longer elaboration on this idea, see especially "A Fisheye Episteme," in Gómez-Barris, *Extractive Zone*, 91–109.

7   Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth Century Colombia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

8   See Francisco Huichaqueo, *Mencer: Ni Pewma* (2011), https://vimeo.com/user2100036.

9   On the sonic transits across Wallmapu, the territory that comprises the Mapuche nation, see Luis Carcamo-Huechante, "Indigenous Interference: Mapuche Use of Radio in Times of Acoustic Colonialism," *Latin American Research Review* 48 (2013): 50–68.

mediation through my embodied experience as a queer and decolonial thinker—and the importance of finding new languages of mediation beyond the zone of destructive reduction.   ✳

Anarchy on and off the Air

by J. Kēhaulani Kauanui

T his communiqué aims to open a conversation between media scholarship and decolonial activism and to rethink everyday notions of place and practice. My take here is informed by my past and present work as a radio producer and host for three public affairs programs—one on indigenous politics and the other two focused on anarchist politics—in the context of a hybrid station: WESU, in Middletown, Connecticut.[1]

From 2007 to 2013, I worked as the sole producer and host of a public affairs show, *Indigenous Politics: From Native New England and Beyond*, a program that was widely syndicated and focused on global indigenous struggles while acknowledging the local context in the spirit of ethical engagement with the indigenous peoples of the land where I reside and labor.[2] One of the aims of *Indigenous Politics* radio was to address the colonial politics of erasure. Notably, the conversations the radio show produced were themselves a political act against that ongoing process of indigenous erasure endemic to settler colonialism.[3]

Then, from September 2010 to May 2013, I also worked in collaboration with a group of students on an anarchist politics show, *Horizontal Power Hour*.[4] Topics included Idle No More, prison abolition, antigentrification, migrant justice, queer liberation, and the Palestinian struggle and global Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement, among numerous other issues.

1   WESU is also a Pacifica affiliate station, one of 180 stations in the noncommercial network.

2   The audio archive can be accessed at the website http://www.indigenouspolitics.com. Additionally, a selection of interviews from the program will be published in my forthcoming book *Speaking of Indigenous Politics: Conversations with Activists, Scholars, and Tribal Leaders* (University of Minnesota Press).

3   Patrick Wolfe has theorized the concept of settler colonialism, arguing that this social and political model of domination operates by "the logic of elimination of the native." As he argues, "Settler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of native societies. The split tensing reflects a determinate feature of settler colonization. The colonizers come to stay—invasion is a structure not an event." See Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 387–409.

4   The audio archive can be accessed at the website https://horizontalpowerhour.wordpress.com.

Currently, I coproduce and cohost a related anarchist politics show (with a new, and always evolving, group of students) called *Anarchy on Air*, which launched in February 2014 and includes a diverse range of subjects, including international anarchist activism, Black Lives Matter, direct action to stop deportations, the war in Syria and the refugee crisis, transgender liberation, efforts to decriminalize sex work, radical art, #NoDAPL (opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline), and political solidarity between Palestine and Native America.[5]

Both the indigenous politics show and the anarchist programs have featured radical politics with a commitment to decolonization. Unhampered by the protocols journalists are expected to abide by, the programs have created a way to discuss radical relationality between people as both mediation and activism at once. Their aim was to move "media activism" from critical and political engagement with specific media and regulatory bodies to an understanding of activism in all its forms as media and mediation. When I was involved with both the indigenous and the anarchist shows during the overlapping years, people often questioned how I could be working on both programs, as though they were so far afield from each other. Although the indigenous politics show and the anarchist radio work were distinct from each other, in terms of the programs themselves and as political projects, I understood them as related in that both challenge the assumed legitimacy and authority of the state. For me, Noam Chomsky's working definition of anarchism gets to the heart of what links these two areas, as they are both about consent politics:

> Primarily it is a tendency that is suspicious and skeptical of domination, authority, and hierarchy. . . . It assumes that the burden of proof for anyone in a position of power and authority lies on them. . . . They have to give a reason for it. . . . And if they can't justify that authority and power and control, which is the usual case, then the authority ought to be dismantled and replaced by something more free and just.[6]

As someone who identifies as indigenous, in terms of my own anarchist approach taking different forms at different times, I strive for a decolonial modality.

Here I offer just one example to get at these linkages. Members of the movement have acknowledged the anarchist roots (and guiding principles) of Occupy Wall Street, even if they themselves do not identity as anarchists.[7] As described at Occupy's website: "Occupy Wall Street is a leaderless resistance movement with people of many colors, genders and political persuasions. The one thing we all have in common is that We Are The 99% that will no longer tolerate the greed and corruption of the 1%."[8] Occupy was a powerful movement that centered on the call to "reclaim" the commons in demanding the return of that which was stolen through "the corrosive

5 The audio archive can be accessed at the website https://anarchyonairwesu.tumblr.com.

6 Michael Wilson and Noam Chomsky, "Noam Chomsky: The Kind of Anarchism I Believe In, and What's Wrong with Libertarians," *AlterNet*, May 28, 2013, https://www.alternet.org/civil-liberties/noam-chomsky-kind-anarchism-i-believe-and-whats-wrong-libertarians

7 David Graeber, "Occupy Wall Street's Anarchist Roots," *Al Jazeera*, November 30, 2011, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/11/2011112872835904508.html.

8 See the Occupy Wall Street home page, at http://occupywallst.org.

power of major banks and multinational corporations over the democratic process."[9] And while many of the on-the-ground practices at various Occupy locales relied on nonbinding consensus-based collective decisions and direct actions, the rallying cry was to "occupy" and "reclaim," with little to no recognition of the history of settler colonial land expropriation that gave rise to the corporate plutocracy of the 1 percent. My work centers on the "other 1 percent"—that is, American Indians.

From Occupy's very start in September 2011, indigenous individuals pointed out how offensive the articulation of the claims were on two levels: the assertion that people "take back Wall Street" and "occupy" given the actual legacy of colonial occupation of indigenous peoples' lands, and the fact that Wall Street itself is built on indigenous dispossession. As Lenape activist-scholar Joanne Barker delineated at the time on her blog *Tequila Sovereign*, the wall that used to stand erect on the actual street today called Wall Street was built by the Dutch to keep out not only the English but also the Lenape Indians from their own traditional territory.[10] This is not an abstract claim; Manhattan is a land base claimed as the traditional homeland of a particular people. Given that specificity, it is problematic to suddenly talk about "the commons" in general terms; to do so erases the history of dispossession of the Lenape people.[11] Furthermore, the Wall Street that is now the global finance industry was built through the history of the corporations formed during the early colonial period to consolidate indigenous homelands as stolen property—and to enslave African humans as property. As the African burial grounds in lower Manhattan reveal, slavery was prevalent in New York between 1626 and 1827.[12] As Cheryl Harris argues, the very origins of property rights in the United States are rooted in racial domination based on the expropriation of indigenous land and African labor.[13] Yet in this example and in that of numerous other sites, Occupy protesters overwhelmingly heard the indigenous critique of the use of the term "occupy" as though it were merely a bid for political correctness in response to some imperfect nomenclature.[14] But this indigenous critique goes well beyond jargon, or some "more radical than thou" posturing. The ongoing contestation is about lived histories and intergenerational trauma and dispossession that have epistemological— and therefore ontological—implications. In other words, it has bearing on how one understands land as property and on ways of knowing and ways of being. Hence,

9 See "About Occupy Wall Street," http://occupywallst.org/about.

10 See the following posts by Joanne Barker at her blog *Tequila Sovereign*: "Manna-hata," October 10, 2011, http://tequilasovereign.blogspot.com/2011/10/manna-hata.html; "Because Not All 99%-ers Are Created Equal," http://tequilasovereign.blogspot.com/2011/10/because-not-all-99-ers-are-created.html; "The Difference That History Makes in the OWS Movements," http://tequilasovereign.blogspot.com/2011/10/difference-that-history-makes-in -ows.html; "Memorandum of Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples," http://tequilasovereign.blogspot.com/2011/10 /proposal-to-occupy-oakland-memorandum.html; "What Does 'Decolonize Oakland' Mean? What Can 'Decolonize Oakland' Mean?," http://tequilasovereign.blogspot.com/2011/10/what-does-decolonize-oakland-mean-what.html.

11 An expanded critical analysis of Occupy Wall Street is included in my manuscript (in progress) "Nothing Common about 'the Commons.'"

12 See "African Burial Ground," New York Preservation Archive Project, http://www.nypap.org/content/african-burial -ground. Warning: this website's home page includes an exposed skeleton in an open burial ground.

13 Cheryl I. Harris, *Whiteness as Property Harvard Law Review* 106 (1993): 1709–1795.

14 In *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement*, David Graeber discusses the origins of Occupy Wall Street and the fact that Adbusters Media Foundation created the catchy slogan (20–21).

the political and ethical challenge is to account for our respective relationships with the indigenous peoples on whose land we dwell and mobilize politically (including myself as a Kanaka Maoli woman residing on lands that are part of the Wangunk people's traditional homeland). Thus, my work engages anarchist calls to "reclaim the commons" and how they perpetuate a settler colonial logic that demands a decolonial appraisal. In turn, I insist that those calling for a recovery of the commons must attend to the indigenous difference; otherwise, these projects both erase and strengthen the structures of settler colonialism.

To respond to this in the context of radio work, in fall 2011 on *Indigenous Politics* I featured the episode "What's in a Name? Indigenous Peoples and 'Occupy' Wall Street."[15] The program included interviews with several guests, including Joanne Barker (mentioned previously), radio producer and host of *First Voices Indigenous Radio* Tiokasin Ghosthorse (Cheyenne River Lakota), and independent legal scholar Steven Newcomb (Lenape and Shawnee). They spoke to the indigenous history of Wall Street, which was built on Lenape tribal territory, and the terms of domination and potentials for decolonization. And they all questioned how successful Occupy could be given the problematic language of "occupation" and the absence of meaningful acknowledgment and redress of the issue of continuing occupation of indigenous lands. As John Paul Montano (Nishnaabe) asserted in "An Open Letter to the Occupy Wall Street Activists," he read the Occupy statement hoping and believing that it would make mention of the fact that the very land on which they were protesting did not belong to them—they were guests on stolen indigenous land.[16] In response to these and other interventions, some activists holding their own Occupy demonstrations in other cities, such as Boston, Denver, and Austin, passed statements in recognition of and solidarity with indigenous peoples.

Any deep critique of state power and the corporate hold begs for a decolonial anarchist approach. For example, contemporary US federal laws that govern indigenous peoples continue to be grounded in the doctrine of discovery rooted in fifteenth-century papal bulls. These mandates established Christian dominion and subjugated non-Christian peoples by invalidating or ignoring aboriginal custodianship of land.[17] That is why there is a widespread movement among indigenous peoples to demand that the Vatican revoke the 1493 edict, especially because European and Euro-settler nations continue today to use the doctrine to rationalize the conquest of indigenous lands in order to perpetuate the legal fiction of land possession. For instance, US federal Indian law and policy have long been premised on Old Testament narratives of the "chosen people" and the "promised land," as exemplified in the 1823 Supreme Court ruling *Johnson v. McIntosh*, a landmark decision holding that private

15 This episode aired on October 18, 2011. The program can be accessed at http://www.indigenouspolitics.org /audiofiles/2011/10-18%20What%27s%20in%20a%20Name%20OWS.mp3. See also J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, *Indigenous Politics* radio program audio archive, 2017.

16 John Paul Montano, "An Open Letter to Occupy Wall Street Activists," *Zashnain: Outbursts of Self-Expression, Determination, and Fury* (blog), September 24, 2011, http://www.zashnain.com/2011/09/open-letter-to-occupy -wall-street.html.

17 See Steven Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land: Decoding the Doctrine of Christian Discovery* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2008).

citizens could not purchase lands from Indian tribes. The foundations of the court's opinion lay in the so-called discovery doctrine.[18] On the basis of this ruling, the US government still today considers tribal nations mere occupants of their traditional homelands with "use rights" based on the court's invention of the concept of aboriginal title. Let us consider here Noam Chomsky's working definition of anarchism as "an expression of the idea that the burden of proof is always on those who argue that authority and domination are necessary."[19] If they cannot, then "the institutions they defend should be considered illegitimate." What would be the basis for justifying US claims to sovereignty if the discovery doctrine were no longer the basis?[20]

In the United States, state power and domination cannot be analyzed, let alone challenged, without an understanding that it is a settler colonial state. But to critically engage settler colonialism, one must be attentive to indigeneity. Yet people who are not indigenus have a difficult time with indigeneity in the first place, let alone with indigenous sovereignty. Usages of the terms "indigenous" and "indigeneity" emerge from this colonial history and as critical responses to it. One result is that the question of who and what counts as "indigenous" seems to cause anxiety for just about everyone. The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the etymology of the adjective "indigenous" to late Latin: *indigenus*, meaning "born in a country," "native," and defines the term as "born or produced naturally in a land or region; native or belonging naturally *to* (the soil, region, etc.)," as well as "inborn, innate, native," and "of, relating to, or intended for the native inhabitants."[21] This emphasis on nativity or birth often leads to assertions such as "everyone is indigenous to *some* place," a universalizing commonplace that makes the term meaningless by erasing the political history of specific indigenous struggles over land access and stewardship. The dictionary definition of indigeneity as "born or produced naturally in a land or region" is insufficient. It also does not account for the wide range of relations to region and nation of the more than 370 million indigenous people who are spread across seventy countries worldwide. Some indigenous peoples define themselves by their historical continuity with precolonial and presettler societies; others by ties to territories and surrounding natural resources; others in relation to distinct social, economic, or political systems; and still others by their distinct languages, cultures, and beliefs.[22]

The concept of indigenous nationhood is too often a sticking point for many anarchists, who may bristle over the abidance to any notion of distinct peoplehood. For indigenous peoples, however, such nationhood is about survival as a people given the endurance of colonial domination. I have encountered anarchists (and leftists in general) who have knee-jerk reactions to any form of nationalism because they see it as

18   *Johnson v. McIntosh*, 21 US (8 Wheat.) 543 (1823).

19   See "On Anarchism: Noam Chomsky interviewed by Tom Lane," *ZNet*, December 23, 1996, https://chomsky.info/19961223.

20   See Newcomb, *Pagans in the Promised Land*, for a searing exploration of this very question.

21   *Oxford English Dictionary,* 2nd ed. (1989), s.v. "indigenous, adj.," http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu:7790/view/Entry/94474.

22   See United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division of Social Policy and Development, Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples* (New York: United Nations, 2009).

either always already linked to aspirations for state power or as a form of separatism, patriotism, xenophobia, or ethnic chauvinism—instead of autonomy. Anarchists who criticize those committed to indigenous distinctions too often condemn them in ways that are deeply complicit with settler colonialism and its genocidal logics.

Let us infuse radical politics with a decolonial commitment—one that goes far beyond discarding the language of domination along with concepts from other histories of struggle and oppression. Otherwise, we reproduce settler colonial violence and erasure.

A September 22, 2015, episode of *Anarchy on Air* offers a compelling example. The program featured an interview with Harsha Walia, who cofounded the Vancouver chapter of No One Is Illegal, a "loosely connected international network of antiracist groups and religious asylum initiatives that represents non-resident immigrants who stay in a country illegally and are at risk of deportation."[23] The radio segment focused on mass displacement resulting from civil war in Syria that was being met with hostile immigration and refugee policies in Canada. Walia spoke from an anticolonial grassroots community-organizing perspective, advancing a transnational critique of capitalism, neoliberalism, and racialized violence that was also attentive to indigeneity. As she explained, the recognition of indigenous sovereignty is a fundamental organizing principle for No One Is Illegal, as is the building of alliances in solidarity with indigenous peoples and communities. Activists in the network have worked in concert with First Nations and other Native communities in numerous ways to form social and political relationships with them, so that the settler state is not the only point of reference. ✳

23 See "Vancouver," No One Is Illegal, https://noii-van.resist.ca/about-us.

Decolonizing Education and Research by Countering the Myths We Live By

by JULIE REID

Countermythologization and Collective Action. This essay argues for a revision of both research and teaching practice within the fields of media studies and the communication sciences, and adopts Barthean semiotic myth theory as a means to demonstrate how such revision could be envisaged as countermythologization within the current climate of decolonization. First, a brief discussion broadly contextualizes the decolonization debate. This is followed by two examples of how

this overarching environment can be responded to, first, by rethinking media studies research practice, and second, by critically revising traditional teaching practices within media and communication studies.

Roland Barthes constructed the semiotic formula for myth to illustrate how myth acts as a mode of (often political) speech, regularly utilized in visual and mediated cultural artifacts such as film and advertising, for the purposeful naturalization and justification of dominant modes of thought and power.[1] Mythologization, which is the activity of mythic speech, differs from the concepts of, for example, discourse and/or narrative in that it declines the provision of detail, empties out its subject of history, and presents only a partial, simplified, and uncomplicated view of the world. Although mythic speech neither tolerates nor accommodates contradiction, it can be remarkably effective in persuading a lot of people that the ways things are, are the way they are meant to be. Since Barthes's original theorization of myth as the "top-down" exertion of communicated power by the dominant sections of society, countermyth theory has examined the conscious mythologization of voices of opposition and dissent.[2] The contestation of dominant colonially inscribed power and its resultant myths, and the current oppositional movements fronting decolonization, can be understood within this theoretical frame.

A key moment in the decolonization movement arose in 2015, when a collective of students at the University of Cape Town in South Africa called for the removal of a statue of the nineteenth-century imperialist Cecil John Rhodes from the university's campus. Demands to remove the statue were metonymic of a desire for the transformation of university curricula and culture, as many black students felt alienated within an institutionalized Eurocentric outlook. The #RhodesMustFall initiative provided impetus for the #FeesMustFall student movement, which blossomed on campuses shortly thereafter, sprouting a series of student-led protests in 2015 and 2016. The students' requests varied depending on the particular conditions at each campus, but in general two demands appeared as the main thrust. The first was the provision of access to quality higher education to all willing scholars, free of charge. The second was for a revision and transformation of university curricula, that is, for the decolonization of education.[3] Subsequent to #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall, collective mobilizations have initiated across the globe, emphasizing similar substantive points of critique and foci, such as the 2015 student protests in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, and the 2017 social movements against Confederate monuments in the United States.[4]

1 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Paladin, 1972).

2 Julie Reid, "A Theoretical Framework for the Semiotic Analysis of Myth and Counter Myth Applied to Post Apartheid Identities and Mythical Representations in a Selection of South African Film" (DLitt et Phil thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 2011).

3 Suellen Shay, "Decolonising the Curriculum: It's Time for a Strategy," *The Conversation*, June 13, 2016, http://theconversation.com/decolonising-the-curriculum-its-time-for-a-strategy-60598.

4 Jonathan Gray, "Dutch Student Protests Ignite Movement against Management of Universities," *The Guardian*, March 17, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2015/mar/17/dutch-student-protests-ignite-movement-against-management-of-universities; Nicholas Mirzoeff, "All the Monuments Must Fall," *The Situation*, August 14, 2017, http://www.nicholasmirzoeff.com/bio/all-the-monuments-must-fall-charlottesville; and Matthew Taylor, "Students Plan Further Protests against Higher Education Reforms," *The Guardian*, November 15, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/nov/15/students-further-protests-higher-education-reforms.

Responsive South African academics in tertiary communication and media studies schools are currently engaging in a significant process of overdue curriculum revision. The national conversation, which was initiated by the students and followed by the collaborative efforts of media studies and communication academics, partially facilitated by the South African Communications Association (SACOMM), to confront the necessary task of decolonization, provides a rich platform for debate, contestation, and transformation.[5] Narratives of racial division have often directed the trajectory of this conversation about curriculum, which in the South African context is to be expected, given the country's recent apartheid history.

Fissures of race differences that germinated during colonialism may have evolved in their form (if not their function), but they nonetheless persist in the present. A gruesome beast, this mythology shifts the balance of opportunity and power in favor of some peoples over others, and it crawls about within the socioeconomic structure of things in South Africa much as it does in many other societies. But an overemphasis on issues of race politics risks ignoring the fact that the project of decolonization is about more than balancing the scales of racial inequality. To be sure, the struggle to "decolonize" involves deracializing the systems of power and facing off against historically oppressive constructions of racial identity. But tackling these constructs alone will be superficial, because the tentacles of colonial power reach further than mythologized race descriptors do.

The dominant colonially inscribed forces that define our world today are largely intertwined with the neoliberal economic organization of society. The conceptualization and exercise of power of these forces takes place through a variety of means, including race, but also class, gender, ethnicity, religion, institutionalization, politics, policy and law, and sexuality. The continuities of power that once relied on the racial aspect of colonialism, such as the institutionalized oppression of a black majority by a white minority in South Africa, have shifted mechanisms of social division to alternative aspects, but the power matrix that matured during colonialism remains unchanged. Societal division and injustice are the mechanisms of naturalization for dominant colonial power. The gendered mythologies of patriarchy and misogyny, the character of political exercise, the admonishment of critical thought (particularly that which critiques the state, corporate capital, or any related structures), prejudice and bigotry (not only in terms of race but also regarding other mythologically constructed personalities, appearances, sexualities, or worldviews), and "capitalist relations of production and distribution, of dominant economic class relations, all function in the service of dominant colonial constructs."[6] Countermovements against colonially inscribed power will fail if activists address only race, because all other aspects will undoubtedly be further naturalized, embedded, and normalized. Decolonization requires a diligent struggle against all the components of dominant power.[7]

5 For more information on SACOMM, see the organization's website, at http://www.sacomm.org.za.

6 Dale McKinley, *South Africa's Corporatised Liberation: A Critical Analysis of the ANC in Power* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2017).

7 McKinley, *South Africa's Corporatised Liberation*, 49.

Dominant coloniality maintains its position by constructing, perpetuating, and disseminating a mode of thought, a set of "acceptable" narratives, mythologies, traditions, and even modes of research practice. Transformation toward a decolonized world demands a far-reaching exercise of countermythologization to foster a broad consciousness that admits the fallacies in the myths we live by.[8] Neoliberal mythical speech, for example, represents competition as an essential aspect of human relations, citizens as mere consumers, and the acquisition of personal wealth as a reward for efficiency while the rich acquire their wealth solely through their own merit—a myth that ignores both the exploitation of workers and the advantages bequeathed to the elite, relating to education, class, race, and gender, that secure their privilege.[9] The decolonial project must actively engage in countermythologization of the neoliberal myths of capitalist coloniality that have for so long convinced so many that the way things are now is the way they are naturally meant to be. Inequality, social discord, and divisions are not natural. They are constructed mechanisms, and as such they can be consciously deconstructed.

Here, the importance of collectives and collective action is crucial. Dominant power stresses individual achievement as virtuous, and this is not a coincidence.[10] Capitalism encourages individual achievement, especially in terms of wealth accumulation, and it discourages a sense of community or collectivism. It does so because collective power is scary to the elites.[11] Throughout history, every time anything has ever changed for the better, it has not been because dominant power willingly offered reform out of its own goodwill but because of the collective support and mass mobilization of large numbers of people. In South Africa the only means to defeat the abhorrent apartheid system was decades of dedicated collective struggle, performed by thousands of people, for freedom and social justice. The decolonial project, required for a more just world, needs collective action to succeed.

Organizing Research Collectives for Decoloniality. The same concept of collective action ought to be recognized by academics and researchers. Contrary to research traditions institutionalized in the Global North—and that bear symmetry to a capitalist worldview in their emphasis on individualism—the promotion of research collectives is crucial. Critical thinking forums and collaborations, and most especially the hands-on involvement of groups of minds working together on the same research goals rather than in isolation from one another, literally allow for more work to be done and the promotion of both organic thought growth as well as the more meaningful mentoring of emerging scholars.

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8 Reid, "Theoretical Framework"; Julie Reid, "The Remythologisation of White Collective Identities in Post Apartheid South African History Film by Myth and Counter Myth," *Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research* 38, no. 1 (2012a): 45; and Julie Reid, ed., *Looking at Media: An Introduction to Visual Studies* (Cape Town: Pearson, 2013).

9 George Monbiot, "Neoliberalism: The Ideology at the Root of All Our Problems," *The Guardian*, April 15, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot?CMP=share_btn_fb.

10 Monbiot, "Neoliberalism."

11 Robert McChesney, *Blowing the Roof Off the Twenty-First Century: Media, Politics and the Struggle for a Post-Capitalist Democracy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2014), 26–27.

Examples are there already. The Media Policy and Democracy Project (MPDP), a South African research collective with an emphasis on communications policy making in the public interest, has incorporated more than twenty local and international researchers, collaborated with various civil society and grassroots community organizations, and participated in steering national policy-making processes with a view to how these ought to promote communications access as a fundamental right and for social justice.[12] The combined efforts of MPDP researchers have resulted in the project's contribution to policy involving media and internet freedom, mass communications surveillance and privacy, public service broadcasting and digital terrestrial television, press regulation and journalistic ethics, and media diversity and transformation. Central to this collective is what the MPDP terms the "audience-centered approach," which is a (decolonized) attitude to media research practices, media policy making, and media production and journalism.[13] The audience-centered approach, unlike colonial and northern developed practices, regards the media end user, the ordinary person on the ground (who in a Global South context is most often economically marginalized), as primary to the research effort. Where elites in government, media, and corporate capital traditionally exert their power on communications policy according to their own interests, the audience-centered approach inverts the traditional top-down power hierarchy, operating on the understanding that the media audience ought to direct the trajectory of policy making and research. Because, after all, if not for the audience or media end users, then what or who is the media for?

Notably, academic research activism does not find comfortable symmetry with the ideological normative traditions of colonialized education structures. Inconveniently for dominant power, activist academics are too often prone to encouraging (sometimes radical) critical thought, which can dangerously explore alternatives to the status quo. Even more inconveniently, they have the expertise to back this up with empirical data and facts.

Decolonizing Curricula and Teaching Traditions. Decolonizing media research is but one part of the picture. The decolonization of teaching practices and normative theory, as well as the substantive content of curricula, is equally crucial. An example comes in the most fundamental principle of communication theory, that is, the theoretical model of the exercise of communication itself. We are perpetually trained, and thereafter train our students, that communication begins with the act of speaking, followed by mediation and finally reception. But some theorists argue that we ought instead to recognize and teach that communication begins with the act of listening.[14]

12 For more information on the Media Policy and Democracy Project, see https://www.mediaanddemocracy.com.

13 Jane Duncan and Julie Reid, "Toward a Measurement Tool for the Monitoring of Media Diversity and Pluralism in South Africa: An Audience Centred Approach," *Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research* 39, no. 4 (2013): 483.

14 Les Back, *The Art of Listening* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2007); Susan Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict and Citizenship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Nick Couldry, *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism* (London: Sage, 2010); Nick Couldry, *Listening beyond the Echoes: Media, Ethics, and Agency in an Uncertain World* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2006); Charles Husband, "Listening and Understanding," paper presented at the seminar of the Listening Project, November 13, 2008; Lisbeth Lipari, "Listening, Thinking, Being," *Communication Theory* 20 (2010): 348; Penny O'Donnell, "Journalism, Change and

Listening ought to take place first, before the speech act occurs. Penny O'Donnell, Justine Lloyd, and Tanja Dreher call listening the "other side" of communication.[15] It can just as reasonably be envisaged as the first step. Fundamentally most curricula and research focuses on the act of expression, almost entirely ignoring the practice of listening. An example of why this is harmful appears in the journalistic profession, indicating that the way that we teach journalists and media producers needs to change.

Increasingly, research studies record the news media's habitual underrepresentation or misrepresentation of the largest portion of the world's inhabitants, the economically marginalized and poor, while privileging reporting on the interests of the elites. Subsequent media content is dominated by narratives that are relevant to the smallest sector of society who hold political and economic power.[16] Journalism globally has a generally poor historical track record of representing the experiences of socially marginalized groups, especially of the poor, women, indigenous and First Nations people, youth, and migrants.[17] The media mistakenly regards these people as "voiceless," but these people do have something to say. The problem is that mainstream news media narrative framers do not do enough to listen to them, relying instead on the "official" voices of media authorities, capital, and the state.[18]

The normative understanding that communication begins with speaking has, whether unintentionally or by design, in practice benefited dominant power because it privileges voices from ruling quarters over the vox populi. Narratively the scales are weighted in favor of the elites, and although the political economy of media markets bears part of the blame, so, too, does the traditional paradigm of the practice of journalism and the way it is taught. If communication begins with speaking, then

Listening Practices," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 23, no. 4 (2009): 503; Penny O'Donnell, Justine Lloyd, and Tanja Dreher, "Listening, Pathbuilding and Continuations: A Research Agenda for the Analysis of Listening," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 23, no. 4 (2009): 423; Jan Servaes and Patchanee Malikhao, "Participatory Communication: The New Paradigm?," in *Media & Glocal Change: Rethinking Communication for Development*, ed. Oscar Hemer and Thomas Tufte (Buenos Aires: CLACSA, September, 2005), http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.edu.ar/ar/libros/edicion/media/media.html.

15   O'Donnell, Lloyd, and Dreher, "Listening, Pathbuilding and Continuations."

16   Jane Duncan, "Marikana and the Problem of Pack Journalism," SABC, October 11, 2012, http://abahlali.org/node/9253; Steven Friedman, "Whose Freedom? South Africa's Press, Middle-Class Bias and the Threat of Control," *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 32, no. 2 (2011): 106; Julie Reid, "Media Freedom Debacles Aside, the Press Is Failing Us," *Daily Maverick*, October 24, 2012, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2012-10-24-media-freedom-debacles-aside-the-press-is-failing-us/; Herman Wasserman, Wallace Chuma, and Tanja Bosch, "Voices of the Poor Are Missing from South Africa's Media," *University of Cape Town News*, March 4, 2016, https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2016-03-04-voices-of-the-poor-are-missing-from-south-africas-media; Anthea Garman and Vanessa Malila, "Listening and the Ambiguities of Voice in South African Journalism," *Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research* 43, no. 1 (2017): 1; Vanessa Malila, "The Voiceless Generation: (Non-)representations of Young Citizens in the Coverage of Education Stories by South African Newspapers," *Communicare* 33, no. 1 (2014): 21; Vanessa Malila, Jane Duncan, Irene Costera Meijer, Nico Drok, Anthea Garman, Larry Strelitz, Lynette Steenveld, Tanja Bosch and Musa Ndlovu, "A Baseline Study of Youth Identity, the Media and Public Sphere in South Africa," School of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/jms/documents/publications/Baseline_study_FINAL.pdf; Herman Wasserman, "Journalism in a New Democracy: The Ethics of Listening," *Communicatio: South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research* 39, no. 1 (2013): 67; Wasserman, Chuma, and Bosch, "Voices."

17   O'Donnell, *Journalism*, 504–505.

18   Servaes and Malikhao, *Participatory Communication*, 91.

journalism gravitates toward the voices that have the means and resources to speak loudly. Because listening is not part of this communication equation, journalism offers scant attention to listening to the experiences and struggles of those who are often most acutely affected by the contents of news reporting, namely the marginalized whose voices are not heard. If this were to change, the threat to dominant power would be immediate, most especially because the disparities of a deeply unequal and unjust system would become widely mediated and exposed. It is in the interest of dominant and colonial power to leave "listening" out of the communication theoretical model that we have been teaching for so long. But a decolonial view of communication and media studies recognizes that one voice ought never to be privileged over another voice on the basis of the economic or sociopolitical status of the speaker.

For social scientists, researchers, and teachers, the decolonial project must begin at home with a question: how do our own habitual teachings and research practices further substantiate and naturalize dominant power, and what can we collectively do to change this? ✱

For Maalik, Naz, Brittany, & Alexis; or, On Loving Black People as a Liberatory Practice

by SIMONE BROWNE

"If you're here with the NYPD or you're with the FBI, welcome, sincerely. We expect you here"—this is the brief greeting spoken by an imam at the beginning of a prayer gathering depicted in the 2015 film *Naz & Maalik* (Jay Dockendorf). This welcoming to the mosque is a recognition of, and, perhaps a reckoning with, the seeming inevitability of the police surveillance and monitoring of Muslim communities, by way of, for example, the New York Police Department's (NYPD) Demographic Unit (which has since been disbanded). At other times mosques and Muslim student groups have been infiltrated by plainclothes cops or through the work of FBI informants and by way of "create and capture." Of course, the surveillance of Muslims in the United States is not a recent phenomenon; it began long before the current president (then candidate) proclaimed, "I want surveillance of certain mosques, okay . . . and you know what? We've had it before and we'll have it again."[1] One need look only to the

1 "Trump: I Want Surveillance of Certain Mosques," Associated Press, November 21, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQUwtYWLR3E.

thousands of pages of declassified FBI files on Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X, Elijah Muhammad, and the Nation of Islam that disclose, by way of redaction and nondisclosure, the extent of the state's targeted actions.

In the film *Naz & Maalik*, Maalik and Naz, two Black, queer, Muslim teenagers, move in and around Brooklyn by foot, bike, and train, all in the course of one day. Their conversations range throughout the day, skimming topics from the gentrification of Brooklyn to the Qur'an, bystander intervention, prisons, and profiling at airports. At one point they are approached by a white, greasy-haired undercover NYPD cop who attempts to entrap the two into buying a gun. Unsuccessful, the undercover cop reports the teenagers to an FBI agent sitting in a black sedan. This is create and capture: the making of informants such that the FBI (allegedly) outfits its targets with terrorist starter kits in order to manufacture and then foil terrorist plots.[2] Maalik and Naz sell various things (Catholic saint cards, lottery tickets, perfumed oils) along Fulton Street to raise some cash, but it is their loving on each other cautiously in public that makes them illegible to the FBI. Their acts of loving on each other while moving through public spaces, like the L train, are cautious because of homo-antagonistic surveillance by family, schools, and the public. This illegibility then renders them all the more suspicious to the FBI agent in the black sedan.

I want to hold on to the Maaliks and the Nazs, but not *Naz & Maalik*, for how they allow me to begin to think with what Sylvia Wynter calls the practice of decipherment in her essay "Rethinking 'Aesthetics': Notes towards a Deciphering Practice." Wynter writes that a deciphering practice "seeks to identify not what texts and their signifying practice can be interpreted to mean but what they can be deciphered to do," and how.[3] It is a way of getting at, as Rinaldo Walcott puts it in his discussion of that same essay, "a reconstituted universalism proffered from the vantage point of the subaltern and the dispossessed."[4] Therefore, it moves toward making alterable our current epistemological order rather than merely being a film or media criticism that is enfolded into, as Wynter puts it, "the instituting of the 'figure of man' and its related middle class subject (and the latter's self-representation as a genetically determined rather than discursively instituted mode of being)."[5] Black queer love in public makes possible an anticolonial reading of the Maaliks and Nazs in the time of, for example, stop and frisk, the police torture site that is Chicago's Homan Square, the FBI's proposed Shared Responsibility Committees, its Don't Be a Puppet website, and the Department of Homeland Security's monitoring of Black Lives Matter movements.

With this frame, I turn to, first, the leaked "unclassified / for official use only" FBI intelligence assessment "Black Identity Extremist Likely Motivated to Target Law Enforcement Officers," then briefly to the documentary *Whose Streets?* (Sabaah Folayan, 2017) for the guideposts it offers for anticolonial action. In this way, what

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2   For examples of this "build a terrorist" practice, see Glenn Greenwald's "Why Does the FBI Have to Manufacture Its Own Plots If Terrorism and ISIS Are Such Grave Threats?," *Intercept*, February 26, 2015.

3   Sylvia Wynter, "Rethinking 'Aesthetics': Notes towards a Deciphering Practice," in *Ex-iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, ed. Mbye B. Cham (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1992), 266.

4   Rinaldo Walcott, "Reconstructing Manhood; or, The Drag of Black Masculinity," *Small Axe* 13, no. 1 (2009): 83.

5   Wynter, "Rethinking," 265.

follows is not an essay strictly on US surveillance policies with regard to the war on terror, or on state and state-sanctioned violence against everyday Black life. Instead, by foregrounding *Naz & Maalik* (for the sake of the Maaliks and Nazs rather than the film itself) and asking what this text "can be deciphered to do," what I am suggesting is that Black queer love of Black people is a liberatory practice and strategy of confronting the gendered violences of anti-Black police terror. This claim is obvious and not revelatory; see, for example, the list of demands from Black Lives Matter–Toronto and its queer-positive Freedom School educational program for children, which is crafted through a trans-feminist lens, or the Movement for Black Lives' platform statement: "We are intentional about amplifying the particular experience of state and gendered violence that Black queer, trans, gender nonconforming, women and intersex people face."[6] But calling attention to Black queer love of Black people as a liberatory practice suggests that it is a deliberate enactment of anticolonial politics against a colonial system and all its makings: white supremacy, capitalist exploitation, the white settler state logic of Indigenous dispossession and bureaucratic disavowal, anti-Black terrorism, and heteropatriarchal violence. I use the term "anticolonial" here intentionally, as decolonial transformations can be fleeting sometimes. They morph and mutate. They can become reincorporated—or structurally adjusted, so to speak—into new systems of violence. "Anticolonial" calls attention to the continuous groundwork and deliberate acts of disruption necessary to hold the world that we want to get to someday—a world that is something other than this colonial one—to its promise of liberation.

Prepared by the FBI's Domestic Terrorism Analysis Unit, the leaked August 2016 intelligence assessment brings with it the creation of a new classification, "Black identity extremist" (BIE), which the FBI defines, in a rather incomplete, confounding, and probably deliberate fashion, as "individuals who seek, wholly or in part, through unlawful acts of force or violence, in response to perceived racism and injustice in American society and some do so in furtherance of establishing a separate black homeland or autonomous black social institutions, communities, or governing organizations within the United States."[7] The document cites the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in August 2014 and the grand jury's failure to indict the cop who killed him as the "very likely" impetus for the rise of this new classification. This new classification is now part of the FBI's catalog of the surveillance of Black life and the criminalization of Black political struggle. According to the leaked document:

> The FBI assesses it is very likely that BIEs' perceptions of unjust treatment of African Americans and the perceived unchallenged illegitimate actions of law enforcement will inspire premeditated attacks against law enforcement over

6 "Platform," Movement for Black Lives, https://policy.m4bl.org/platform.

7 The leaked document continues by noting: "This desire for physical or psychological separation is typically based on either a religious or political belief system, which is sometimes formed around or includes a belief in racial superiority or supremacy." The document makes no reference to the "alt-right" movement, or any other nomenclature that names white supremacist or white nationalist groups, organizations, ideology, and their calls for the establishment of a white ethno-state. FBI Counterterrorism Division, "Federal Bureau of Investigation Intelligence Assessment: Black Identity Extremists Likely Motivated to Target Law Enforcement Officers," August 3, 2017, https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/4067711-BIE-Redacted.html.

the next year. This may also lead to an increase in BIE group memberships, collaboration among BIE groups, or the appearance of additional violent lone offenders motivated by BIE rhetoric. The FBI further assesses it is very likely additional controversial police shootings of African Americans and the associated legal proceedings will continue to serve as drivers for violence against law enforcement.[8]

I cite from the leaked document at length here because it is an instrument of the FBI's power to index certain Black political struggles as an internal threat to national security, where this indexing becomes the state's alibi and its justification for repression of any critique or responses coming from Black people when it comes to state violence against Black people and their communities. This twelve-page threat assessment is, then, documentary evidence of the sources and methods of the state's anti-Black surveillance rationalities. For example, the document reads: "The FBI only uses likelihood expressions" and "does not derive judgments via statistical analysis"; instead it claims to present "analytic judgements."[9] However, these analytic judgments ("The FBI assesses" and "it is very likely" when it comes to "perceptions of unjust treatment") work to produce that very statistical analysis, where "very likely" is equated with "highly probable" and a rate of "80–95%."[10] It is a spurious correlation indeed, but if we are to take such certainty at face value for a moment, then we must read into the use of the future tense in "will continue to serve" in the excerpt as an unintentional admission that police shootings of Black people will continue along with nonindictments, acquittals, or, as in the case of the now-former cop who killed Terrance Crutcher in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 2016, expungement.[11] The rhetoric of statistics as objective, empirical truth—when they are in fact not—is part and parcel of the methods in the FBI's intelligence sources and methods that work to name Black political struggle as an ideological and statistically verifiable threat to police power. The threat assessment does not include any credible specifics about future violent acts targeted at police; instead, it offers the "Black identity extremist" as a category manufactured to trigger, one could guess, the bureau's counterintelligence tools, such as the recruiting of informants and its other methods of discrediting and disruption.

In *Whose Streets?* Brittany Ferrell, cofounder of the St. Louis–based Millennial Activists United, calls for a different future tense, one that centers a Black queer critique of our current governing order. This 2017 documentary follows Ferrell and her partner Alexis Templeton throughout their activist work, and caretaking, during the Ferguson uprising and beyond: a highway shutdown, their wedding, movement work, community meetings with elected officials, Ferguson October, protests, disruptive acts, and loving acts. Millennial Activists United is a grassroots organization

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8 FBI Counterterrorism Division, 8.

9 FBI Counterterrorism Division, 8.

10 FBI Counterterrorism Division, 8.

11 David Moye, "Police Officer Who Killed Terrance Crutcher Has Manslaughter Charge Expunged from Record," Black Voices, *Huffington Post*, October 27, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/terence-crutcher-betty -shelby-record_us_59f376e0e4b077d8dfc97210.

created by Black queer women.[12] Their ways of caring demonstrate what Black queer revolutionary love can make possible by showing what it looks like to love Black people in public spaces, like their shutdown of the I-70 highway (where one motorist violently drove through the protestors' human barricade). Their love is strategic, and it is dutiful—as they echo Assata Shakur's words throughout the documentary: "It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains"—and it can be summed up in the three words: Black Lives Matter.

At one point during the documentary, Ferrell outlines a method for a deciphering practice: "I just challenge these ideas of normality . . . if your normal is limited opportunities for people of color, why aren't you questioning that normal? If that normal is 18-year-old teenager laying in the street for four hours, but that's your normal right? Everybody wants things to be normal. I feel like if you are not questioning normal, you are not paying attention." If you are not questioning colonial forms of domination, then you are willfully not paying attention. Although Wynter's deciphering practice is focused on the texts, like film, that shape the imaginaries of our current governing order, we can still look to it as a means of getting at a way of reading our present in the making of our anticolonial futures. Or, as Ferrell aptly put it, "it's that feeling that keeps me going." If not, we remain "accomplices in an 'epistemic contract,'" as Sylvia Wynter warns, that functions not in the name of liberation but in replicating our current governing order.[13]   ✳

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12   Funders for Justice, http://fundersforjustice.org/millennial-activists-united.

13   Wynter, "Rethinking," 258.

The Untitled Images (2014)

by Khaled Barakeh

Modern artists are facing constant challenges in terms of defining their roles—artists are no longer just themselves; they often become an artist-activist, artist-journalist, artist-storyteller, and so on. But have our times changed the rules of truth telling, storytelling through art, content choices regarding topics that could, or should, be a part of discussion in the modern art world?

After a few years of repetitive images of Middle Eastern misery shown in Western media, I've noticed a certain numbness, even a cruel boredom, in viewers becoming used to seeing scenes of massacres on daily basis. At the same time, editors and international photography agencies dominate content, showing what's subjectively worth showing and hiding what's not. Those photographs are, indeed,

undeniably violent, but they are never more brutal than the reality itself. Editors and agencies claiming that their actions of refusal protect audiences from violence deny the existence of the people portrayed, as if ignorance could ever be pictured as protection. Their choices naturally shape viewers' understanding of the conflict, as people reflect on it according to what they see.

During the past few years in Syria, this problem has escalated into a new social dynamic, creating a cruel "competition" of violent images—only those who post the most horrific and intense visual materials win the world's attention. It has even led to people staging traumatic events, replaying the horrors they didn't manage to capture on film, guided surely by a feeling of necessity to create even more intense, exaggerated visual materials to satisfy the world.

It might be that we think we know history and art history, but what we really know is just a reproduction of it. This series, *The Untitled Images* (2014, digital C print, five photos, 21 × 30 cm each), raises the question of how the existence and nonexistence of an artwork might affect the material existence of the reality presented in a photograph. It asks, how can we shape public opinion, based on reality on the ground, without showing the reality as it is?

To challenge my own critical eye, I decided to use photographs taken in different parts of Syria, joined by one recurring feature—the horror of loss. Mostly portraying adults holding their children's bodies, the photos are brutal visual evidence of an equally brutal reality. I peeled off the silhouettes like we peel dead skin off our bodies—getting rid of the unwanted, the unpleasant, the inconvenient to see. Edited in this particular manner, the photos become acceptable for the media, showing only the desired amount of pain, or a lack of thereof.

There are a few different levels of violence present in those pictures. First, there is that of the regime making this horror happen; second is that of the media, cynically deciding whose pain should be displayed on the pedestal of our TV screens; and last is my own layer of violence that I, as an artist, had to apply to those photographs, when I very carefully, almost surgically, erased the skin—and therefore the people who once were individuals.

The act of erasure is, in fact, a protective one: the absence of the bodies makes them more present. The real-life victims are removed and become human silhouettes—they become a symbol of any victim, anywhere in the world, at any given time. Viewers are allowed to identify themselves with a universal feeling of loss and pain, not this specific one that they believe themselves to be far away from. ✽
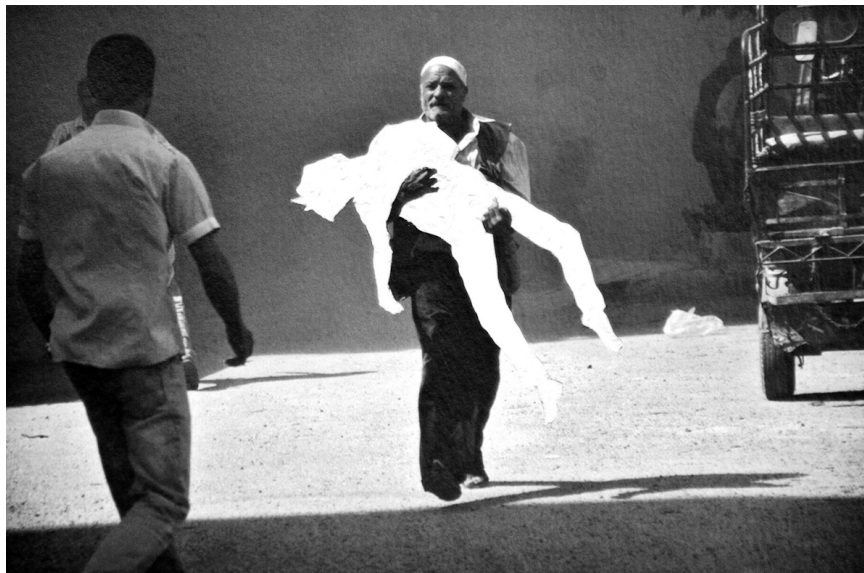
Reel Evil

by NEGAR MOTTAHEDEH

I still remember the unexpected fever that washed my skin in red as I watched him, the forty-third president of the United States, George W. Bush, apply a black-and-white overlay to the world in his 2002 State of the Union address. That speech followed a series of unthinkable terrorist attacks on American soil on September 11, 2001. My visceral response as I watched the State of the Union that night is captured by a descriptive French phrase, *colère du lait* (milk anger), a state of being that boils into sudden rage when heated.

In that speech, President Bush spoke of three "axis" countries: North Korea, Iran, and Iraq. They were evil. They developed and tested dangerous weapons of mass destruction. They curtailed their citizens' freedoms—repressed, starved, and tortured them. Saddam Hussein's Iraq was, by far, the worst among them.

This political rhetoric is by now familiar ground. The forty-fifth president of the United States, Donald Trump, applied it to President Bashir Assad in his first postelection act of military aggression against

Syria and again to Iran's president Hassan Rouhani's in a speech in Riyadh in May 2017.[1]

In the spring of 2003, still outraged by the reconstruction of the world in terms of good and evil, I designed the Reel Evil: Films from the Axis of Evil film series at Duke University with my colleague and collaborator miriam cooke, the eminent Middle East literary scholar, and Hank Okazaki, Screen/Society's film curator. By that spring, six countries in total had been identified as members of the "axis of evil" by the Bush administration.

Reel Evil, our festival of films from North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Cuba, launched just days before the United States went to war in Iraq in March 2003. The war implemented the military doctrine of "shock and awe"—rapid dominance in order to shut down the adversary's society completely, incapacitating the ability to fight.[2] The Reel Evil film series, which ran from February 26 to April 17, 2003, featured a variety of film genres from the axis of evil—comedies, *vérité* films, melodramas, war epics, and Godzilla films. The series was media activism in its own right. The sheer variety of featured genres emphasized the presence of well-developed societies in these vastly different "adversary" countries against the backdrop of a rhetoric of uniformity and backwardness in the media landscape. The festival's range established that there was an infrastructure supporting the making of feature-length films in the axis countries atop a culture and viewership that enjoyed a hearty laugh and a solid cry.

Global media outlets went bonkers when they heard about Reel Evil. Hank, miriam, and I gave interviews about the festival for weeks on end that spring. The BBC, CNN, MSNBC, CBS, Fox News, MTV, NPR—the news networks were all excited.[3] The conservative talk-show host Rush Limbaugh denounced us. He wondered what the concession stands on Duke's campus would sell during the screening of the North Korean Godzilla movie *Pulgasari* (1985): fried frog legs and critter soda?

Made in 1985, *Pulgasari* was Kim Jong Il's crowning achievement in filmmaking. To make it, he kidnapped a South Korean director, Shin Sang Ok, and his wife, the talented actor Choi Eun Hee.[4] (The film is clunky, and it is so dreadful that it is awesome!) Teetering on this foundation of grave corruption and wrongdoing by the filmmaker himself, the film itself tells the people's story, the story of a giant metal-eating monster who fights alongside the peasants to overthrow an evil monarchy.

1 President Trump's Riyadh speech was annotated by Uri Friedman and Emma Green. See "Trump's Speech on Islam, Annotated," *The Atlantic*, May 21, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/05/trump-saudi-speech-islam/527535.

2 Harlan K. Ullman, *21st Century U.S. Military Documents: Shock and Awe, Achieving Rapid Dominance—Momentous Defense Paper on New Strategies* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2005).

3 Steve Inskeep, "Reel Evil," *All Things Considered*, March 2, 2013, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1180397; and "'Axis of Evil' Films to Screen in the US," BBC News, February 20, 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/2784025.stm.

4 Paul Fischer, "Kim Jong-Il and the Great Movie-Star Kidnap," *The Guardian*, February 21, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/feb/21/kim-jong-il-movie-star-kidnap-plot-north-south-korea-godzilla.

The semester-long film series was intended to educate Duke students about cinema and film industries in the axis countries that had come into focus. This simple act, we thought, would undo the representations of otherness that daily colonized our media on the level of content. It would also upend formal film standards that had been normalized by dominant cinema in its circulation around the globe. Our films would show that cinema could speak in a multiplicity of formal grammars and entrain the senses of its viewers in ways unfamiliar to Hollywood's global audiences. Reel Evil was a success in that regard, but to say that the majority of Duke's students really cared about this festival of films, or that they stepped foot in our screenings, would be exaggeration.[5] While the series' eight film screenings were generally packed by the public, our students had their own commitments and their attention was elsewhere.

News networks and newspaper journalists meanwhile feverishly pursued their coverage. For global media outlets, the staging of Reel Evil at a top-tier American institution represented some form of vigorous resistance to the Bush administration. In reality, all any of us was doing then and now is our civic responsibility as citizens of a democratic nation. Having studied the literature and the arts of resistance made under dictatorships and in nondemocratic cultures, miriam cooke understood and modeled this perspective for me.[6]

The journalists who came to Duke University to cover Reel Evil wanted to talk endlessly about how the comedies and melodramas from the axis countries were vehicles for politics and power.[7] I did not disagree with them. I still do not. Movies have a way of changing our perspective. And the international film industry, including Hollywood, has always been a vehicle for ideological persuasion, sensory entrainment, territorial expansion, and political propaganda. A vast majority of film industries around the world were specifically set up for this purpose, Hollywood included. The international film industry was built up and best funded during times of war and efforts in imperial expansion. The industrial films and oil films that were made by (and funded the more progressive projects of) the international New Wave in the 1950s and 1960s testify to the fact that even the most visionary film movements are not exempt from this characterization. What I learned from the Reel Evil experience, however, was that it is somehow only when we talk about rogue states that those aspects of film—film's rootedness in politics, imperialism, and capital—are highlighted.

To that end, my key takeaway from the experience was this: my students largely were not interested in our festival of films or drawn in by the media's hype around it. Like most Americans, they lived in a world that had been filtered into black and white

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5 Six hundred people attended the two screenings of *11'09"01*, on September 11 and April 17, 2003. The film was a collaborative effort by eleven film directors from around the globe; among them Mira Nair, Sean Penn, Ken Loach, Samira Makhmalbaf, and Youssef Chahine each contributed a short film of eleven minutes, nine seconds, and one frame in length.

6 See, for example, miriam cooke, *Dissident Syria: Making Oppositional Arts Official* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), and *Dancing in Damascus: Creativity, Resilience, and the Syrian Revolution* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016).

7 "Staff, Students 'Duke' It Out over Film Festival," Fox News, March 14, 2003, http://www.foxnews.com/story /2003/03/14/staff-students-duke-it-out-over-film-festival.html; Andy Soltis, "Students Flock to See Reel Bad Guys," *New York Post*, March 11, 2003, https://nypost.com/2003/03/11/students-flock-to-see-reel-bad-guys.

by the media and, more precisely, by the government's use of the media, and they couldn't breathe life into shades of gray because they didn't know how.

For them—kids who had lived the terror of the 9/11 attacks—criticism meant being negative toward things that "felt" unpatriotic, "felt" threatening, or "felt" other. When, for example, we watched Gillo Pontecorvo's lyrical representation of the struggle for national independence in the 1966 film *La battaglia di Algeri* (*The Battle of Algiers*)—a film that was screened at the Pentagon by the Bush administration to train American soldiers in guerilla warfare—my students in Intro to Film reported me to the university administration, making the point that I called members of the National Liberation Front in the film freedom fighters instead of terrorists.[8] This is what the notion of "critical" in critical thinking about foreign films amounted to in the post-9/11 media era—for most of that generation of Americans, anyway.

In that black-and-white world, people of all walks were constantly speaking of the horror that was Saddam Hussein. He had been cast as the force of evil on the planet, after all. It was the collusion of critical thinking with this black-and-white world that finally forced me to see the shades of gray, where Saddam's Ba'athism—and its militaristic nationalism, more specifically—corresponded to the ideological positions being taken up by the US government at the time. I noted, too, the ways that Saddam's pan-Arabism corresponded to the left's defense of Palestinian nationalism that was in vogue on college campuses. In the gray spaces in between the poles that marked the distances between good and evil were the similarities that demanded my critical attention.

Media activists and educators must similarly attend to this lack of curiosity and of critical engagement with a world that is cast in black and white, especially as it is paired with the alarmist stances of contemporary political tribalism and scaled to a whole new level of urgent self-importance by media ratings, page views, and impressions. We need to think globally and engage critically with concepts such as civic responsibility and citizenship, and to understand what these concepts mean specifically in the context of a democracy as opposed to in a military dictatorship. What does criticism mean, and what does it mean to be critical now? What do these concepts look like when animated by our everyday lives? How might these terms be formative of identities and opinions? Which media would best articulate them for the public? If and on which platforms could they scale and circulate in the public sphere?

For if there is no exact one-to-one correlation between "media activism" and impact, as my experience with Reel Evil foregrounded, and no lack of ambivalence in the valuation of the media that is expressive of our views, as the North Korean film *Pulgasari* exemplifies,[9] then we also need to see how our views are wrapped up in the views of those whom we see as our opposite. We need to clearly grasp what they are

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8 Michael T. Kaufman, "The World: Film Studies; What Does the Pentagon See in 'Battle of Algiers'?," *New York Times*, September 7, 2003, http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/07/weekinreview/the-world-film-studies-what-does-the-pentagon-see-in-battle-of-algiers.html.

9 It exemplifies this in the sense that *Pulgasari* as a narrative film celebrates the rights of the peasantry and their uprising against a monarchy while its filmmaker denies the rights and liberties of the film's main actors.

thinking and see what life inhabits the darkness where we cannot see them. Are there colors that dwell in those gray spaces between us and them?

As the Iranian painter and poet Mohammad Ebrahim Jafari once wrote:

In my paintings where the darkness is, I am looking for you;
And where the light is, I have lost you;
I love the gray . . . the gray . . .

The black-and-white filter that George W. Bush applied to the world in that 2002 State of the Union address had real consequences. It resulted in the deaths of more than 170,000 people and created millions of international veterans. It articulated a world-view that continues to reverberate now fifteen years later in the rhetoric of division and hatred in the United States on both the right and the left of the political spectrum.

What strikes me as interesting is this, however: that specific play in light and shadow—that filter that the media, too, agreed to place on the world that finally turned it into mere shades of black and white—is suddenly vibrant with color for the forty-third president himself as he establishes himself as a painter in his own right. Pushing oil around on canvas in colorful swirls and decisive strokes that capture the disfigurement of his subjects, most of whom are 9/11 veterans, Bush admits to seeing the world differently now—seeing color where before there were mere shadows.[10] It is in the gray that he now finds the vibrancy of a world we all lost to the stroke of a pen in the highest office fifteen years ago.   ✱

10 Mimi Swartz, "'W.' and the Art of Redemption," *New York Times*, March 21, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com /2017/03/21/opinion/w-and-the-art-of-redemption.html.

Contributors

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