Citational Media
Counter-Archives and Technology in Contemporary Visual Culture

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Edited by
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INTRODUCTION

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Citational Media as Counter-Archives

Annie Ring and Lucy Bollington

University College London

This book puts forward the novel concept of 'citational media' as a means of approaching the entanglements of past and present, nostalgia and techno-progress, that are evident in so much of contemporary visual culture. We define citational media inclusively as encompassing the many visual and digital artworks, performances, and screen media works that reference, appropriate, or reframe archival material in critical representations of their historical moment. We are particularly interested in tracing this citational practice across screen works exhibited outside the space of the cinema auditorium, and produced around the world. Analysing key examples of such media, the authors writing in this volume claim that citational practices in recent visual cultures highlight the historical and present-day issues that are most urgent for thinking through current developments in culture, global politics, media, and technology. Further, we claim that the reflective and political examples of citation analysed here can be viewed collectively as belonging to a 'counter-archival' visual culture, in which artists around the world are challenging existing ways of archiving and narrating the past and present, and so developing new images for the political, aesthetic, and mediatic realities of the future.

This project began at a screen media and theory workshop at University College London and King's College London in summer 2019, focused on topics of uncertainty and turbulence in visual cultures characterised by practices of re-use and citation. The workshop took place at a time when relations between media and truth had been strained by their abuse at the hands of Donald Trump, whose spokesman Sean Spicer sought to use questionable photographic evidence to assert that crowds at his inauguration in 2017 were much larger than those at Barack Obama's eight years earlier, just one of many distortions of the truth by Trump using visual and social media. Now, discussions around media, representation, and politics are arguably even more pressing. Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 involved banning news media inside Russia that described this invasion and war as such, all the while carrying out deadly strikes that seemed designed to feed international news cycles. The use and re-use of images in contemporary media, especially via networked technology, requires urgent analysis in our era of global turmoil, and amidst the technological developments we are seeing at this time.

In the field of contemporary technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI) using Natural Language Processing (NLP) has developed rapidly and seems likely to grow in use and capacity. These automated technologies learn by mimicking human communication patterns, including speech and images drawn from the Internet. AI programmes such as text-generator ChatGPT and image-generator DALL.E are therefore themselves citational media. They learn from big data archives to generate language and visual content, which at its best is indistinguishable from content originating with human authors, so bringing to the fore a whole range of new potentials and also new risks for future communicative cultures.

Given such a backdrop, in which media and technology are being used to undermine as well as advance cultures of communication, this volume turns towards visual works which address this ambivalent citational landscape through critical reflection and aesthetic experimentation. The central claim of this book is that there is a trend towards citation, re-use, and counter-archiving across contemporary popular and experimental visual cultures, and that this referencing gives rise to political reflections that tell us much about the tendencies and transitions animating the contemporary world. The book's chapters locate some of the citational media practices that best succeed in questioning the dominant narratives, perspectives, and governing logics of this era, which are shaping global affairs and networked communication. The case studies discussed here are diverse in terms of media, and include gallery installations and artists' film, mixed-media theatre spaces, popular uses of the moving image on the Internet, and radical television productions, which reference and re-use other media, images, tropes, or footage in their attempts to reframe existing ideas. These case studies are also drawn from heterogeneous geographical contexts ranging from Germany to South Africa and Puerto Rico. Most of the visual works examined date from the last ten to twenty years, though earlier works, such as those by Harun Farocki in Chapter 1, are included as they have been neglected by scholarship so far, and have enduring relevance to the digital present.

The citational media discussed across the volume are challenging and complex, as they question regulatory norms and existing organisations of power, while also valuing archives of historical truth. These works also frequently test the capacities of mainstream visual forms and formats as they seek to expand the limits of what can be seen and known in contemporary mediatic cultures. In the case studies examined, citation sometimes emerges as a practice of acknowledging forgotten, denied, or only partially perceived realities by re-presenting found material. This recuperative trend in media re-use is characterised by the attention the visual artists in question pay to neglected archives, as well as their propensity to cite and reframe traditional and recognised archival content, placing it in dialogue with other, often unrecognised material. When successful, these citational modes of re-use can counteract past erasures, weave new connections, and bring about the visibility that is necessary for repair and recovery. Citational media can also raise the ethical and technical questions necessary for designing and regulating future regimes of knowledge and power in an age of advanced technological progress.

By proposing the concept of 'citational media', we build on existing cultural and critical theories of citation, as well as past work in media and visual studies centred on media re-use and referencing, along with canonical and more recent scholarship on the concept of the archive. Accordingly, this Introduction situates the volume's key contributions to these fields, before offering an overview of the different approaches to media citation taken in the subsequent chapters. It must be noted that, as our opening examples above make clear, there is nothing inherently progressive about media citation, and we return to the ambivalence and complexity of citation in different ways across the following pages. Yet the artworks we foreground in the volume are united by their shared tendency to open onto the political in ways that tell a more generative, reflective, even hopeful story about the possible uses of citation.

Citational Subjects

The verb 'to cite' stems from the Latin *citare*, which designates an act of calling forth, of summoning, and of urging. *Citare* also carries the implication of movement and inspiration: to cite is to 'put in sudden motion', to 'rouse', to 'excite'. Citation is thus a kinaesthetic transitive, rooted in evoking and reframing, analysing and translating, critiquing and transforming. It implies calling forth, but also looking backwards, and around, in order to imagine new pathways and connections. Citation has strong associations with scholarly writing conventions, and we therefore commence by surveying recent work on citation in this context. And yet, as we will then show, citation is integral to embodied and subjective existence more broadly too, as well as being a longstanding audio-visual technique.

In scholarly writing, we cite authors who have come before or co-exist with us, engaging with ideas that we now carry forward, so entering into dialogues across time and space. We marshal the insights of others to offer context, aid understanding, delineate our observations and positions, and to trace and articulate continuities and shifts in meaning. At the same time, scholarly citation is a practice that invariably entails selection. As such, academic research is animated by a series of decisions — whether stated or unstated, conscious or unconscious — about which existing narratives, voices, and ideas are to be allotted substantial space, and which authors and texts will be mentioned briefly or even omitted. These citational selections have political implications, since citations can sustain or challenge existing conditions in scholarship in the way they consolidate or upset the prevailing dynamics of visibility and invisibility, or of audibility and inaudibility, animating a given field — the prevailing 'distribution of the sensible', as Jacques Rancière would put it.[1]

Citational selections have great material significance because decisions about which ideas, voices, and perspectives to foreground shape understandings of the world and the beings — human and more-than-human — that inhabit it. Yet dominant scholarly conventions do not allow the relationality and the material and textual encounters shaping reflection and knowledge production to be fully registered via citation. Donna Haraway points to one example of this problem when

reflecting that her work as a teacher means 'in daily life' she often reads 'those with no public names — yet — much more carefully': those of her students. She asserts that:

> Reading and [...] citation practices have somehow to be brought into synch. Reading Mary, Astrid, Gillian, Eva, Adam, Jake, Heather, Natasha, and many more — this tracks my line of flight better than a genealogy. These are the names of companion species all asking, 'What is to be done?'.[2]

Decolonial scholarship and activism have done important work to underline the power dynamics shaping citational hierarchies in scholarly writing and course syllabi. Such problematic hierarchies are bound up with the inequities shaping the history of the modern university. The Cite Black Women Collective, for example, underlines the ongoing individualism, racism, and sexism that characterise scholarly citation practices. In 'Cite Black Women: A Critical Praxis (A Statement)', authors Christen A. Smith, Erica L. Williams, Imani A. Wadud, Whitney N. L. Pirtle, and the rest of The Cite Black Women Collective, write:

> The academy has traditionally used authorship to create hyper-individualistic hierarchies of knowledge that can be monetised and catalogued according to capitalist and neoliberal measurements. This traditional system — built on the logics of heteropatriarchal white supremacy — inherently erases the invisible labour of those who help to build the genealogies of thought that contribute to all knowledge. Within this rubric, Black women have been systematically unnamed.[3]

As the above quotation suggests, a key concern of the Statement is the lack of acknowledgement and even the plagiarising of Black women's ideas, a theft the authors associate with the long history of stealing from Black women that has been occurring 'at least since the advent of slavery in the Americas'. Smith and others also draw a connection between the exploitation of Black women's bodies and the 'misuse' of Black women's intellectual labour, so making visible a connection between corporeality and citation. Citation, then, can be an exclusionary, even violent force which names certain authors and 'systematically unname[s]' others in ways that sustain existing social and political inequalities, with significant and material effects.[4]

Yet, as the work of the Cite Black Women Collective demonstrates, scholarly citation can also be placed in the service of progressive politics. Smith and her co-authors define the Collective as '*a Black feminist intellectual project, praxis, and global movement to decolonize the practice of citation by redressing the epistemic erasure of Black women from the literal and figurative bibliographies of the world*'. They assert that 'citation as a practice allows us to engage with the voices that are often silenced or left behind', and specify that, through citation, 'the Cite Black Women movement is one that is both rooted in community and seeks to produce community'.[5] Relevant to the concerns of this volume, contemporary technologies have played an important role in the Cite Black Women Collective's activism around citation and their conception of community. Despite the many problems associated with platformed culture, including its encoded structures of racism and sexism, the

work of this Collective shows that social media platforms, and media such as podcasts, offer possibilities for connection and community through the promotion of neglected texts and the sharing of citations.[6] Such a view of citation, as a means of challenging erasure and supporting community, finds echoes in other theoretical texts. Sara Ahmed, for example, evokes a similar understanding of citation in *Living a Feminist Life* (2017) when she writes that 'citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow'.[7] Citation can thus open up new orientations and viewpoints, all the while acknowledging that these are only possible through collective endeavour, and not through the hyper-individualistic work of sovereign, solo creators or authors.

Beyond questions of scholarly practice, citation is also a core process in the formation of subjectivity, as the result of the constant re-use and re-iteration of social norms. Judith Butler has convincingly made this argument in their influential work on gender, according to which gendered subjects only come into being through 'citationality, the acquisition of being through the citing of power', a procedure of citing norms that can work either to reinstate or to challenge them. Queerness figures in Butler's gender theory as a 'citational politics', one that responds to existing norms by recasting previously unacceptable sexual acts and identities as forms of subversive agency.[8] Beyond their work on gender, Butler has also argued that all aspects of subjectivity are the result of a reproduction of narrative norms, which define the viability of life. Crucially, stating and describing these norms can also destabilise them, and doing so constitutes a progressive citational practice. For instance, it is possible to draw attention to laws and regulations that undermine themselves by naming precisely that which they are forbidding or censoring, in this way dethroning the seemingly all-powerful 'Sovereign Performatives' that define what can be said and known without admitting to the exclusions they bring with them.[9] Citation emerges in Butler's theory as crucial to the norms that define which bodies are permitted to materialise socially and which are violently disavowed. Yet it also carries a promise to transform the regulatory norms governing patterns of inclusion and exclusion. The forms of embodied citation that Butler analyses are central to questions of liveability and inclusion.

Moreover, the citationality that Butler views as foundational to subjectivity interacts inevitably with technology, given how the human is forged and reshaped in immanent relation to technics of different sorts. This is evoked, for example, through Bernard Stiegler's concept of 'referential individuation', as developed in his philosophical book on attention, education, and technics, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations* (2008). As the notion of the 'referential' may imply, for Stiegler 'individuations' (which he understands as becomings that are never terminated) are animated by reflexive relationships between individuals and the social collective that are grounded in 'shared knowledge'.[10] Individuation, in this way, 'connects and articulates the *synchronicity* forming the *we* with the *diachronicity* creating the *I*,' and so also nurtures a feeling of the communal, of 'unity'.[11] In *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, Stiegler shows how referential individuation is nurtured

(or undercut) by different technologies as they are employed by institutions, such as schools, or industries. On the one hand, he evokes how technologies can function as rich repositories where 'transindividual' collective memory is preserved and transmitted across generations. This kind of memory (which Stiegler calls 'tertiary retention') represents an important archive and offers the material 'ground' for ongoing referential individuations.[12] On the other hand, Stiegler contends that technologies employed by the cultural industries, for example, can cut individuals off from collective knowledge and experience and obscure the intergenerational relationships underpinning such knowledge.[13] The cultural industries instead reroute 'referential individuation' towards identifications with 'merchandise and brand names', Stiegler reflects, to the effect that individuation really becomes 'disindividuation', while intergenerational relationships and structures of attention and care are weakened.[14] With Butler's and Stiegler's theories in mind, we can say that, beyond the page and beyond scholarly practice, we are all *citational subjects*. All subjects are formed through our ongoing referential relationship to the discursive, technical, and material contexts in which we are immanently enmeshed. No wonder, then, that the visual cultures emerging from these contexts are densely citational too.

Citational Practice in Contemporary Visual Cultures

Citation is an important trend in contemporary visual cultures, permitting screen artists and multi-media practitioners to address global and political, human and technological challenges. This trend can be seen across works made for the cinema and beyond. One prominent example of citational screen culture is Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica's 1992 film *Videogramme einer Revolution*. This volume's cover image is a citation of a citation from that film, as seen in Farocki's 1995 work *Schnittstelle/ Interface*. *Videogramme* pieces together archives of amateur videography and footage from Romanian state television, whose station was occupied by protestors during the Christmas revolution of December 1989. Farocki's multiple citations of this material seek to demonstrate the particular, activist role played by the video camera in recording the fall of Ceausescu and the other revolutions preceding the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the process, his media-archaeological projects show more broadly how specific media forms intervene significantly in shaping the historical events they record and witness.

Another key example is Alfonso Cuarón's feature film *Children of Men* (2006). Based on P. D. James's 1992 novel about a rapidly depopulating planet, the film is strikingly intertextual and intermedial, remixing twentieth-century anti-war song, band iconography (Pink Floyd's inflatable pig), and dystopian literature with canonical artworks, including Michelangelo's *David* and *La Pietà* and Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*. Cuarón's film also departs from the novel's era as it cites key images and events linked to the 'war on terror', including the harrowing images of torture by the US military, leaked from Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Cuarón mobilises these citations for an incisive critique of capitalist inequity and global

warfare in the twenty-first century. Noting Cuarón's own description of his filmic approach as one of 'referencing' rather than 'creating', Samuel Amago has written evocatively about the importance of such a citational strategy, asserting that 'creative appropriation and recontextualization of elements taken from a variety of media and cultural contexts embody Cuarón's visual style, which mobilises the aesthetic in the service of the political'.[15] Several of Cuarón's citations emerge in the background or on the edges of the filmic frame, leading Amago to highlight a structuring 'tension between the background and foreground' as key to the film's 'sociopolitical critique', and to note the significance of the camera in registering 'images and happenings' that the human protagonists may not 'notice'.[16]

Another persuasive example of the political capacity of referencing is found in *Pineland/Hollywood* (2021), a citational gallery-film by civil rights lawyer and documentary artist Debi Cornwall. Cornwall cut together around five hundred fair-use clips from Hollywood cinema, and overlaid them with audio recordings of a trial investigating a shooting by police of two US military personnel taking part in undercover training. The citation of the footage from Hollywood films enables Cornwall to show the centrality of images of guns, cars, and violence to the creation of classic film narratives. Unsure of the nature of the audio voiceover they are hearing until the end of the film, viewers emerge from this archival montage as if from a training session on how visual culture interacts with events in the real world, which archive and, at the same time, glamorise violence.

Recent screen works also mobilise practices of citation in order to question which voices and images are recognised, advancing counter-cultural histories. This approach is significant to queer filmmaker Desiree Akhavan's debut film *Appropriate Behavior* (2014), and Clara Bradbury-Rance has highlighted the film's 'hypercitational' qualities, which explore the shortcomings of mainstream feminism, as well as the potential for solidarity seen in its history to date.[17] The film cites feminist history while drawing attention to the hierarchies of citation in this movement, hierarchies that have defined which voices are heard and which images of feminism are visible into the present day. Such a questioning of citational hierarchies is evident too in the international project *Progress 1968* (2019), a twenty-three-minute-long video installation by Franco-Rwandese writer and visual artist Ada Cotton, African Street Style London founder Etienne Joseph, and Decolonising the Archive co-founder Jeffrey Lennon, which draws on stills, moving-image footage, and audio archives to foreground African diasporic perspectives on the events of 1968 around the world.

Found material is re-used for this urgent project of uncovering suppressed histories in many other contemporary examples of citational media, too. Hope Strickland's installation *I'll Be Back* (2022) cites 16 mm archival video in a digital format, showing photographs and footage from archives and museums whose holdings attest to colonial violence. *The Subterranean Imprint Archive* (South Africa and Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2021), a multi-media installation and collage film by art research collective Lo-Def Film Factory, is also focused on colonial atrocities. Its topic is the historical sourcing of uranium, used to develop

the first atomic bombs, in the Shinkolobwe mine in the then Belgian Congo, now Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The history of this atomic material raises questions, so the collective argues, about how to evaluate the worth of technological objects given their extraction history and violent use. In order to examine this contested history of mineral extraction for use in nuclear weapons, the collective turned to archives including first-hand testimonials, lectures, found audio, and footage of a stage production of the Japanese graphic novel and film *Akira* (Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988) in the DRC. This richly archival project on the history of nuclear technology is another vital example of how citational media aim to make visible the violent extractivism hidden in the history of contemporary technologies, including those that can be used in the most destructive kinds of warfare.

It would be possible for us to mention many more examples. The above, however, illustrate how citation in recent visual culture has taken diverse forms and generated many critical reflections and meanings. It encompasses artistic techniques such as intertextuality and intermediality, wherein past artworks and their tropes are referenced and, often, refashioned. Citation also takes the form of artistic references to technologies and to historical and social documents, events, places, monuments, and rhetorical and ideological trends. Citation may be brief — deployed as allusion or discreet homage — or extended. It may be glimpsed on the edge or in the background of a given frame, or it may take centre stage. While expected stylistic modes of acknowledgement accompany scholarly citation practices, citation in screen media may be explicitly attributed to a source or appropriated without reference, in the latter case indicating a possible connection spectators may or may not register.

It is important to emphasise, however, that citation in media is not always a progressive strategy, and it can have uncertain political effects. Just as communities of citation in scholarly settings can be problematic and exclusionary, media practices that archive and appropriate existing content can be conservative and even reactionary. Some of the most visible citational media today are the memes, Easter eggs, and TikTok parodies that are consumed and circulate on social media. These have been central to the formation of online communities and networks, which are often defined by the difference between those who understand what is being cited and those who do not. At their worst, these kinds of citational media might be not only conservative, but conformist, producing silos of those like-minded people who are able to get the joke. Other examples such as propaganda, fake news, the spread of misinformation online, mentioned at the start of this Introduction, often involve a referencing of images and texts that promotes divisive, conservative, or violent messages, as well as deliberately spreading confusion and uncertainty. Citation is therefore ambivalent by its very nature and offers possibilities of conservation as much as critique, and of obfuscation and division as much as connection.

However, the history of citation in visual culture has in many cases been animated by commitment to progressive political critique. Citation as strategy of progressive image re-use, for instance, spans the found-footage documentary; the legacy of Situationist *détournement*; the post-productive 'remixing' that Nicolas Bourriaud identified as key in artworks of the 1990s; as well as some more recent examples of 'countergaming', where art borrows and re-uses ludic aesthetics for critical

purposes.[18] In these contexts, citation is employed for political reasons, including anti-capitalist protest and the promotion of new and previously denied visibilities. This is not to say such strategies have always been effective. Rancière, for instance, notes that one problem with some examples of anti-capitalist *détournement* is that in their rerouting of iconography they tell spectators things they already know.[19] For Rancière, for art to be political it must intervene in the 'distribution of the sensible' and so create 'new configurations between the visible and the invisible, and between the audible and the inaudible, new distributions of space and time'.[20] And indeed, many examples of citational media do combine re-use of images and texts with a redistribution of the sensible, in a manner that is resonant with Rancière's understanding of political art as injecting a specific form of disagreement (or 'dissensus') into the existing fabric of sensible life.[21] Moreover, as T. J. Demos reflects, the political capacity of appropriative art was made more ambivalent with 'the shift from a manufacturing economy' to 'current-day immaterial labour', for in this latter context artistic repurposing of popular imagery, for instance, can be resonant with new forms of 'creative consumerism'.[22] Yet Demos argues, and we agree, that the 'deconstructive criticality' and 'affirmative creativity' emerging through artistic re-use can persist even in this ambivalent terrain.[23]

Some of the chapters in this volume flag different instances of ambivalence and uncertainty around citation in screen media. These contributions show us that the relationship between citation and the political is by no means straightforward. However, working through these complexities, many of the authors writing in this book are ultimately invested in the progressive possibilities of citation across different cultural and thematic contexts. The volume's chapters explore the rich continuities, shifts, and connections woven through the diverse range and styles of referencing that accumulate in contemporary visual culture. On the one hand, the following chapters chart how citation is a practice through which tropes and stories can be deconstructed, upturned, or otherwise challenged; for instance, in cases where cited tropes such as Internet interfaces and television news editing practices are defamiliarised or given provocative contextual links. On the other hand, the contributors to this volume also explore citation's relationship to the building of alternative networks of thought, visuality, audibility, and communication to promote inclusion.

The analyses in this book show how citational screen practices have tended to acknowledge their indebtedness to critical cultural practices of the past, at the same time as they deploy citation to highlight how some media can obscure their ideological make-up and so prevent genuinely new or critical thinking. Another unifying factor in citational works of visual culture is that, while addressing contemporary political and global topics, they are also self-reflexive about how art and media are made, often interrogating the histories and the effects of their own formats. This volume's central concept of 'citational media' captures this constitutive referentiality that inheres across recent screen works. The political stakes of this referentiality, meanwhile, are made clear through the engagement in the artworks considered here with a variety of archives.

Citation, Archive Theory, and Counter-Archives

This book demonstrates how citational practices of re-use and referencing in contemporary visual cultures are inextricably linked to concepts of archiving and 'the archive' present in cultural theory in the mid- to late twentieth century. Citation involves repetition and conserving the past, and yet it also implies the production of novelty and difference, altering the cited material through the process of re-use. All of the visual artworks and media we analyse in this book appropriate the sources they cite in a manner we define here as 'counter-archival', in that they displace or distort, reframe or *détourne* found tropes or archival material, to politically progressive and art-historically critical effect.

In critical and cultural theory, archives are not calm and dusty places where records are simply stored, neutrally preserving information that all can agree represents one sole, inarguable version of the past. Archives are repositories of information that store knowledge from the past, but they always have some principle or system by which that knowledge is organised. The kinds of archives that exist range from the institutional to the privately collated; from those which can be publicly consulted to those that are secret and closed to public scrutiny; and the rules of access also determine how archives have effects in producing, disseminating, or withholding and erasing knowledge about the past. Accordingly, continental theorists of the late twentieth century examined the ways in which archives can be destructive as well as preservative institutions, dominant in their control of knowledge and of the versions of the past that are acceptable.

Archives are a focus of Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* (*L'Archéologie du savoir*, 1969), in which he analysed the role of these institutions as laying down 'the law of what can be said'.[24] For Foucault, an archive is not only a site for the preservation of information about the past: it also holds the conditions of possibility of what can be known in the present moment. Registration of a fact or a person in the archive is 'not a condition of validity for statements, but a condition of reality'.[25] While organising knowledge about the world, an archive first permits such knowledge to exist. This archive in Foucault's account is thus a technology of sovereign power, setting the limits of what can be known, and what (and who) can be recognised as existing and worth remembering in a given society.

Yet there is potential to challenge this sovereign, Foucaultian archive built into its very structure. Alongside its authoritarian function in organising and so controlling knowledge, Foucault identifies a degree of dynamism in the constitution of archives that can allow for contestation: 'Nor is the archive that which collects the dust of statements that have become inert once more; it is the general system of the formation and transformation of statements'.[26] This notion, that statements about what exists and is known are not only formed but also transformed within the archive, indicates a dynamic textual, and citational, potential inhering in even the most authoritative and seemingly inarguable archiving institutions. For Foucault, the archive is a fundamentally political text, always subject to power struggle over the nature of truth by various authors and other stakeholders. Such struggles signify that the archive's contents can never be considered final, and their content does not

gather dust, but rather exists in a lively political state, allowing space for counter-archival argumentation and re-evaluation.

As Jacques Derrida argued in his seminal text *Archive Fever* (*Mal d'archive*, 1995), 'effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive'.[27] Like Foucault, Derrida recognised the sovereign power of archives, as an origin 'from which *order* is given', so that their operations 'of unification, of identification, of classification' do not merely organise but shape the information that they process. Derrida further argued that the information stored within an archive is often construed as a totality, one organised with the goal of 'gathering together [...] to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration'.[28] In this account, the shape an archive traditionally takes is one guided by an ideal of integrity, wholeness undisturbed by separation or difference.

Yet the content of this Derridean archive's orderly corpus does not remain fixed; instead, an 'aggression and destruction drive' threatens its integrity. The *mal* that afflicts the archival assemblage Derrida analyses is construed in his lecture as a Freudian 'repetition compulsion', akin to the death drive, whereby the archive feverishly labours to secure its contents through processes of 'reproduction' and 'reimpression', attempts at totality that generate an unintended instability. Derrida describes this instability as 'anarchic, anarchontic', and writes that it can even work towards destroying archives completely ('archiviolithic'), revealing the risks that come along with traditional archives' organising principles.[29]

The works of visual culture studied here offer counter-archival approaches to the storage and reproduction of knowledge in contemporary cultures and in many different archives. The following chapters show how existing archives of historical material, tropes, artworks, and information can be subjected to counter-archival citation. They explore media and texts which go against the authority of colonial, heteropatriarchal, and corporate archives, from the mid-twentieth century to the present day. Counter-archives as defined in this book counter the archontic authority of archives which may claim to store information neutrally, but which actually select, emphasise, and so also make some content disappear, often through frameworks organised around class, race, gender, and other exclusions. At times, these citational counter-archives subject the content of existing archives to critique through re-use and appropriation. At others, they bring into vision neglected archives such as writing and art by women and People of Colour, archives that attest to the violence and extreme wealth accumulated through colonialism, and archives giving expression to non-normative identities, bodies, and communities.

In pursuing the counter-archival qualities of the works analysed in this book, we are indebted to Paula Amad's *Counter-Archive* (2010) and Katherine Groo's *Bad Film Histories* (2019). Amad's analysis moves between cinema and wider visual cultures as it offers a wide-ranging exploration of the ideas of preceding theorists, including Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and Henri Bergson, on the authority of archives and the potential to challenge them. While Amad locates those elements of contingency and contestation in a counter-archive, Groo describes them in *Bad*

Film Histories as already essential to the dynamics of audio-visual archives, echoing the dynamism and instability that Foucault and Derrida argued inhere in all archival institutions. We also build here on the work on an-archives done by So Mayer in *A Nazi Word for a Nazi Thing* (2020) and Michael Goddard in *Guerrilla Networks* (2018); both of these writers analyse media and artworks that refuse archival conformity and so show up archives as containing their own latent disruption and potential for change. We build on these approaches with awareness, too, of Jaimie Baron's insights into the ambivalence of citational media, as explored in *The Archive Effect* (2013) and *Reuse, Misuse, Abuse* (2020), which importantly pay heed to the limits of appropriating found and archival material for new mediatic interventions.

Technological Ambivalences

One of the unifying concerns of the above approaches to archives and counter-archives, and one shared by many of the authors in this present book, is technology. The period from the 1970s to the present has witnessed the rapid development of communication technologies and the rise of a new media landscape. Indeed, a reconfiguration of the world has occurred with the spread of networked computing, and a related expansion in machine cognition and Artificial Intelligence (AI) has followed. The visual cultures of this era and the experiences, politics, and topics of cultural production they address cannot be thought without a serious engagement with this sociotechnical landscape. Therefore, technology emerges repeatedly in this book as a central concern of citational media, the ways in which they are made, the sociopolitical themes they address and the archives of material they appropriate. We understand technology here to be just as ambivalent in its possible effects as citation. Such ambivalence is captured well by Stiegler when he describes technics pharmacologically, as having the potential to be both 'poison' and 'remedy'/ 'cure'.[30]

Technologies, old and new, have always been intimately involved with practices of archiving. Foundational theorists of the archive, though, have sometimes sounded notes of caution about the possible impact of technology on archival practices and ethics. Orit Halpern identifies Derrida's concern with technology's potential to cause an 'automation of recording to the point of death', suggesting that technological processes of archiving would reinforce the death-drive Derrida found in traditional archives.[31] Contemporary digital technologies have also expanded the scale and scope of the concept of the archive dramatically, given the sheer quantity of material they produce, circulate, and store. Digital technologies have created new possibilities for personal and commercial archiving, from the creation and curation of social media profiles to the collection of large swathes of data by powerful Internet companies. Such big data archives, facilitated by digital computing, are crucial to the running of contemporary governments and economies. Big data archives, for instance, are 'regularly touted as the solution to economic, social, political, and ecological problems'.[32] Yet these archives bring with them the instability and risks of 'archiviolithic' destruction discussed in Derrida's theory of the archive, a premise taken forward by the *Uncertain Archives* project.[33]

Indeed, digital archives introduce new trends and challenges in the politics of sensibility (especially visibility and audibility) that we have tracked across this Introduction. The hierarchies of sensibility produced through Internet searches, for example, represent a particularly worrying organising feature of digital archives, and one that is shaped by the ongoing human biases and ideologies encoded in algorithms, as explored by Safiya Noble in her influential *Algorithms of Oppression* (2018). Notions of visibility and invisibility also gain new meaning given that contemporary technical processes often surpass human perceptual and cognitive registers and are thus only partially accessible to us.[34] This problem of accessibility is exacerbated when the archives that digital technologies produce are held in the invisible, though not immaterial, forms of data and of discarded hardware.[35] Moreover, despite earlier promises of freedom through the hoped-for democratisation of information, communication technology can also trap users in a sensory landscape comprised of unfree, undemocratic phenomena such as dataveillance, the easy spread of fake news, and abuses linked to the for-profit AI industry that Timnit Gebru describes as a new 'gold rush'.[36] These examples indicate a continuation of exploitation and inequality into a future shared with cognising machines.

And yet today's big data archives have also furnished contemporary artists with a vast amount of possible audio-visual material to cite and reframe in their political and counter-archival reflections on the sociotechnical present. In the chapters that follow, the contributors reflect on varying artistic and popular citational responses to this context of rapid and ambivalent technological change. These take in citations of, or citations that proceed through, technologies of different kinds in contemporary visual culture, from artistic technologies and artefacts, technologies employed in the entertainment industry, through to citations of content taken from the Internet and platformed culture, and references to different forms of (human and technical) cognition. Analysing these audiovisual works that engage with technology in citational fashion, the chapters shed light on the essential role played by technologies in our current world, and their intimate links with contemporary political and aesthetic movements.

Chapter Summaries

The case studies of counter-archival citation foregrounded in the book's chapters span a wide range of media forms and technological contexts. Thanks to this variety, the chapters are able collectively to unspool perceived divisions between professional art and 'amateur' engagements with media and technology, and between so-called 'high art' and 'popular culture'. Additionally, the book is arranged to provide insight into how citational practices have changed in the light of technological developments, while not implying a reductive teleology. Together, the volume's chapters thus analyse practices of counter-archival citation in a manner that elucidates how citation can be a critical or even resistant practice, at once carving out new and uncertain pathways in an information-saturated world and

defying the exploitative visions and unequal narratives that continue to operate in it, despite all the technological 'progress' we see around us. The chapters move between examples of citational media from the 1970s to the present day, in a variety of visual texts and objects, and they read these examples in terms provided by a range of cultural and critical theories, spanning from canonical work on archives and media archaeology, to heterogeneous accounts of the political, to more recent scholarship concerned with new media and digital culture. Through these references to both longstanding and new theoretical ideas, they probe scholarly citation's multivalent capacity for continuity and carrying forwards as well as for reframing and forging new connections.

One of the most influential visual cultures outside the cinema, and one that enjoyed particular dominance in the late twentieth century, is television. Accordingly, in Chapter 1, 'Archives of the Future Past: Harun Farocki's Critique of Television in *The Trouble with Images* (1973)', Laura Lux writes on the counter-archival critique of television as mass medium advanced by the essay-filmmaker and documentarist Harun Farocki in his theoretical text *What Ought to be Done* (1975) and his films made for the German television channel WDR: *The Trouble with Images* (1973), *Moderators* (1974), and *The Struggle with Images* (1974). Analysing material which resurfaced through the posthumous work of the Harun Farocki Institut, Lux discusses how Farocki's television works critiqued the use of images and editing practices of television news features to shed light on television as a media archive and urgently assess its impact on ways of looking. She considers Farocki's television critique and imagined counter-archive in terms of the 'technical structures' of archiving discussed in Derrida's seminal text, *Archive Fever*, and of the temporalities of media and image practices as handled in theoretical work by Walter Benjamin and in post-1968 Marxist thought. Taking these perspectives, Lux discovers in Farocki's television *œuvre* a counter-archival resistance to the violence and stagnation of late twentieth-century television's tendencies towards systematisation, categorisation, and thoughtless archiving, tendencies that parallel the stockpiling of images in contemporary data archives. Lux's chapter thus finds in Farocki's television critique and image practice the potential for an archive of the 'future past', moreover it is one that can answer some of the questions arising from our digital predicament today.

The concern with the bridge between television and contemporary digital culture continues in Chapter 2, 'Between Citational Genealogy and the Counter-Archival Uncanny: Adam Curtis and the Democratisation of the Archive'. Emily Baker considers the contemporary work of counter-archiving carried out by Adam Curtis's series *Can't Get You Out of My Head* (2021) in which he adopts a Foucaultian genealogical methodology, rewriting narratives of the recent past to shed light on the most worrying aspects of our present reality. Baker finds in Curtis's six-part series for the BBC a valuable attempt at the critical examination of mechanisms of punitive, disciplinary, and psycho-power operating across the globe, examining the diverse personages and historically contingent events that filter down into what Curtis calls the 'sea of now'. The chapter makes reference to Achille Mbembe's and

Byung-Chul Han's developments of Foucault's work in the forms of 'necropower' and 'digital psychopolitics', and in relation to the competing impulses within archives themselves that Derrida explored in *Archive Fever*. At stake is the viewer's role in making their own connections between images, sound, and narrative, ultimately determining their own meaning and course of action. This is significant given that Curtis does not provide programmatic solutions to the world's problems denounced in the films such as climate change, inequality, crime, and racism, but instead reminds us that it is in our power to imagine the world differently. Baker additionally considers the significance of the streaming context through which Curtis's work is made available to the viewing public, and how this screening format impacts upon the spectatorial experience.

The following three chapters in the volume centre on histories of colonial violence, and the decolonial counter-archival responses to this violence that proceed through media including theatre, artists' film, and contemporary music videos. In Chapter 3, 'Excavation and *Entstellung*: (Media-) Archaeological Activity and Postcolonial Memory Work in William Kentridge's *Wozzeck* and *The Head & the Load*', Lawrence Alexander draws on approaches from the fields of media archaeology and critical race theory in order to read stage productions by William Kentridge. He considers the value of *Entstellung* (Freud's conception of 'distortion' but also 'dis-placement') for the artist's critical, counter-archival performance practice. His chapter thus applies a symptomatic reading to the postcolonial memory work carried out in Kentridge's production of Alban Berg's opera *Wozzeck* (2020) and his work staged in the Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern, *The Head & the Load* (2018), which conveys the experiences of African carriers during the First World War. Analysing the use of the cinematographic apparatus in both of these productions to distort a sense of linear, temporal continuity, and to explore a shadow archive of 'flickering images', Alexander develops a media-archaeological reading of the violent distortions that structure Western narratives of history, causality, and memory, as well as dominant cultures of representation and the image now considered to be in crisis. By foregrounding the effects of simultaneity, displaced bodies and objects, and temporal dislocation in these pieces, Alexander argues that reading for traces of *Entstellung* in these productions is instructive for uncovering the historical processes that have deformed landscapes and bodies, both African and European, through industrial warfare and colonialism into the early twentieth century. The chapter thus draws out Kentridge's counter-archival practice as one essential for narrating alternative, multiple, and apparently 'forgotten' histories.

In Chapter 4, 'Critique, Repair and Care: Rebuilding the Black and Decolonial Archive with Theaster Gates and Kader Attia', Jenny Chamarette turns to decolonial practices in gallery works by contemporary artists Theaster Gates and Kader Attia. Presenting research that spans the period immediately prior to the global pandemic and the upheavals in cultural attitudes to race that happened almost concurrently, the chapter itself archives a geopolitical upheaval and social rupture in relation to questions of race. Chamarette's analysis of Gates's and Attia's sculptural and expanded moving-image installations draws on a rich (counter-)

archive of decolonial museologies, adapting a vital tradition of Black, postcolonial, and decolonial critique from before and after the Black Lives Matter movement, in addition to concepts from psychoanalysis, restorative justice, and conciliation. In Gates's *Amalgam* (exhibited at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris and at Tate Liverpool, 2019–20) and Attia's *Museum of Emotion* (exhibited at the Hayward Gallery, London, 2019), Chamarette identifies a set of 'truth constellations' that contest White European and colonial ways of seeing Black archives. The chapter considers how Gates's and Attia's screen-based practices offer a reparative refounding of Black and decolonial archives, in such a way that omissions in the record become polymorphous sites of speculative and even healing exploration. This counter-archival abundance is revealed through resistant combinations: alchemical amalgamation for Gates, and the *cicatrice* [scar] for Attia. Their deep archival and epistemological enquiry pays urgent attention to processes of repair. Chamarette's reading questions who should carry the overweening burden of healing labour and of archival rebuilding. Posing these questions via discussions of care from feminist archival practice and recent global majority writing on radical care, Chamarette develops a non-extractive theoretical approach that amplifies calls to care from contemporary Black and decolonial artists.

Chapter 5 continues this critique of coloniality, while opening onto the medium of the music video. In 'Counter-Archiving Coloniality in the Americas: Rita Indiana and others' *After School*', R. Sánchez-Rivera and Natasha Tanna adopt an innovative dialogic approach fitting for understanding Dominican writer and singer-songwriter Rita Indiana's 'After School', a hybrid performance and music video filmed in a former state school in Puerto Rico in August 2020 and directed by her partner, Noelia Quintero Herencia. Sánchez-Rivera and Tanna analyse the citational elements of this genre-disrupting thirteen-minute-long video, as it incorporates spoken-word and voiceover passages, thermal imagery footage of Hurricane María, and monochrome negative film footage of musicians in the Dominican Republic. Their reading foregrounds Indiana's concerns with environmental racism, state violence, coloniality, technology, and the interconnectedness of political struggles across the Americas, and it draws on work by critics of racialisation and dehumanisation in colonial archival practices including Saidiya Hartman, Lisa Lowe, and Alexander Weheliye. Analysing the video as a counter-archive, Sánchez-Rivera and Tanna demonstrate how Indiana's performance contests racialising assemblages both formally and thematically through its citational critique of continued colonial practices. Tanna argues in her section of the chapter that the video's visual technologies of projection, blackouts, monochrome negative film effects, and thermal imaging constitute counter-archival practices in that they make present what remains absent (the virtual *par excellence*) in such narratives, be that people or violent histories. Sánchez-Rivera then offers a counter-argument, focusing on what might be obscured unintentionally in this shift towards 'opacity', where opacity is a mixing reminiscent of the racial ideology of *mestizaje*. Reflecting Indiana and Herencia's disruption of the genre of music video, this chapter seeks to disrupt academic writing conventions by bringing

together co-written segments, individual contributions, and a transcript of part of the authors' discussions. They also pay attention to how their perspectives are changed by each other's insights, but not forced to cohere. In this way this chapter enacts its own counter-archival mode that tends towards messy connectedness without the potentially homogenising thrust of *mestizo* logics.

The subsequent chapters in the collection turn to the context of networked technology and contemporary big data archives, and probe the different ways artists and popular performers have employed citation in response to this vast archiving of contemporary life. This inquiry begins with Chapter 6, 'The Material Impact of "the Digital" in Counter-Archival Video Works by Hito Steyerl and Brenda Lien', where Annie Ring examines counter-archival works by two video artists from the German-speaking world, Hito Steyerl and Brenda Lien. Ring draws out the citational media practices they each use to reintroduce a counter-archive of bodily and material experience into thinking about networked technology. Steyerl's video installation *Liquidity Inc.* (2014) and Lien's short film *Call of Comfort* (2018) both repurpose familiar tropes and interfaces from the ultimate archive of our time, the Internet, citing, spoofing, and rerouting its dominant aesthetic trends with critical effects. In her reading of these works, Ring shows how their 'anarchival' media citations can challenge associations of contemporary technology with immateriality, drawing out how, in their different ways, Steyerl's and Lien's video works make palpable the biopolitical effects that Internet-enabled technologies have through these new forms of *détournement*. She also considers the apparent contradiction, whereby these works were themselves made and displayed in a context of inescapable entanglement with the media they critique. Ring's chapter thus reveals the possibilities for practices of citation in contemporary screen media to animate feeling for the impacts new technologies are having on bodies and on the world, all the while productively, and at times performatively, acknowledging their own mediatic complicity with those impacts.

In Chapter 7, 'From the Cyborg to the Rendered Body: Conceptualising Redistributions in Composite Agency through Hito Steyerl's Citational Figures', Lucy Bollington examines the citational techniques employed by Hito Steyerl in her 2015 artist's film *Factory of the Sun* to reflect critically on the transformations in distributed agency brought about by expanded automation. Steyerl's *Factory of the Sun*, Bollington suggests, adopts the counter-archival strategy of 'countergaming', combining ludic references with other sociotechnical and theoretical citations to portray the fibreoptic present as a pervasive and increasingly automated 'gamespace', in which we are all caught, though we may not see it.[37] Navigating the film's diffuse gamespace are first cyborgs and then digitally-rendered bodies, figures Bollington describes as 'citational', for Steyerl's cyborgs are framed with reference to Donna Haraway's influential 'Cyborg Manifesto', while her rendered bodies are appropriated from the Internet and associated with bots and ludic non-player characters (NPCs) — that is, with algorithmic agencies. In dialogue with Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, and other theorists of technology and games, Bollington argues that *Factory of the Sun* stages a transition in conceptual figures

from the cyborg to the rendered body in response to the major sociotechnical transformations animating contemporary gamespace: most centrally, a tilting of distributed agency towards the machinic that impacts upon the operations of power, capitalism, and protest today. Bollington argues that the counter-archival (or 'countergamic') potential of *Factory of the Sun* rests largely in how Steyerl evokes and invites reflection on the scale and impact of widespread automation. Yet she also suggests that another, more ambivalent, strand of the counter-archival is introduced through the automated protest Steyerl depicts as emerging in this context through her framing of the rendered body.

Finally, in Chapter 8, 'Twin Faces as Sites of Uncertainty in Algorithmic Image Cultures', Edward King examines the representation of the faces of twins as a productive site of breakdown in contemporary technology's archiving cultures. Analysing examples of algorithmic image culture engaging with twin faces, such as the failure of an Apple facial recognition system to identify the faces of twins, the location of 'twin strangers' on online image databases and the practice of the 'twin selfie', King shows how twin faces can produce valuable moments of uncertainty in the datafication of identity and so undo the 'ontological invisibility' that defines now-naturalised networked technologies.[38] He argues that the performance of identical twinship can thus work as a form of mask or act of strategic invisibility on social media, so counter-archiving the power/knowledge relationships that define biometric surveillance entrenched in current platformed image cultures. In King's argument, twin faces pose a counter-archival challenge to the biometric systems currently connecting humans with computational systems.

The range and diversity of approaches in this volume reflect the very wide array of citational media in contemporary visual cultures around the world. Together, the chapters convey some of the major ways in which recent screen- and other artists have been engaging critically with the archives and technologies through which knowledge and *the sensible* are conveyed and preserved, namely by creating counter-archival responses to them. The book's case studies are also united by their tendency to be consumed outside the traditional space of the cinema, a space that we all continue to value as visual studies scholars, but that has arguably been overtaken by media and performance works that can be displayed away from the enclosed, sometimes hierarchical, and often profit-driven industry of mainstream cinema. This is not to say that there are no problems associated with the alternative exhibition contexts to which the works we discuss in this volume belong. As Steyerl writes, the art gallery is itself a space that is complicit with capitalism in multiple ways: from the unpaid labour supporting the gallery as an industry, via the gentrification that often occurs in tandem with the building of exhibition spaces, to the funding of artworks by 'predatory banks' and companies.[39] Similarly, the operation of capitalism via social media platforms has been well documented, as in Shoshana Zuboff's acclaimed book showcasing the transformation of capitalism into surveillance capitalism occurring with the rise of powerful Internet companies and now being a prominent profit model for businesses operating both online and off.[40] Thus, the political critique or progressive content offered by the case studies in this volume must by necessity negotiate these ongoing contextual binds.

Two core ethical concerns emerge in common between the analyses in this book. The first is associated with an awareness that some archives are vulnerable and fragile, so that practices of care and curation necessarily accompany any attempts to challenge the realities of domination and exclusion that are built into them. The second is a concern with the ambivalence of complicity, insofar as many of the artists studied in this volume rely on the very technologies they contest in the making of their citational works. With both of these concerns in mind, the chapters below not only shed light on specific visual-cultural practices, but they also posit citation as a delicate, multifaceted, and political act in its own right, one that is intimately bound up with questions of medium and technique, and that requires carefully locating the forms and images best suited to reflecting critically on the sociotechnical present. Of course, one such act of citation and counter-archiving is criticism itself. Criticism involves recuperating and analysing artworks, theories, texts, and other materials, asserting their value, and entering into a dynamic conversation with their makers and with other critics. As we hope this volume demonstrates, at its best, such collective criticism is capable of articulating the place of its chosen material in vital historical processes. When it takes place in a shared process of reflection and understanding, it can also play a vital role in the cultural-political reckonings necessary for our contemporary era of uncertainty and turbulent change.

Notes to the Introduction

1. See, for example, Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. by Steven Corcoran (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).
2. Nicholas Gane, 'When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done? Interview with Donna Haraway', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23.7–8 (2006), 135–58 (p. 157). This reflection is taken from a part of the interview in which Haraway expresses frustration at being labelled a 'Deleuzian' and describes her refusal to read his work for many years; she argues that such citational comparisons make 'women thinkers [...] seem derivative of male philosophers, who are often their contemporaries — made to be derivative and the same, when we are neither' (p. 156).
3. The Cite Black Women Collective, 'Cite Black Women: A Critical Praxis (A Statement)', *Feminist Anthropology*, 2.1 (May 2021), 10–17 (p. 10). In addition to the authors named above, the statement also 'acknowledge(s) those who are not named as authors but explicitly contributed to the genealogy of thought of this statement: Bianca Williams, Yasmine Irizarry, Jenn M. Jackson, Michaela Machicote, and Alysia Mann Carey.
4. Ibid., pp. 10, 11.
5. Ibid., pp. 12, 16.
6. Ibid., p. 15.
7. Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 17.
8. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 15, 21.
9. Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 130.
10. Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, trans. by Stephen Barker (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 59, 64.
11. Ibid., pp. 64, 61.
12. Stiegler argues, for example, that the 'transmission of [...] long circuits constituting human experience molds the process of primary collective identification, which is also the base for the process of referential individuation in modern society': ibid., pp. 60–61.

13. See, in particular, ibid., pp. 1–16.
14. Ibid., pp. 62, 184.
15. See Samuel Amago, 'Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Future of Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men*', *Discourse*, 32.2 (Spring 2010), 212–35 (pp. 215–16).
16. Ibid., p. 221.
17. Clara Bradbury-Rance, 'Appropriate Feminisms: Ambivalence and Citational Practice in *Appropriate Behavior*', *Camera Obscura*, 37.3 (2022), 145–77 (p. 170).
18. See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction — Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002); Alexander R. Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 2006); and T. J. Demos, *Dara Birnbaum: Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* (London: Afterall Books, 2010).
19. Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 144.
20. Ibid, p. 139.
21. See 'The Paradoxes of Political Art', in Rancière, *Dissensus*, pp. 134–51.
22. Demos, *Dara Birnbaum*, pp. 103, 84.
23. Ibid., pp. 97, 103. Through his perceptive reading of feminist US artist Dara Birnbaum's influential work of appropriative video art, *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman*, Demos describes an example of image re-use that eschews 'the false hope of utopian fantasy' while nevertheless exhibiting an 'optimism that reveals the viability of imagining and creating new forms of life, despite society's controls and its limited options' (p. 103). This sort of complex negotiation mixed with hopefulness continues in many of the examples of citation studied in this volume.
24. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 4.
25. Ibid., p. 143.
26. Ibid., p. 146.
27. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), p. 4.
28. Ibid., pp. 1, 3.
29. Ibid., pp. 19, 14, 10.
30. This is a framework developed across his books in relation to different technologies. For an incisive reading of the technology of the book in pharmacological terms, see Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and Generations*, pp. 21–22. For his arguments about how we must combat the 'toxic' effects of the digital pharmakon, see, for example his *The Automatic Society. Volume 1: The Future of Work*, trans. by Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), p. 44. See also his *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology*, trans. by Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).
31. Orit Halpern, *Beautiful Data: A History of Reason and Vision since 1945* (Durham, NC, & London: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 241.
32. Ibid., p. 5.
33. See *Uncertain Archives: Critical Keywords for Big Data*, ed. by Nanna Bonde Thylstrup and others (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021).
34. On this, see, for example, Mark B. N. Hansen, *Feed-Forward: On the Future of Twenty-First-Century Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).
35. On the material impacts of data archiving, see Annie Ring, 'Data that Matter: On Metaphors of Obfuscation, Thinking "the Digital" as Material and Posthuman Co-Operation with AI', *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory*, 46.2 (July 2023), 176–91.
36. John Harris, '"There was all sorts of toxic behaviour": Timnit Gebru on her Sacking by Google, AI's Dangers and Big Tech's Biases', *Guardian*, 22 May 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2023/may/22/there-was-all-sorts-of-toxic-behaviour-timnit-gebru-on-her-sacking-by-google-ais-dangers-and-big-techs-biases> [accessed 11 August 2023].
37. 'Countergaming' is a concept developed by Alexander Galloway and 'gamespace' is a term coined by McKenzie Wark. See Galloway, *Gaming*; and McKenzie Wark, *Gamer Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
38. Kevin W. Bowyer and Patrick J. Flynn, 'Biometric Identification of Identical Twins: A Survey',

Department of Computer Science and Engineering, University of Notre Dame, 2016 <https://www3.nd.edu/~kwb/Bowyer_Flynn_BTAS_2016.pdf> [accessed 15 November 2018], p. xxxiii.

39. Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), pp. 94–100. Steyerl writes, for example, of the problem that 'radical art is nowadays very often sponsored by the most predatory banks or arms traders and completely embedded in rhetoric of city marketing, branding and social engineering' (p. 99). She also notes that art 'sustains itself on the time and energy of unpaid interns and self-exploiting actors on pretty much every level and in almost every function. Free labour and rampant exploitation are the invisible dark matter that keeps the cultural sector going' (p. 96).
40. See Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (London: Profile Books, 2019).

CHAPTER 1

❖

Archives of the Future Past: Harun Farocki's Critique of Television in *The Trouble with Images* (1973)

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To thinking belongs the movement as well as the arrest of thoughts.
— Walter Benjamin[1]

Although Harun Farocki has become a renowned filmmaker in documentary and essayistic film practices, reflecting on the 'in-betweens' of images through film, there is still little known on the prevalence of his ideas around montage and the moving image in his critique of television in the early 1970s.[2] This period has remained largely overlooked by scholarship, except for the occasional side post, because these early television films were, as Thomas Elsaesser noted in 2004, 'buried in the cellars of several German broadcasters' and have only recently become available together with his early texts through the Harun Farocki Institute.[3] In interviews, Farocki also repeatedly downplayed this phase in his career telling Tilman Baumgärtel in 1995 somewhat disparagingly that 'hardly anything is interesting from this time'.[4] Despite such statements, Farocki's critique of television in his writing at the time and his methods in the film *The Trouble with Images* (*Der Ärger mit den Bildern*, 1973) show how his critical engagement with the relatively new medium of television initiated an extensive reflection on the audio-visual and media specificities and prompted him to work critically and theoretically with archival found footage. *The Trouble with Images* thus represents an early example of Farocki's essayistic filmmaking with found images as well as a cunning example of his meta-critical engagement with media.

What follows aims to revisit this often-forgotten step in Farocki's evolution as a filmmaker while outlining his critical thoughts on television and analysing the citational counterstrategies in film which he developed to undermine its techniques of obfuscation, amnesia, and systematisation. As we will see, *The Trouble with Images* confronts the evolution of film language within television and television

reportage as they are implicated in the creation of social realities, raising questions about the ethics and politics of representation in image-based media technologies. In this context, Farocki's Brechtian and Eisensteinian montage emerges through a meticulous analysis of the language of film in television, emphasising the unique status of the moving images, as a referent with a distinct temporality and a multiplicity of meaning, against television's hectic engagement with them. *The Trouble with Images* thus opens a larger reflection of media as archives, which Farocki would continue in the text 'What Ought to be Done' in 1975. Pleading for an archive of the future past in this manifesto, Farocki's work with and against television finds a place of resistance to the systematisation of images in developing distinct temporalities against television's fixation on the present and relation to referents, still relevant in new media software processes today.

The Television Machine

Television was not foreign to Farocki, neither as institution nor medium, when he started to work more regularly for the Westdeutsche Rundfunk (WDR) in the 1970s. Farocki experimented with Ampex video technology for his project *Untitled or, Wandering Cinema for Technologists* (*Ohne Titel oder, ein Wanderkino für Technologen*, 1968) in the 1968 student movement. Here, Farocki already welcomed the way video offered new avenues for recording, editing, and screening instantaneously in service of the political strategies and campaigning of the student movement.[5] A few months later, he produced *Inextinguishable Fire* (*NICHTlöschbares Feuer*, 1968–69) for the WDR programme *Versuche* to bring their protest to a mass audience. After Farocki completed his studies at the Deutsche Film und Fernsehschule Berlin (DFFB), the WDR editors Angelika Wittlich, Werner Dütsch, and Reinhold E. Thiel integrated Farocki and the new generation of filmmakers, whom they met through the cinephile community in Berlin and through film magazines such as *Filmkritik*.[6] In the early 1970s, the WDR then partly funded Farocki's first collaboration with Bitomsky, *The Division of All Days* (*Die Teilung aller Tage*, 1970), before he began working regularly for television as a freelancer.

In this period, WDR was experiencing a 'golden age of television' because West Germany's favourable financial and administrative circumstances in the 1970s led to thriving cinema programming. The channel broadcasted *auteurs* and new wave movements from all over the world, and was an important source of funding for New German Cinema filmmakers like Wim Wenders or Rainer Werner Fassbinder and a younger generation of filmmakers including Farocki and his peers, including Hartmut Bitomsky or Helke Sander, or even documentarians working on political documentaries such as the *Arbeiterfilme*.[7] Compared to the UK and France, the 'regionalised' structure under the ARD, WDR's parent channel, catered to regional communities and 'represented the views and interests of a wider range of groups and voices in West German society' pursuing a free, diverse media landscape after post-war occupation.[8] Within this cinephile, artistic, and political environment, Farocki wanted to continue his ambitions for a Marxist didactic cinema with

Bitomsky, experimenting with found footage, documentary, and Brechtian *mise-en-scène* prevalent in his 1968 activist filmmaking.[9] Yet, because these television commissions meant working for the establishment of commercial television production, he viewed this period in his career as a 'slump' because it kept him from pursuing the 'political practice as promoted by the Group Dziga Vertov or Tel Quel'.[10]

Farocki produced a considerable output on and around television, including the film *The Trouble with Images*, as a poignant and sharp meta-critique of the practices and industry of the relatively new television medium. It was commissioned by Wittlich and aired on WDR 3 on 16 May 1973 as part of the programme *Telekritik*, which started in 1972 in the WDR unit *Glashaus* to 'encourage a self-reflexive turn to the shortcomings and deficits of TV programming itself'.[11] For this programme, Farocki also made *Moderators* (*Moderatoren im Fernsehen*, 1974), which failed to air, and *The Struggle with Images* (*Die Arbeit mit Bildern*, 1974), which is unfortunately lost. Significantly, as Volker Pantenburg notes, Farocki's critique of television 'finds [...] echo in print' to the point where his articles reprint the voice-over commentary word for word. Among eight articles, discussing television in various formats and from multiple angles between 1973 and 1977, *The Trouble with Images* features in 'Shirking Before Reality' ('Drückebergerei vor der Wirklichkeit') in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* in June 1973, in 'Images on Television' ('Bilder aus dem Fernsehen') in *Filmkritik* in July of the same year, and, in 1974, in the longer publication 'On the Work with Images in Television' ('Über die Arbeit mit Bildern beim Fernsehen') in *Filmkritik*.[12] Comparable in method and tone to Bertolt Brecht's sociological experiment on cinema in the *Threepenny Trial* (1931), Farocki discusses the television industry from the perspective of his own work experiences with a critical, ironic voice which also ventures into topics of medium specificity, ontology, form, and politics.

In Farocki's writing and *The Trouble with Images*, television appears as a large apparatus sustained by a capitalist industry. Compared to the prominent West German debates around television between Jürgen Habermas, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, and Alexander Kluge with Oskar Negt, discussing the paradigms of a more pluralistic, democratic media landscape and counter public sphere as 'reciprocal communicative relationships' influenced by Brecht and Walter Benjamin's media theory and politics, Farocki's critique enters television through the backdoor by visiting the editing tables behind the programmes on television sets as a way to reveal the means of production.[13] In 'On the Work with Images in Television', Farocki describes the predominantly female editors, who process, cut, assemble, and re-assemble images containing 'professional politicians who have something to say' and 'sometimes a seagull against the sky' at countless editing tables.[14] Here, Farocki highlights the manual and technical labour behind television's forms of audio-visual mass production and draws on the use of moving images in television as a commodity. Shaped by technical and industrial conditions, Farocki sees these forms of producing meaning with and through images disseminated through television in society. As he notes in 'Images on Television' in 1973: '[b]ehind the walls of this

Fig. 1.1. Ampex Buildings, still from *The Trouble with Images*, dir. by Harun Farocki (West Germany, 1973)

house, thousands of people work on the production of meaning every day'.[15] While this description aims at a Marxist critique of television labour, which he developed in several other texts in *Filmkritik* wanting to form 'an alliance with the proletariat in the TV industry', it also highlights television as an industrial institution.[16] In the film, this apparatus of television is illustrated in several graphic still images showing the urban skyscraper landscape of Cologne, the heartland of television in West Germany, the various technologies used in television, television sets, cameras or studio equipment, and the video technology processors, staged as a large corporate building against the sky with the slogan 'Images and Sounds — FREE' (Figure 1.1.).

For Farocki, these forms of production of meaning in television belong to the register of journalism, *Publizistik* in German, including editorial media from print, radio to television, positing the essay as their key format. As Farocki explains in 'On the Work with Images in Television', journalism in its audio-visual form on television standardises audio-visual language on a public scale: 'The main expression of television is filmed journalism. This language in image, sound and editing surrounds us, a mode of expression that is as decisive and powerful and directs thinking and feeling like High German'.[17] This standardisation in West German television in the 1970s includes the framing and recording of images, where they are 'taken in the same photographic style, countless snapshots recorded with a pan,

zoom and short cuts' and appear in the jargon of ARD television professionals.[18] Compared to the medium of cinema, television belongs to a history of forms of argumentation and documentation. Farocki further elaborates: 'There has to be something that holds the details together. Images are concretions. What is shown must be put in a relationship to what is absent'.[19] In the text 'On the Work with Images in Television', in 1974, Farocki also differentiates between cinema, as the world of 'story' based on narrative conventions embedded in cultural history, and television, as the medium of essays which 'relate entities from one or more points of view'.[20]

For Farocki, the essayistic becomes the cultural form of the television medium, bringing 'Words Images Cuts' together to create meaning and produce knowledge, which, in Farocki's opinion, should not cast aside the indexical particularity of the image as divorced from the object of its recording.[21] Significantly, Farocki demonstrates in these texts his interest in the 'in-between' of images as they form a theory or argument out of images fundamental to Farocki's essayistic practice for which he is known today.[22] Moreover, the distinction of television from cinema as a medium of multiple elements creating relations resonates with the political filmmaking he was pursuing at the time, influenced by the Dziga Vertov Group (Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin), as we will see below, and, significantly, by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet whose cinema advocates for the profoundly Brechtian 'separation of elements'.[23] Farocki also developed his understanding around video in 1968 in his experiments with Ampex technology and explored a creative method called 'Minimale Variationen' [Minimal Variations] built on the idea of distantiating spectators and foregrounding the constructed nature of film by repeating film sequences with small changes in separate elements, such as dialogue or *mise-en-scène*, most elaboratively in *Inextinguishable Fire*. These methods find interesting points of connections in television, which has a technical disposition that fosters a particular diegetic make up, which, as Elsaesser notes in relation to sound, is less embedded in continuity and unity of the narrative world but creates a 'multiple diegesis' and heterogeneity as it joins together unrelated footage; its unity emerges through commentary, where then '[t]he voice of God rules'.[24]

From this perspective, the television apparatus's techniques of meaning and ordering of images come through in the television feature's methods of representation as an exemplary genre which reproduces standardised and automated forms of visual language, which in turn affect the notion of reality it portrays. In *The Trouble with Images*, the television feature — a term designating a longer news reportage in West Germany at the time — is introduced in the voice-over commentary as a 'machine' from the beginning:

> Features are great exploitation-machines. They chop up the things that we are not particularly interested in, and also the things that might interest us. They rush from detail to detail to cover up the meaninglessness of each detail. In doing so, they also destroyed the informational values that the lovelessly recorded image still has.[25]

Farocki considers the audio-visual elements with which features produce meaning

through montage where the meaning and informational value of images fall victim to a hectic, meaningless ordering of a mechanical nature, presented as an extension of the whole media apparatus. These, which Farocki terms the 'means of articulation in television language', are characterised through the metaphor of the machine by their mechanical nature, fast-paced, rigid, and automated.[26] The basic operation of television is thus its automated aspect: the ways in which techniques of editing or filming are executed according to programmed processes like the one in a machine. As the opening of the film demonstrates, Farocki's focus on these objects of examination is on a general language and style that emerges in the feature's principles of representation and 'the manner with which [...] image and sound are used to represent something from the real world'. Television is thus represented as a standardising machine that constructs normalised forms of reality. This constitutes the mass medium's influential role in forming public opinion and representing a cultural, political, economic, or social reality.

Citational Counter-Strategies

To counter and analyse television and the television feature, *The Trouble with Images* assembles footage and fragments from television archives and recontextualises them through montage. As Farocki explains in his writing, he needs to 'take [the phrases in television features] out of the context in which they want to hide, and [he] ha[s] to repeat them, i.e. put them to the test'.[27] As Pantenburg highlights, *The Trouble with Images* appears in this sense almost like a clinical analysis and 'diagnosis' of television, close to a dissection, where Farocki 'does an almost medical examination of television reality'.[28] The editing, sounds, and uses of commentary in television features are then analysed in detail in *The Trouble with Images*. Over its fifty-minute duration, the film displays, repeats, and cuts between footage taken from the vaults of the television stations and accompanied by the analytical commentary of a woman's voice-over reading these images and their forms of representation as typical of a generalised style on television. With titles such as 'Restoration', 'What God Joined Together', 'Extortion, Speculation and a Little Welfare' and 'The Lost Time of Apprenticeship', these examples of the television feature format range thematically from urban planning, renovations, work placements, reforms in divorce law, pre-school pedagogy to psychology in schools. Yet, Farocki's Brechtian approach to the found footage renders this dissection deeply citational as the methods of the television feature and the film's own approach are foregrounded through a self-referential, reflective meta-critique and archival film practice. In this sense, Farocki's own role at the editing table is made perceptible to create space for critical engagement. As he writes, the editing table becomes 'a particularly sharp instrument against the rhetorical shell' of the television feature's forms of representation.[29] Farocki's focus on elements in film, 'Words Images Cuts', builds here on a semiotic understanding of film related to his appreciation for *Tel Quel*'s cultural politics, mentioned before. Yet his emphasis on the recontextualisation of images hints at the citational politics and practice of Benjamin's media-archaeological project, as described by Catherine

Russell, which 'assemble[s] fragments of film found in various collections, archives, and other sources to rethink and reframe history as a cultural construction'.[30]

In terms of Farocki's approach to these images, *The Trouble with Images* nevertheless stands within an essayistic practice, as Pantenburg has pointed out, in the lineage of Brecht's well-known discussion on representation around the Krupp factory images, which favours 'a model-like simulation whose emphasis is on structures, not on things'.[31] Yet, what Pantenburg has extensively explored in his discussion on filmmaking as a form of theory, namely Farocki's 'intellectual linking of images' through montage, does not appear in this television film as a filmic essayism building on intellectual, associative connections between images. Rather, it seems more analytical and didactic in its aim to demonstrate conspicuously and in a Brechtian manner how editing practices in television build these links through different forms and methods of audio-visual argumentation.[32] Explaining the production behind *The Trouble with Images*, Farocki discovers in the repetition and recontextualisation of images that 'if you look at individual shots again and again without sound, you can see the unstructured nature of all pictorial characters and character-forming operations'.[33] Crucially, these televised forms of meaning build and represent a sense of reality as is conventional within documentary modes in reportage.[34] As *The Trouble with Images* emphasises from the beginning, the film's aim is to evaluate the role of the television feature in navigating its spectator's relationship to reality or, as the voice-over notes, a 'cut-out of reality'. To this end, unsurprisingly, *The Trouble with Images* engages predominantly with television features on larger socio-political questions, a trademark of the genre, including themes such as urban planning, divorce, and psychology in education. It analyses how editing and framing shape and constitute a sense of reality that is taken falsely, as Farocki's voice-over argues, for a social totality since a television feature can only offer a 'cut-out', a fragment of or perspective on reality.

After *The Trouble with Images* introduces its spectators to the filmmaker's intent, it starts with a thorough deconstruction of a documentary sequence of two minutes and fifteen seconds. Through intertitles, noting the locations or content of the images, and the woman's voice-over, Farocki isolates separate elements, 'Words Images Cuts', to highlight the discrepancy and generalist nature of the reportage's verbal and visual discourse. The commentary notes the relationship between words and the images as an overwhelming, cumulative aggregation asking: 'Why so many images, statements and locations?' Through this method, Farocki aims to demonstrate how such programmes make generalisations and unfounded claims, where, as the voice-over states, a lorry stuck in the streets becomes visual evidence for grandiose statements about the deplorable state of cities. Then, in a second phase, the sequence is broken down further into multiples episodes and repeated, each time interrupted by a blue screen (Figure 1.2), while the voice-over (re-)explains the techniques employed in the excerpt seen by the spectator a second ago. Throughout *The Trouble with Images*, such arguments are brought forth repeatedly through a literal reading of the picture's documentary value by the voice-over commentary. This technique turns the perceived authority of the television reportage voice-over

on its head, at times to comical effect, as in the lorry example, and at other times, more seriously, when criticising the representation of the working class through stereotypical images of people living in poverty (Figure 1.3). Furthermore, the film also turns its attention towards forms of editing and recording the images in reportage to address the means of production. For example, a supposedly seamless cut in one feature, an example of invisible editing, introduced by a zoom, links images from unrelated locations that have no connection to the subject discussed in the commentary. In the film and his texts, Farocki attacks such unimaginative aesthetic choices of television producers, which might have been the reason for the riot the film caused at WDR, as both Farocki and Wittlich remember, and describes the technical processes behind television programmes to spectators.[35] As Farocki explains in 'On the Work with Images in Television', this focus on the means of production aims at finding a common ground to combine, in his counter-cultural analysis, the language of television with the industry and labour of its professionals: 'But because films are not made by the authors alone, we might get a step further if, in the analysis, we combine the destruction of the expression of television language with the destruction of work in television'.[36] Along these lines, a shot from the passenger seat of a moving tram in Berlin becomes symptomatic of the feature's cursory look at and discussion of reality: 'The gaze on this is, in any

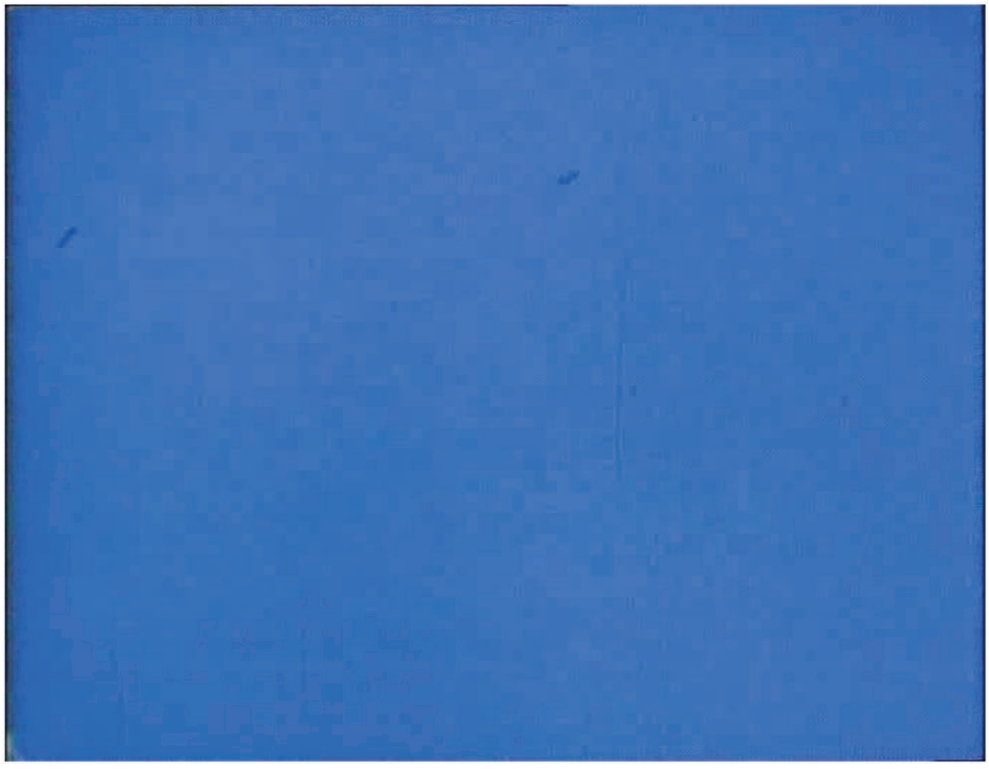

Fig. 1.2. Blue still image, still from *The Trouble with Images*, dir. by Farocki (West Germany, 1973).

case, as unfocused, as if one was looking out of the window in a driving streetcar'. Going back to Pantenburg, the structures and functions behind images emerge here as the industrial and technical means of production behind television.

These Brechtian analyses of the construction of meaning are then paired with a level of reflexivity on the medium of television above all through the repeated use of the blue screen. The blue still refers to the visual technical effects of chroma key blue associated with video technology and thus the means of production behind television, still relevant today to mark the digital edifice in Internet art. The shot interrupts the hectic pace of the automated and superficial ordering of images within the conglomerate of words, images, and sounds in the television feature and highlights the commentary and structures the film as a recurring guide to the argument and analysis it performs. Compared to the documentary mode of television features, it offers a moment of visual stillness and, in a sense, stimulation, given its monochrome, abstract form and lack of indexical relation to the objects of a pro-filmic event, as well as a relief from the hectic, standardised editing flow of television feature footage. In turn, it becomes a space for thought and language, a moment of theory through the intervention of language in the commentary. This is especially apparent towards the end of the film where television features, introduced without commentary or introduced at random, are repeatedly fragmented by the

Fig. 1.3. Children playing, still from *The Trouble with Images*, dir. by Farocki (West Germany, 1973).

blue still. Against the appearance of integrity and authority of the television 'voice of God', the features are reduced to indexical noise. The 'hectic' television footage commented by a hyped-up, generalist, journalistic discourse, faces in *The Trouble with Images* another a mode of slow-paced reflection through theorising and recontextualising images without instrumentalising photographic images as evidence.

While analysing the style and logic of the television feature, *The Trouble with Images* also introduces a different subjectivity and tone on the level of the essayistic commentary. Typical for his later essay films, the voice-over, spoken by an unnamed woman narrator, rereads these images and guides the spectator through his analysis and argument with cold didacticism. This opposes the 'rhetoric' of the reportage examples in the film, which have a male 'voice of god' making generalist claims from the position of an unchallenged objectivity to create a sense of spectacle. Against such performed objectivity, Farocki introduces his authorship, through the personal 'my' and 'I' in his reading of the footage, to convey a subjective opinion rather than making claims to a universalist truth. In the context of Farocki's larger television critique, the female commentator of his film also seems to give voice to the predominantly female editors behind the production of features while also countering the masculinised commentary of the televisual examples.[37] The critical and oppositional stance of the voice-over is paired with a range of subversive, graphic still images with intertitles, which appear throughout the film. These forms of subversive critique especially come to the fore in the film's most direct provocation towards the end. Here, another graphic image shows a mannequin's plastic head dressed before a microphone with the title 'DER ÖFFENTLICHRECHTLICHE SOUND' [public sound], as the voice-over suddenly whispers: 'This is how it comes to the typical tone of voice, the speech of interested parties and harmony. [...] This is how it comes to the tone of voice which takes the edge off any thinking'. These graphic still images again introduce moments of serenity to the dynamic of the television footage. Farocki uses slogans to introduce a critical commentary paired with the humour of the image, suggesting the tone of television as one of pretentious 'plastic people'. The 'do-it-yourself' quality and subjectivity of the voice-over and these graphic images, which look hand-written, were intentional on Farocki's part to counter the sleekness of the televisual aesthetic. As Farocki recalls in another television film from this period, *About 'Song of Ceylon' by Basil Wright* (*Über 'Song of Ceylon' von Basil Wright*, 1975): 'TV was a highly official affair at the time, and using these hand-written, scribbled intertitles was a wonderful gesture of rebellion. [...] The transgression against a certain sound and tone — that was important'.[38] Strikingly, these written interventions and many of the techniques mentioned above, are reminiscent of Farocki's early political filmmaking in the 1968 movement — intertitles, critical voice-overs, found footage, image analysis, or situationist metaphors — which demonstrate the stakes of 1968 politics in and around media for Farocki's evolution as a political artist in the 1970s.

Farocki's repeated critical analysis of images and sound throughout the film then concludes towards the end of *The Trouble with Images*. He claims here that the mode of representation in television features and the journalistic form of the medium

obfuscates their own disorder: 'That is the aesthetic principle of the feature. There is no meaningful order, but the disorder is not admitted either. It is covered up'. The 'Dynamik' [dynamic], the flow and rhythm of the forms of articulation in reportage, designates a quick pace in editing and camera movement paired with a sense of 'rush' and spectacle. These produce a register that is superficial, meaningless, and obstructive to a more meaningful engagement with reality; it undermines the potential of the image to represent informational value and significance. This conclusive argument is accompanied by a direct strike against the ARD, introduced through another graphic still of a television set screening the channel's emblem. The words overwriting the image read: 'chaos order disorder' (Figure 1.4). Television and its forms of articulation thus emerge in *The Trouble with Images* as a process of obfuscation that is based on the discrepancies between the images and the discourse of the reportage, and which artificially maintains an authority of voice without referring to the indexical nature of the image and its relationship to reality. From this perspective, the voice-over in *The Trouble with Images* calls for a 'quality of understanding' and producing of meaning, which should foreground the constructed nature of the images' relation to social reality. Like in Brecht's work, as Farocki notes ironically in 'Images on Television' (1973): 'Nothing is sadder than a product which does not want to be aware of the condition of its production'.[39]

Fig. 1.4. 'chaos order disorder' at the ARD, still from *The Trouble with Images*, dir. by Farocki (West Germany, 1973).

Archives of the Future Past

At its close, *The Trouble with Images* evolves into a manifesto for a filmmaking that undermines the logic and standardised forms in television through observational and essayistic documentary practices. As the voice-over openly proclaims, the goal *should* be to '[d]o investigations with film'. For Farocki, such documentary modes enable a meta-analysis of how meaning and reality emerge in the audio-visual. Such methods would then counter the superficiality of the television feature, which remains 'more of a barrier in front of reality than an instrument for experiencing reality'. Instead: 'You watch meanings emerge. And the images and sounds are no longer degraded to do such a sad production of meaning'. With the intertitle 'INSTEAD: IMAGES + SOUNDS' (Figure 1.5), *The Trouble with Images* in its final scenes vouches also for a particular Brechtian method in documentary. Farocki pleads here for a broader reflection on the creation of meaning through the audio-visual techniques of television reportage. The graphic still image recalls the Dziga Vertov Group's well-known separation of image and sound in the television film *British Sounds* (Dziga Vertov Group [Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin], 1969) and Godard's method of joining elements conspicuously, famously described by Gilles Deleuze: 'What counts with [Godard] isn't two or three or however many, it's AND, the conjunction AND'.[40] The separation of elements foregrounded by Brecht functions as the critical, analytical tool to break with television's standardised techniques of organising and commenting on images. The film ends with two excerpts of such exemplary practices which Farocki selects among his peers at the DFFB. First, we see an interview scene from the *cinéma-vérité* documentary *The Tire Cutter and his Wife* (*Der Reifenschneider und seine Frau*, 1968–69) by Klaus Wildenhahn, Farocki's former DFFB teacher, and Roland Hehn. This stands in for a typically durational, non-interventionist, unaltered documentary interaction between the subjects and interviewers, contrasting with the 'chopped up' interview practices of the television feature demonstrated before. Then, *The Trouble with Images* showcases the essayistic documentary *The Industrial Reserve Army* (*Die industrielle Reservearmee*, 1970–71) by Helma Sanders-Brahms. In this fragment, which takes up the remaining five minutes of the film, images of Spanish guest workers queuing at a local food bank are paired with Sanders-Brahms's own critical commentary and the personal account of a guest worker describing his experience of exploitation at work in West Germany.

Besides its advocacy for specific documentary methods, *The Trouble with Images* offers a reflective, critical approach that opens to a broader reflection on the photographic image and indexicality. Throughout the film, its critique of the standardised operations in the television feature addresses the use of images mocking above all their simplistic employment as illustrations in television journalism. As Farocki explains in 'Shirking Before Reality': 'In features, the images are hardly used any differently than in word journalism: for illustration, not as a stand-alone or combined medium making a statement or investigation'.[41] In the text and in the film's voice-over, he draws out two tendencies: '[I]mages in the feature are either in a bad correspondence with the text or used for a literal analogy: either they are

Fig. 1.5. 'instead: images + sounds', still from *The Trouble with Images*, dir. by Farocki (West Germany, 1973).

obscured or they have no secret'.[42] Farocki sees images used either as a merely illustrative, evidential document through simple analogy, meaning that words are merely 'illustrated' in a literal manner through metonymy and metaphor. Or, they are there to 'fill time' without any generative relationship to the words spoken by the commentary. For instance, in one of Farocki's televisual examples, 'divorce' is expressed through a visual metaphor of a saw cutting through a family photograph, enacting the rupture visually (Figure 1.6). In the second case, the voice-over in *The Trouble with Images* discusses a feature on professional training, mocking how images are introduced with no relationship to the subject matter discussed by the television commentator; they only cover up 'killed time'. This relationality between language and the visual undoes what Farocki terms the 'secret' at the heart of the photographic image, which Farocki designates in the text 'On the Work with Images in Television' as the 'elliptical' nature of images, where 'the object being filmed is left out'.[43]

With *The Trouble with Images*, Farocki associates the photographic, moving image with a particular relationship to temporality and duration. The film stresses the obfuscation of temporality especially in relation to historical footage from post-war Germany, which appears halfway through the film without sound (Figure

Fig. 1.6. Visual metaphors in a television feature on divorce, still from *The Trouble with Images* dir. by Farocki (West Germany, 1973).

1.7). After we watch these muted black and white images, of people at food banks and roaming through the city, quickly edited together, Farocki cuts to chroma key blue screen. The voice-over now laments the fast-paced edit and hectic recording of the footage, leaving only enough time to form superficial insights and thus undermining these images' documentary potential. In later scenes, Farocki even graphically illustrates the speed with which images are accumulated on television with a black screen and a white line of dots cueing the next scene. In its emphasis on pace, temporality, and the image, Farocki's critique of television in *The Trouble with Images* resonates with Mary Ann Doane's seminal analysis of television in 'Information, Crisis, Catastrophe' (1990), drawing out the medium's principle of 'present-ness'. This contrasts with what Roland Barthes described as the cinematic image's temporality of '*That has been*' or 'pastness'.[44] By drawing on the discrepancy between television and the photographic image, Doane notes the extent to which the former is caught in an endless 'stream of information', where one piece of information replaces the next in a continuous flux of instantaneity, 'a temporality of "present-ness" — a "*This is going on*" '.[45]

In Farocki's view, the 'exploitation machine' television 'subjugates' the image to merely illustrative modes of representation, a pure artificiality, heightened by a hasty

Fig. 1.7. Footage of Post-War Germany, still from *The Trouble with Images*, dir. by Farocki (West Germany, 1973).

temporality. Considering the medium's standardised forms, Farocki sees television as building visual tropes. Towards the end of the film, *The Trouble with Images* turns to a television documentary on youth in West Germany where images of protests are mixed with images standing in for other concepts: for example, a computer represents the notion of progress, or a 'hard serious situation' is conveyed through images of protest and war footage of bombings and tanks. Farocki denounces these practices as 'an imaginary lexicon', the 'rhetorical shell' of the documentary. In the end, *The Trouble with Images*' essayistic, meta-critical analysis of television leaves its spectators with the notion that the 'machine' works overall to build a visual archive of standardised meanings and tropes. Furthermore, it also reiterates the idea that journalism, like television, has shaped standardised visual tropes as forms of meaning in society, which can be used to detrimental effect as political, social stereotypes affecting public notions of protest, progress, and war or, as seen before, marginalised communities. According to Farocki's writing at the time, the image should instead maintain its status as a document of time and indexical referent. Going back to 'On the Work with Images in Television', the relations created in the essay should consider how images work as a concretion, a process of meaning, where '[w]hat is shown must be related to what is absent'.[46]

The insights drawn from *The Trouble with Images* about television as a larger apparatus and media archive of images clearly inspired the alternative archival practice that Farocki imagines a few years later in his text 'What Ought to be Done' (1975). In this two-page document written privately in 1975 and complemented in 1976 with a 'Survey', Farocki outlines the principles for a new institution which archives and produces images. As Ingemo Engström, a close collaborator during this period, remembers, Farocki's vision became a point of discussion under the name 'documentation centre', in his circle of friends including above all the writers at *Filmkritik*.[47] 'What Ought to be Done' opens with a clear purpose:

> We want to create a facility that is initially just an office for initiating and coordinating some documentary work.
> Ultimately, a (the) national image library.
> Producing material to investigate the present, the future past.
> This institution is intended to collect, i.e. secure what is there, and produce, i.e. initiate what is not yet there.[48]

Although Farocki's plan for this radical archival institution never materialised, this utopian vision represents the continuation of his protest against television. He attributes to this imagined, alternative archive a film practice with a twofold purpose: a commitment to reality and integration into archival practice. As Pantenburg, Doreen Mende, and Tom Holert have pointed out, the text asserts the relevance of archival autonomy in its call for 'self-institutionalisation' and 'self-determined research', which also resembles the emphasis in his collaborations in 1968 on taking charge of the means of production in the media.[49]

Farocki's archive of 'the future past' reacts to television's turn towards the present, as a continuous flow and instantaneity, by intervening in the present from the perspective of the 'future past'. It acknowledges the ontological specificity of the photographic image, its recording of pastness, and its potential to shape new futures. Beyond the influence of Barthes on Farocki, the founders of the Harun Farocki Institut have also considered the legacy of Brecht in Farocki's vision, as seen in these lines: '[Farocki's] programmatic (and very Brechtian) demand for an alienating history of the present is combined with productivist ambition'.[50] Reconsidering Farocki's stance on temporality and memory within representational practices in television, the present as a 'future-oriented past' offers an astute alternative to television's instantaneous forgettability, acknowledging the photographic image's relation to the past and television's force in shaping the zeitgeist of the present.

Yet, Farocki's envisioned archive rejects established methods of standardisation in the media, including television and cinema within such tendencies:

> Just as in the work with written sources, documentation can't be left to journalism. The millions of kilometers that are produced each year in film and TV are ill suited to documenting the real world in a way that enables you to work with the sources.[51]

In these forms of systematisation, Farocki laments, on the one hand, the lack of 'indications of location, time, and conditions of recording'. On the other, he criticises how the footage is transformed in such a way as to be 'entirely absorbed

into the final product'.[52] In these cases, images cannot be re-used for new meanings in the dialectical and polyvalent manner he discusses in *The Trouble with Images* and his texts. Farocki attributes to photographic images more flexibility as visual documents, whereas '[w]ith film material you can perhaps deduce something else, but you can hardly write anything else with it'.[53] For Farocki, the processes behind the creation of meaning in image-based media should ideally safeguard the photographic image's polyvalence and multidirectional associative meanings, and so create 'building blocks' that filmmakers 'have to assemble and disassemble'.[54] As he notes in 'On the Work with Images in Television': 'images are polyvalent and one continuously imagines the meanings that lie in them'.[55] It is here also the idea of an associative, multidirectional engagement with images emerges in an early form, as a way to '"process" images, metonymically as well as metaphorically, making connections as well as maintaining separations' through Eisensteinian principles of montage.[56] From this perspective, Farocki develops an archival practice aimed at tackling the 'TV machine's obfuscating, hectic operations', described in *The Trouble with Images*, and its standardised visual language with an archive of the future past investigating 'what really constitutes a useful library of images; the systematic and what defies systematization'.[57]

Conclusion

In Farocki's critique of television around and through *The Trouble with Images*, the photographic, moving image performs a clever 'protest' against the medium's standardised forms. Farocki stages a rebellion, where the hectic pace, the dynamic, and superficial, visual rhetoric of image/sound relations in television come to the fore through archival and citational practice. Instead, he advocates for a return to the medium specificity of the moving image in television. The latter comes across as a large, industrialised media archive accumulating and ordering images that shape reality and forms of knowledge production through moving images in the present. For Farocki, citation becomes as much a consideration of the image's pastness and relation to history as a moment of stillness, supported by the audio-visual's capacity for duration, to develop other forms of visual analysis and deconstruction, meta-critical hermeneutics, and reality-making.

Interestingly, such temporalities eschew the sense of 'real-time' engagement, for which television has become exemplary, and which continues in other media today, creating the illusion of instantaneity. In this manner, Farocki's critique of television resonates with more recent engagements with television such as Doane's and, in an even more timely way, the stockpiling and analysis of data in the present moment, making his intervention an extremely progressive media praxis for the 1970s. Farocki's critique of television's hectic flow and superficial engagement with photographic realism bears similarities to Doane's understanding of television's temporality and referentiality in the 1990s. As Doane explains, televisual 'liveness' is understood 'as an immediate collision with the real'.[58] The problem in television becomes its temporality of crisis where the 'lure of referentiality' is 'perpetually

deferred' to the extent that it fosters a 'media event, where the referent becomes indissociable from the medium'.[59] Two decades later, Wendy Chun analyses stockpiling software from this perspective of real-time habitual media operations, as they shape a user's relationship to the referent. In her discussion of storage and memory in new media in *Updating to Remain the Same* (2016), Chun discusses the real-time response to new storage software:

> The belief in memory as storage, combined with the belief in 'real time' as indexical, is a form of cruel optimism: memory, which once promised to save users from time, makes them out of time by making them respond constantly to information they have already responded to, to things that will not disappear.[60]

Chun's approach to algorithmic search patterns and memory as storage mechanisms builds on Doane's account of television by considering how old and new media offer 'different habits of touching the real'.[61] The 'realness' of media rests on the illusion of instantaneity: the 'real' of live news coverage or of memory in storage built on a blind faith in instantaneous control. Yet, as she notes critically, '[h]abitual crises make information persist', rendering information 'curiously undead' and something that is 'constantly regenerating', as users store data 'by making the ephemeral endure'.[62]

Returning to Farocki, the conspicuously repeated, de-, and recontextualised images, as a locus of pastness and polyvalence in *The Trouble with Images* and 'What Ought to be Done' in the mid-1970s, undermines the illusion of instantaneity and real-time. It also undercuts the authority of information and rigid methods of systematisation and standardisation employed in media technologies that order and shape these cultural objects. Citation, as a conspicuous quoting and reading of images through film, across media, in turn, puts a halt to such mindless accumulation of data and television news. Within Farocki's concept of an archive of the future past, the image is located between the past and the future as a medium rooted in the pastness of its recorded moment and in the future of its polyvalence, creating new meanings for the future. From this perspective, it makes sense that Farocki would years later re-use operational images, created by visioning machines for other machines, to recontextualise these technical images for human eyes in order to evaluate their social implications and embed them in potential futures rather than in a machinic loop of automated repetition. Farocki's citational practice in *The Trouble with Images* introduces a pause into the way we think images and the realities we draw from them in television, leaving space for a stillness in our engagement with the present through moving images. This engagement can then both acknowledge the past and dwell in the ever-present potential for new realities in the future.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA, & London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 475.
2. Thomas Elsaesser, 'Working at the Margins: Film as Form of Intelligence,' in *Harun Farocki: Working on the Sightlines*, ed. by Thomas Elsaesser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press,

2004), pp. 95–108 (p. 104). Elsaesser notes here how, in Farocki's work, 'something is becoming visible in the in-between, or during the passage from one [image] to the other'.

3. Elsaesser, 'Working at the Margins,' p. 95. For Harun Farocki's work in television, see: Tilman Baumgärtel, *Harun Farocki: vom Guerrillakino zum Essayfilm* (Berlin: b_books, 1998), pp. 104–05; and Volker Pantenburg, *Farocki/Godard: Film as Theory* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), pp. 156–57.
4. Harun Farocki, cited in Baumgärtel, *Harun Farocki*, p. 104. This statement is taken from a conversation between Baumgärtel and Farocki on 1 September 1995.
5. See Harun Farocki, 'Staubsauger oder Maschinenpistolen — ein Wanderkino für Technologen', *film*, 12 (July 1968), 1, 7.
6. Volker Pantenburg, 'The Golden Age of Television: The Case of Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR)', in *TV Essay Dossier, I. The Case of Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR)* (= special issue of *Critical Studies in Television*, 14.1 (2018)), 106–38 (pp. 108–09).
7. Thomas Elsaesser, 'West Germany's "Workers Films": A Cinema in the Service of Television,' in *Celluloid Revolts*, ed. by Christina Gerhardt and others (New York: Camden House, 2019), pp. 122–33 (p. 122). See also Richard Collins and Vincent Porter, *WDR and the Arbeiterfilm: Fassbinder, Viewer and others* (London: BFI Publishing, 1981).
8. Collins and Porter, *WDR and the Arbeiterfilm*, p. 4.
9. Before his television-critical projects materialised in the early 1970s, Farocki had already pursued a media-critical project alongside Hartmut Bitomsky in 1970: the radical, self-reflexive, but ultimately unfinished project *Auviko*, which was also conceptualised for a potential release on television. See Volker Pantenburg, 'Die Arbeit der Autorschaft: zu Harun Farocki's frühen Texten', in *Harun Farocki — meine Nächte mit den Linken: Texte 1964–1975. Schriften. Band 3*, ed. by Volker Pangenburg (Berlin: Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, 2018), pp. 255–73 (p. 267).
10. Harun Farocki, 'Written Trailers', in *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?*, ed. by Antje Ehmann and Kodow Eshun (London: König Books, 2009), p. 223. See also Baumgärtel, *Harun Farocki*, p. 101.
11. Pantenburg, 'The Golden Age of Television', p. 113. See also Angelika Wittlich, 'Entwurf für eine Konzeption "Telekritik 1975" über dokumentarische arbeit: Beispiele und Analysen', 'TV Essay Dossier, I. The Case of Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR)', *Critical Studies in Television* 14.1 (2018), 129–33.
12. These texts include Harun Farocki, 'Drückebergerei vor der Wirklichkeit: das Fernsehfeature *Der Ärger mit den Bildern*', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 2 June 1973, p. xi; 'Bilder aus dem Fernsehen', *Filmkritik*, 199 (July 1973), 304–08; 'Larabel Film', *Filmkritik*, 204 (December 1973), 555–57; 'Über die Arbeit mit Bildern beim Fernsehen', *Filmkritik*, 211 (July 1974), 308–16; 'Arbeiten — beim Fernsehen', *Filmkritik*, 219 (March 1975), 116–17; 'Der Wahnsinn hat Methode, sogar Begriffe (HaF und ZDF)', *Filmkritik*, 224 (August 1975), 356–66; and 'Was mir das Fernsehen bedeutet', *Filmkritik*, 228 (August 1977), 408–12. Hereafter, these texts will be referenced from the book *Harun Farocki – meine Nächte mit den Linken: Texte 1964–1975. Schriften. Band 3*, ed. by Pantenburg.
13. Roswitha Mueller, 'From Public to Private: Television in the Federal Republic of Germany', *New German Critique*, 50 (Spring-Summer, 1990), 44–51 (p. 50).
14. Harun Farocki, 'Über die Arbeit mit Bildern beim Fernsehen', in *Harun Farocki — meine Nächte mit den Linken*, ed. by Pantenburg, pp. 164–73 (p. 164). Unless otherwise indicated translations are author's own.
15. Harun Farocki, 'Drückebergerei vor der Wirklichkeit', in *Harun Farocki — meine Nächte mit den Linken*, ed. by Pantenburg, pp. 132–39 (p. 147).
16. Farocki, 'Written Trailers', p. 223. This political engagement comes even more to the fore in several other texts in the 1970s related to his television critique. In 'Anmerkung zum Status des Kleinproduzenten' (1973) he describes his own experiences as a freelancer in the industry and contributes 'Notwendige Abwechslung und Vielfalt' (1975) to the special issue of *Filmkritik* entitled *Leben und Arbeiten innerhalb und ausserhalb des Fernsehens* [Living and Working Inside and Outside Television] See Harun Farocki, 'Anmerkung zum Status des Kleinproduzenten' in *Harun Farocki — meine Nächte mit den Linken*, ed. by Pantenburg, pp. 150–53; and 'Notwendige

Abwechslung und Vielfalt' in *Harun Farocki — meine Nächte mit den Linken*, ed. by Pantenburg, pp. 216–26.
17. Farocki, 'Über die Arbeit mit Bildern beim Fernsehen', p. 164.
18. Farocki, 'Drückebergerei vor der Wirklichkeit', p. 137. In 'Der Wahnsinn hat Methode, sogar Begriffe' Farocki also specifically mocks the pretentious professionalism and jargon of television professionals at the ARD by analysing their brochures to rather comical effects.
19. Farocki, 'Über die Arbeit mit Bildern beim Fernsehen', pp. 165–66.
20. Ibid., p. 166.
21. Ibid., p. 165. Farocki was at the time also involved in the German translation of André Bazin's *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* (1958). See André Bazin, *Was ist Kino? Bausteine zur Theorie des Films*, ed. by Hartmut Bitomsky, Harun Farocki, and Ekkehard Kümmerling, trans. by Barbara Peymann (Cologne: DuMont, 1975)
22. Elsaesser, 'Working at the Margins', p. 104.
23. See Martin Brady and Helen Hughes, 'Introduction: Incendiary Films', in *The Cinema of Daniele Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub*, ed. by Martin Brady and Helen Hughes (Cambridge: Legenda, 2023), pp. 1–24 (p. 7)
24. Thomas Elsaesser, 'Political Filmmaking after Brecht: Farocki, for Example', in *Harun Farocki*, ed. by Elsaesser, pp. 133–55 (p. 145).
25. Farocki, 'Drückebergerei vor der Wirklichkeit', p. 139.
26. Farocki, 'Über die Arbeit mit Bildern beim Fernsehen', p. 165.
27. Ibid., p. 167.
28. Pantenburg, *Farocki/Godard,* p. 156.
29. Farocki, 'Drückebergerei vor der Wirklichkeit', p. 132.
30. Catherine Russell, *Archiveology: Walter Benjamin and Archival Film Practices* (Durham, NC, & London: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 113.
31. Pantenburg, *Farocki/Godard*, p. 145.
32. Ibid., p. 157.
33. Farocki, 'Über die Arbeit mit Bildern beim Fernsehen', p. 170.
34. Harun Farocki, 'Die Aufgabe des Schnittmeisters: Ökonomie. Gespräch mit Peter Przygodda', *Filmkritik*, 10 (1979), 487–91 (p. 489).
35. See Angelika Wittlich in Pantenburg, 'The Golden Age of Television', p. 114, taken from an email exchange with Pantenburg on 20 February 2017.
36. Farocki, 'Über die Arbeit mit Bildern beim Fernsehen', p. 169.
37. The work of television editors was dominated by women at the time and, in a dossier called 'Arbeiten — beim Fernsehen', Farocki also focuses specifically of the role of editors in television, adding to the publication two transcripts of conversations he had with the editors Elke Christ and Erika Kisters.
38. Farocki in Pantenburg, 'The Golden Age of Television', p. 116, taken from Harun Farocki, *Conversation with Michael Baute and Stefan Pethke* (Berlin: Kino Arsenal 2008).
39. Farocki, 'Bilder aus dem Fernsehen', in *Harun Farocki — meine Nächte mit den Linken*, ed. by Pantenburg, pp. 143–47 (p. 146).
40. Gilles Deleuze, 'Three Questions on *Six Times Two*', in *Negotiations: 1972–1990*, trans. by Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 37–47 (p. 44).
41. Farocki, 'Drückebergerei vor der Wirklichkeit', p. 137.
42. Ibid., p. 138.
43. Farocki, 'Über die Arbeit mit Bildern beim Fernsehen', p. 172.
44. Mary Ann Doane, 'Information, Crisis, Catastrophe', in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. by Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press/ BFI Books, 1990), pp. 240–66 (p. 251).
45. Ibid.
46. Farocki, 'Über die Arbeit mit Bildern beim Fernsehen', p. 166.
47. Ingemo Engström in Volker Pantenburg, Tom Holert, and Doreen Mende, 'Producing Building Blocks: The Working Paper "What Ought to be Done"', in *Harun Farocki: What Ought to be Done. Document, Commentary, Material*, ed. by Elsa de Seynes (Berlin: Harun Farocki Institut/

Motto Books, 2017), pp. 9–18 (p. 11), taken from an email exchange with Doreen Mende on 31 March 2016.
48. Harun Farocki, 'What Ought to be Done', trans. by Volker Pantenburg and Michael Turnbull, in *Harun Farocki: What Ought to be Done*, ed. by Seynes, pp. 3–5 (p. 5).
49. Pantenburg, Holert and Mende, 'Producing Building Blocks', p. 17.
50. Ibid., p. 13.
51. Farocki, 'What Ought to be Done', pp. 3–4.
52. Ibid., p. 4.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., p. 5.
55. Farocki, 'Über die Arbeit mit Bildern beim Fernsehen', p. 170.
56. Elsaesser, 'Working at the Margins', p. 104. For the legacy of Eisenstein on Farocki's work with images and montage see Pantenburg, *Farocki/Godard*, p. 234.
57. Farocki, 'What Ought to be Done', p. 4.
58. Doane, 'Information, Crisis, Catastrophe', p. 262.
59. Ibid., p. 251.
60. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (Cambridge, MA, & London: MIT Press, 2016), p. 78.
61. Ibid., p. 75.
62. Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

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Between Citational Genealogy and the Counter-Archival Uncanny: Adam Curtis and the Democratisation of the Archive

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Can't Get You Out of My Head is a six-part documentary film series made by Adam Curtis and released on the BBC iPlayer in February 2021. Media scholars such as James Bennett have taken the launch of the iPlayer as their first example of the disruption to the 'structure of television's scheduled flow' in this new era of digital and thus personalised viewing.[1] Curtis declared himself aware of the extra freedom this immediate release to iPlayer would give him in terms of the complexity of content he could deal with; yet apart from being longer, in many ways the series's form and content adheres to his signature style, inaugurated with the release of *Pandora's Box* (1992, BAFTA winner for Best Factual Series in 1993) and refined over the course of a number of series and stand-alone documentaries.[2] Many of these series such as *The Century of the Self* (2002) and films such as *Hypernormalisation* (2016) operate around constellations of similar themes: power, control, science, individualism, radicalism, uncertainty, and inequality, with distinct and recurring case studies. *Can't Get You Out of My Head*, for example, extends the theme of *The Trap* (2007) in vilifying figures such as Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, as Jonathan Rosenbaum puts it, 'for being elected on liberal/labor platforms and then immediately giving away their hard-won power to the banks and markets, meanwhile increasing class inequality'.[3] While the history of Prozac was examined in *The Trap* as a means of showing how the psychiatric establishment and drug companies worked together to pacify the masses, in *Can't Get You Out of My Head* Curtis charts the story of Valium and its promotor Arthur Sackler who was responsible for its widespread sale to doctors (insisting it was not addictive) thus contributing to it becoming the most widely prescribed medication in the Western world by 1971. Not just politics, medicine, and psychiatry, but culture, mathematics, and a whole host of different social, academic, economic, and

techno-scientific discourses are revealed to have contributed to the formation and perpetuation of damaging assumptions about humankind which, in turn, form the basis for practical actions taken by governments, economists, and individuals with often devastating results. As Michel Foucault himself said, 'Society is an archipelago of different powers' and this chapter takes Curtis's thematic cues to examine his work in the light of Foucauldian and post-Foucauldian theories: biopower, Achille Mbembe's 'necropower', and Byung Chul Han's 'psychopower' as related to the use of big data for the control of populations.[4] I argue that Curtis's series can benefit from being understood as a genealogical study of the present, aware of its own discursive will-to-power, and at the same time, maintaining openness to multiple possible readings. Understanding it in this way should subdue critiques that label Curtis's work as 'incoherent and conspiracy-fuelled'.[5] I demonstrate that while the BBC documentary-making tradition is clearly folded into his work, Curtis's citational use of the BBC, and other, archives produces a clear counter-archive to the hegemonic discourses of power that the BBC was often complicit in producing, reflecting and/or underpinning.

Citing some of the critics of his work, Rosenbaum states that 'a closer look at Curtis's filmmaking style starts to raise a few questions about both the arguments themselves and the way that he propounds them'.[6] Rosenbaum mentions earlier commentators Paul Myerscough and Paul Arthur who pronounced themselves 'worried' and doubtful, respectively, when it comes to 'intellectual shortcuts and simplifications' amongst other elements.[7] Indeed, Foucault was often criticised on the same basis as Curtis with sceptics questioning the historical accuracy of the narrative created. Foucault, for his part, says:

> I am fully aware that I have never written anything other than fictions. For all that, I would not want to say that they were outside the truth. It seems plausible to me to make fictions work within truth, to introduce truth-effects within a fictional discourse, and in some way to make discourse arouse, 'fabri-cate,' something which does not yet exist, thus to fiction something.[8]

Foucault, like Curtis, knowingly sought to analyse and re-examine accounts of the past to reveal damaging operations of power, often linked to narratives themselves, that continued to have detrimental effects on values and practices in the present.

When considering Curtis's use of voice-over, it is true that he does not do much to subvert what Stella Bruzzi calls the 'archetypal solid male narrator' that has aroused suspicion because it is 'inevitably and inherently didactic'. For Bruzzi, transgression, within this model can be achieved through 'the insertion of ironic detachment between image and sound' or 'the reflexive treatment of the narrative tradition'.[9] Whilst Curtis's work is, as John Doyle argues, 'metajournalistic', and certainly meta-discursive, *Can't Get You Out of My Head* does not make use of irony to undermine the narrative discourse in this way. For Curtis, the narration *is* his journalistic position.[10] If there is anything working to disrupt this seemingly closed and edifying perspective, it is the repeated tropes of the visual (and sonic) uncanny that punctuate the narrative. Indeed, I argue that the particular political potentiality comes precisely from this juxtaposition between a somewhat unashamedly homiletic

omniscient narrator and a visual uncertainty and unknowability, which serves to counterbalance this totalising thread and opens up the texts to multiple meanings, to be co-constructed by the viewer.

The uncanny and somewhat open and contradictory effects of Curtis's montages of footage taken from the BBC archives lends the work to further being considered with reference to Derrida's concept of 'archive fever'.[11] In a *New Yorker* feature, Sam Knight comments upon Curtis's 'extraordinary license to explore and experiment with the BBC's archive of television output from the past seventy-four years, which might be the largest in the world'.[12] Due to this privileged access to the BBC archives, which contain over sixty miles of shelves held at Perivale, Curtis could be described as an *archon*, one of those 'guardian' figures who 'have the power to interpret the archives'.[13] There are two further useful intellections in Derrida's 'Archive Fever' that not only shed light on the effects of Curtis's work but are also adjacent and complementary to the Foucauldian tools outlined above: the first asserts the future-orientated work of the interpretation of the archive.[14] This we see immediately from *Can't Get You Out of My Head*'s opening inter-titled quotation by David Graeber: 'The ultimate hidden truth of the world is that it is something we make and could just as easily make differently'. The second is Derrida's assertion of the archive's own contradictory and thus, to some degree, self-destructive workings.[15] It is not a coincidence that Derrida takes a 'Freudian Impression' as his lens through which to view the archive, and here I argue that Curtis specifically works to accentuate the uncanniness (as theorised by Freud) at the heart of the archive, thus deliberately undermining any totalising interpretation and allowing the viewer to participate in the construction of meaning, further democratising the archive's information, as should be the *archon*'s role.[16]

A Genealogical Exploration of the Present

In a 2015 interview Curtis said, 'Everything is a construction. Personally, I think I'm more honest about the construction in television than some of my peers who pretend that it's neutral. None of television is neutral, it's all propaganda'.[17] Characterising it as 'aesthetic radicalism', Doyle places emphasis on metajournalistic elements in his reading of Curtis's work, describing him as a 'remixologist' due to his heavy reliance on citational practices.[18] Curtis's work makes use of 'found footage', photographs, reportage from the archives, documentary extracts, all pulled into a journalistic narrative through his narration. Indeed, whilst Curtis is more likely to cite literary influences than visual ones, his style is reminiscent of the intermedial archival collage, often with didactic narrator, of the Latin American 'third cinema' movement emblematised by *The Hour of the Furnaces* (*La hora de los hornos*, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 1968). The first episode of that three-part film begins with white intertext on a black background reading 'Notas y testimonios sobre el necolonialismo la violencia y la liberación' [Notes and testimonies on neocolonialism, violence and liberation], followed by an opening sequence that intersperses bursts of footage of state violence and mass protest with a black screen and more intertext, overlayed with rhythmic drumming music. In the case of *Can't*

Get You Out of My Head white intertext on black exhibits the previously mentioned, more hopeful, quotation of Graeber: 'The ultimate hidden truth of the world is that it is something we make and could just as easily make differently'. The music is more otherworldly than in the opening to *The Hour of the Furnaces* and the inaugural images are more static. In the same vein as the 'third cinema' movement, however, Curtis is concerned with denouncing neocolonialism, violence, and inequality, as well as condemning liberal inaction in the face of these. Yet, unlike many of the 'third cinema' films, his work is not a revolutionary call to arms. As the Graeber quote illustrates, here, emphasis is placed on the transformative power of narrative rather than guns. In this sense, Curtis demonstrates a Foucauldian understanding of discourse: a belief in its power to shape the way people think and behave; and a commitment to ask questions of the present by revisiting and rewriting the narratives told about the past to form a better impression of how we have got here, and thus perhaps how to move forward.

This attitude towards the past and the way in which it informs our understanding of the present is visible in the following by Curtis in a recent interview about *Can't Get You Out of My Head*, from which I quote at length:

> In the past I've tended to follow one idea or one set of ideas and how that played out in the world. In this one, I wanted to show how there have been lots of tributaries, lots of streams that initially seemed to have nothing to do with each other, but have all flowed down to a sort of 'sea of now' that we are swimming in [...]. And in that sense, I was just trying to do a history of the roots of present-day desire for change and yet also fear and uncertainty about how to change, and a feeling that somehow everything is inevitable and you can't change it. There was this strange mix of our time and I just wanted to explain the roots of that, historically, by telling a number of different stories.[19]

Foucault likewise sees history as a 'profusion of entangled events', and in 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' he says:

> If the genealogist [...] listens to history, he finds that there is 'something altogether different' behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms.[20]

Both Foucault and Curtis eschew a teleological vision of history, emphasising instead the role of contingency in bringing about events and circumstances.[21] In Episode Three, entitled 'Money Changes Everything', which focuses among other things on the climate crisis, Curtis begins with phone footage taken from a driver-view position in a car in Malibu in 2018 by a woman (credited as Rebecca Hackett) crying and praying as she drives through intense wildfires. This brings the viewer straight into the subject-position of someone experiencing the immediate effects of an extreme weather event. He then goes back in time to articulate that Cold War developments, including attempts to predict and control the weather, had unintended consequences which, by sequential association, can be seen as a contributing factor to the present climate emergency. In discussing atomic bomb creator John Von Neumann's use of an early computer to model the climate system

Curtis says: 'his aim was to use it to predict and manipulate the weather to use as a weapon with which to attack the Soviet Union, but what he began had another consequence'. Left as a cliff hanger, this is followed by the statement, 'In 1961 a scientist Edward Lorenz made a mistake that revealed something that astonished him'. Curtis goes on to describe the way a change in a fourth decimal point revealed to scientists, for the first time, the instability of the climate system: 'he began to wonder whether the world's climate was not the stable, self-correcting system that other scientists believed; that it was unstable, and that one tiny change somewhere in the world could tip the whole system from one state into another'.

Each of these climate-related vignettes contains an emphasis upon the inexplicable, unknown, or unintended consequences of events or actions. As Foucault says, the purpose of a genealogy is not a quest for origins because they will always prove to have been diffuse and contingent:

> To follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations — or conversely, the complete reversals — the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents.[22]

Indeed, as described, Curtis attributes our knowledge of the danger of climate change to Lorenz's 'faulty calculation'. Those critics that accuse Curtis of fabricating conspiracies might argue that he is simply producing another 'grand narrative' to replace those that he challenges, since despite maintaining events in their dispersion, he does link them together through the would-be objective narrative voice, often taking strong political positions in doing so. Yet in a series such as *Can't Get You Out of My Head* that weaves together a vast number of different stories from multiple national contexts and about many different groups and individuals, it would be incredibly unlikely that any one viewer articulate the 'central thread' in the same way as any other. The sheer plurality and dispersion of images and themes is just one of the ways in which Curtis ultimately 'fails' to produce a grand narrative himself, yet, like Foucault, he is effective in explicitly challenging some of the powerful ideologies that have shaped the imaginations of millions before.

Emotional Histories and the Counter-Archival Uncanny's Challenge to Grand Narratives

The focus on the fear of the anonymous driving woman in the Californian wildfires reveals another aspect of Foucault's genealogical method from which Curtis derives inspiration. This is the revisionist approach to political events, refusing solely to focus on global events, the decisions of leaders, and privileged forms of 'traditional history'.[23] Instead, attention is often placed upon the stories of more peripheral historical figures: from Black Panther and Tupac Shakur's mother, Afeni Shakur, to Mao's wife Jiang Qing, and at other times relatively ordinary people, either through pre-existing documentaries or news footage and interviews. These are

rescued from the archive and visually and narratively fleshed out achieving a form of personalisation that helps the viewer to appreciate how individuals fit into wider historical moments. At other times, even more remote from power, footage of anonymous individuals or groups is used to create a space for the viewer to construct their own impression of what was thought or felt. As Foucault says, genealogy is concerned with 'sentiments, love, conscience, instincts'.[24] More concretely, Curtis describes his work as 'an emotional history', seeking to privilege inner thoughts and desires, as a crucial part of recording the mood or zeitgeist of a given time and the forces that shaped events. These personalised trajectories and emotional histories play an important part in counter-archivally challenging the grand narratives that support a certain understanding of the past as well as present realities that may be derived from them.

Two such grand narratives are those of Chinese communism and American individualism. Curtis undermines the notion of Chinese communism by showing how Mao's wife Jiang Qing was spurred on by a radical individualism and hunger for personal power, which helped to propel the Cultural Revolution into its most brutal and uncontrollable form. In the case of American individualism, he reveals how people's widespread isolation in suburbs led to alienation and mistrust manifesting paradoxically in communities such as the John Birch Society unifying around paranoia and conspiracy. In other words, both ideologies, which start from seemingly opposite positions (communism and individualism), seem to be haunted by their opposite principles.

The isolation, unease, and alienation of many ordinary people living in the suburbs is one of the recurring sites through which the visual uncanny erupts in the series, underscoring the notion of ghosts, haunting, and repression that Curtis also narratively discusses from the outset. For example, shortly after the focus on the fairly high-level climate science discussed previously, he lingers on a close-up shot of the face of a short-haired woman smoking in her suburban house, taken from the documentary *America: Democracy on Trial* (James Mossman, 1968). As she smokes and drinks coffee the shot lasts around forty seconds such that the viewer has time and space to imagine what she is thinking. Deep in thought, just towards the end, a worried look passes across her face and she bites her lip anxiously. As the close-up of her face fades, it becomes overlayed by a shot of a car driving past identical suburban houses suggesting that the same scene of preoccupied time-passing might be being repeated many times over in each of the domestic units (Figure 2.1). Curtis's narration follows:

> In America in the 1960s was a man who was convinced that there was something frightening hidden under the surface of the new modern suburbs; that behind what looked like a confident individualism rising up throughout America, there were really hidden fears eating away at people from inside. There were feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and emptiness, and he was convinced he could make a lot of money out of these feelings.

The extrapolation of the feeling of fear experienced by this woman is thus visually and narratively generalised to include hidden fears haunting the suburbs of America,

Fig. 2.1. Pensive woman in the American suburbs, still from James Mossman's 1968 *Democracy on Trial*, in *Can't Get You Out of My Head*, dir. by Adam Curtis (UK, 2021).

but then reparticularised through the story of this man, Arthur Sackler, who saw a capitalistic opportunity in this alienation.

This suggestion of haunting is in line with Derrida's formulation of the 'archive' as 'cleft, divided, contradictory [...] always dislocating itself because it is never one with itself'.[25] The archive contains a spectral version of every position, thus confirming none; for every example there will be a counter-example. In particular, the BBC archive lends itself well to counter-archival mining because, as a public broadcasting service, the BBC has always had an ambivalent relationship to power: it is in a privileged position to both establish hegemonic values (that may reflect the biases of society of the time) and also call other forms of (state or economic) power to account. The permanent contradiction within the archive is what Derrida called 'archive fever' and he describes this fever 'or disorder which we are experiencing today' as one manifested within 'modern history and historiography' including 'all the detestable revisionisms, as well as the most legitimate, necessary, and courageous rewritings of history'. In other words, rewritings of history, based on the archive, will always occur but some of them will be 'detestable' and others 'necessary, and courageous'. I argue that Curtis uses the BBC archive to unravel hegemonic discourses and engage in the courageous rewritings that seek to reveal the damaging operations of power and, as Derrida puts it, the 'unstable limit between public and private, between the family, the society, and the State, between the family and an intimacy even more private than the family, between oneself and oneself'.[26]

For the next few vignettes there is a particular gender dimension to Curtis's investigation, potentially locating women as most emblematic of this 'unstable limit between public and private, between the family, the society and the State' that Derrida describes. Curtis reports:

> The new wave of feminists pointed out that many more women than men were taking Valium. They said the drug was being used to blot out the feeling that millions of women were having that there was something badly wrong with their lives. That when they did what they were supposed to do it didn't bring the happiness they had been promised.

Set against a clip of a young girl being presented as a debutante in society, this is followed by a jumbled testimony of a fatigued-sounding woman:

> There's got to be a better way for me, and I went about it in the way that I wanted to, regardless of what society was saying. And then it all kind of caved in on me. And I just figured, well, you know, what's the use? And so I ended up in the state hospital [...]. I found if I... I don't think there is a solution because if I act the way society tells me to act, and do abide by the rules, my life is fine and everybody's happy.

This focus upon the expectations that society constructs and the way that individuals feel beholden to these expectations is an example of what Foucault identifies as the process of self-disciplining that operates hand in hand with the 'examination' operating in all medical and educational institutions since the end of the eighteenth century and the obligation to conform to what psychiatric power defines as 'normal'.[27] With the mediation of capital, the pharmaceutical industry in the twentieth century turns to drugs to control 'abnormal' tendencies and mask the fact that the aspirations produced by capitalism are far from fulfilling.

Biopower, Necropower, and Psychopower

The mass-prescription of addictive anti-depressant medication is just one form of control, in this case facilitated by the medical-pharmaceutical establishment in an effort to make money and turn individuals into docile and productive citizen-consumers. Curtis's series visually distinguishes between a number of different types of power that Foucault and his successors identify and theorise in their work, beginning with the enduring legacy of colonialism that, through its racial stratification, causes forms of necropolitical power to endure long past the end of the public 'torture' era of punishment that faded out towards the beginning of the nineteenth century.[28] In Achille Mbembe's scheme, 'politics' is theorised as a function of 'the work of death' and 'sovereignty', 'the right to kill' and, at the very outset of the series (giving it particular prominence) Curtis explores this with reference to the then British colony of Kenya.[29] The narrative introduction proceeds thus: 'In the late 1950s, as the British Empire was falling apart, there was a growing sense that something was badly wrong under the surface'. The 'old forms of power' that Curtis begins to describe (and the corruption and violence that characterise them) are represented initially in a visual register of City of London bankers, who 'had been at the very heart of the Empire'. Amongst them, Lord Kindersly and William Keswick, we are told, were accused of using insider information to make themselves millions of pounds. They dismiss the charges saying, 'it is difficult to remember conversations one had whilst shooting on a

grouse moor'. They are declared innocent by the government. This is emblematic of the scenario which has been common throughout history in which the poor are disproportionally criminalised, whilst the rich (especially financiers) get away with (figuratively and often literally) murder. Indeed, Mbembe argues that by no means have we seen the completion of the passage from punitive power to a form of sovereignty experienced as 'the production of general norms by a body (the demos) made up of free and equal men and women', in other words Foucault's disciplinary society.[30] In this first sequence we see that at the heart of British 'democracy' the elites already rig the system to ensure that they maintain disproportionate power and wealth. Curtis proceeds, structurally, to link this power and wealth to atrocities in the colony.

This revelation of banker corruption precipitates a narrative turn-of-phrase that becomes a common linking device throughout the series: 'At the same time'. In this case, at the same time, 'reports had started to come back from one of the last parts of the Empire — Kenya — that seemed to show that those in charge had gone out of control'. An image of an immobile Kenyan child on the ground with a group of white and black men standing over them (seemingly trying to identify whether they are dead) is followed by a cut to the 'psychological adjustment' camps established as part of the fight against the Kenyan liberation movements, such as the Mau Mau. Here, whatever forms of 're-education' may be initially intended, mass torture and killing ensue. Mbembe's stated concerns are precisely these figures of sovereignty still very much operating 'the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations' that, he argues, 'constitute the *nomos* of the political space in which we still live'. He identifies that 'the colony represents the site where sovereignty consists fundamentally in the exercise of power outside the law (*ab legibus solutus*) and where "peace" is more likely to take the face of a "war without end" '. For him, it is the 'state of exception and the relation of enmity' that have 'become the normative basis of the right to kill'.[31] In this case, the 'state of exception' is, precisely, the potential fissure of empire; and thus violence is constructed as necessary to subordinate the Mau Mau group at the forefront of the fight for independence.

Curtis's representation visualises what Mbembe describes as a 'peculiar terror formation' within the colony that represents a 'concatenation of biopower, the state of exception, and the state of siege'.[32] In the first camp shot we see rows of Kenyan men facing in different directions and a woman with a baby on her back being marched down the aisle by a white woman in a colonial uniform (Figure 2.2). The mass of people ordered in such a way demonstrates the biopolitical effort to control, or what the narration describes as 'manipulate [...] the African mind', yet the obvious impermanence of the camp-like situation evokes the 'state of exception/siege', and accordingly the narration confirms, 'but then what happened in the camps turned into a frenzied madness. The British used mass killing and torture as they desperately tried to hold on to power'. Mbembe describes this operation thus, 'Here [in the colony] we see the first syntheses between massacre and bureaucracy, that incarnation of Western rationality'.[33] Visually, correspondingly, we see an

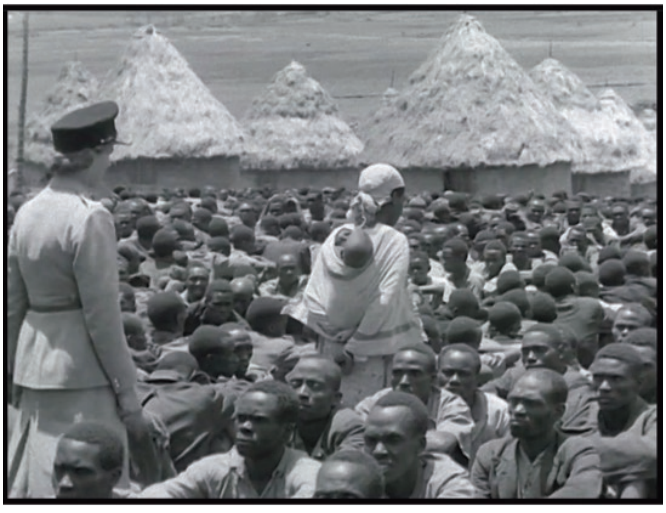

Fig. 2.2. Prisoners at a British 'psychological adjustment' camp in Kenya, still from *Can't Get You Out of My Head*, dir. by Curtis (UK, 2021).

administrator in a van holding some papers whilst cuddling up to a figure covered entirely in a white sheet with eye holes cut out, looking ominously like a figure of the Ku Klux Klan, producing an uncanny effect due to the displacement of this figure familiar in one context (the southern United States at successive times in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) to the British colony. Thus, the Kenyan camps sequence clearly demonstrates Mbembe's thesis that 'power [...] continuously refers and appeals to exception, emergency, and a fictionalized notion of the enemy', in this case the Mau Mau.[34] It is, furthermore, clearly racism, as Foucault diagnosed and Mbembe underscores, that facilitates the split between 'those who must live and those who must die'.[35]

Whilst earlier works of Foucault such as *Discipline and Punish* relied on historical periodisation to chart changes in regimes of sovereignty, in 'The Mesh of Power' Foucault is clear about the need to speak of 'a hierarchy of different powers' at work at any one time that need to be appreciated in their 'historic and geographic specificity'.[36] Curtis, through visual and narrative juxtaposition, as well as larger structural associations, is adept at conveying the coexistence of disciplinary power with other forms of 'necropower' and punitive 'anatomo-politics', the enacting of full control over the body that institutions such as prisons still aim to achieve, and that are also heavily practiced along racialised lines. Later in the series in a disturbing sequence dealing with the 'new world of mass incarceration in America', we see predominantly non-white inmates being forced to crawl along the floor to their dorms, full body to the ground, some of them naked, as they are verbally abused by guards in a form of humiliation and dehumanisation reminiscent of the treatment of prisoners of war (Figure 2.3).

Racism, back in the metropolis, is the next site of Curtis's exploration in the first episode, chronologically following the Kenyan camps, and introducing the first

Fig. 2.3. Dehumanising treatment of prisoners at an unnamed United States penal facility, still from *Can't Get You Out of My Head*, dir. by Curtis (UK, 2021).

personal case study of the series, that of Trinidadian intellectual and 'revolutionary but also a vicious gangster', Michael de Freitas.[37] De Freitas, as characterised in this phrase by Curtis, is emblematic of the tensions and contradictions inherent to the archive and arguably every human being, discussed above with reference to Derrida's 'Archive Fever'. Whilst, as the series reveals, de Freitas later went on to commit morally reprehensible actions such as exploitation and murder, we can still learn from his story and appreciate that, at other times and in other circumstances, he may have had noble intentions. In the first instance, de Freitas's account, presented in interview footage, reveals the disjuncture felt by those who travel from the colonies and ex-colonies to the so-called 'motherland' only to find an anxious and fearful society that rejects them. In other terms the fearful society could be characterised as experiencing a form of sublimated 'colonial/postcolonial guilt', but Curtis denominates this particular phenomenon 'Englishism', defined as 'an anger and a melancholy that came from the loss of empire'. In a classically arrogant and patronising vein the television interviewer asks, 'you see this is the great mystery, see when you came here you say you found you weren't wanted, why then did you stay? Why did you choose to stay here?'. This is a problematic formulation of the discourse that assumes that Britain is superior and therefore people choose to come in large numbers, and thus they ought to be grateful for the opportunity, despite the social ostracism and hostility they face; the atrocious 'why don't you just go back to where you came from' narrative expressed starkly in public broadcasting. In another sequence, in the same episode, we see a South Asian man, fitted with a microphone by a journalist, entering a barber's shop only to be told 'No' by a well-to-do sounding voice (presumably the barber). When he insists, following more flat 'no's without explanation, the barber says the shop is closed, while it clearly is not. As such, the initial vignettes move from the continued punitive and genocidal control

waged under the name of empire in Kenya into the metropolis which still upholds racial hierarchy in discourse as well as its own forms of dehumanising practices.

In other case studies from the series, Otherness in more than just racial terms is shown to be an object of discursive and material disciplinary policing. As Foucault writes at the end of *The Will to Knowledge* (1976), the 'formidable power of death', that had reached new heights of genocide and war since the nineteenth century, was a paradoxical counterpart to the new forms of control that sought 'a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations'. This form of power was related to 'the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity'. This is what Foucault terms 'the biopolitics of the population'.[38] One of the pillars of this 'technology of power' developed to achieve 'the regulation of the social body' was sexuality. Accordingly, this aspect of Foucault's analysis is revealed in another of Curtis's vignettes when we learn of the case of the trans woman Julia Grant, who faced incredible barriers to fulfilling her desire to transition to the body she wanted, erected by medical and psychological gatekeepers.

In the attitude of the authoritarian, patriarchal psychiatrist, we see the same logics underpinning the rise of 'biopolitical' power, whereby reproduction and the family were placed at the heart of state productivity, and forms of unproductive sexual desire were stigmatised and policed. In fact, the psychiatrist is such a patronising representative of the medical establishment, and its pretensions to be the guardian of norms, whilst withdrawing people's control over their own bodies, that it almost comes across as a parody of Foucault's argument. In a room with three additional observers with clipboards, the psychiatrist begins by asking, 'What do you mean by "being a woman"?', to which Julia replies, 'I tend to reject my masculine body'. The psychiatrist asks, 'You know it to be masculine?', to which Julia replies, 'I identify it as masculine because society identifies it as masculine', and the psychiatrist callously says, 'It's not a matter of society, it's a matter of anatomy'. When Julia, frustrated with the process, decides to have breast implants privately, the psychiatrist scolds her:

> It is a medical matter it isn't a personal choice. I like to be informed. See, once again you're overstepping the mark and I don't like it one bit [...] you're not arranging this affair in a manner that fits our protocol [...] and I don't like people who step out of line.

The bureaucratic language of 'protocol' in this system supersedes bodily and mental autonomy and the freedom to choose (and even pay for) one's own outcomes. The fully tragic consequences of this bullying and forestalling attitude to Julia's transition are revealed when we see her seek a privatised sex change operation. When complications arise from the surgery she is taken into hospital and, because the surgery was unrecorded on her medical file, the authorities do what they can to stop the bleeding but leave her unable to have orgasms. At the end of her story, we see her frustrated, depressed, and alone.

The working of Foucault's 'biopolitical power' is evident in this scenario when regulation of bodies becomes the purview of the state. However, in his post-Foucauldian work, Byung Chul Han shows that under neoliberalism there is a shift and a new regime of power adds to this dynamic: 'Biopolitics is the governmental technology of disciplinary power. However, this approach proved altogether unsuited to the neoliberal regime, which exploits the psyche above all'.[39] Biopolitics is taken one step further when 'big data are used to control people at a pre-reflexive level in what Han has termed 'digital psychopolitics'. Big data are determined by Han to represent 'a highly efficient psychopolitical instrument that makes it possible to achieve comprehensive knowledge of the dynamics of social communication'.[40] In the final episode, mirroring this trajectory of increased control over bodies and minds on a mass scale, Curtis reveals some of the workings of different societies that exploit this in varied ways: China, the United States, and the United Kingdom. As with the vignettes deconstructing the opposition between American individualism and Chinese communism, discussed earlier, Curtis visually and narratively deconstructs the dichotomy between perceived social control under Chinese communism and ostensible freedom in 'the West', revealing that both are subject to the neoliberal 'Dictatorship of Capital'.

The 'Dictatorship of Capital' is visually established in the opening sequence of the very first episode of the series including images of London's Canary Wharf, emblematic of global financial capitalism, structurally linked through a jump cut to a burning car in a low-income area, followed by an advancing wall of riot police in the USA, linked in the same way to a triumphant Biden just being elected, and succeeded by a room full of computer servers. In this visual narrative capitalism, as Han argues, has achieved the status of a 'new transcendency' under which circumstance 'politics lapses into servitude [...]. It becomes the handmaiden of Capital'.[41] These images are revisited at the beginning of a vignette in which, in the United Kingdom, the polemic figure of Dominic Cummings is presented as key in spreading the belief among politicians of the need to use large-scale data analytics to examine 'underlying patterns in modern society'. Over a visual sequence of Chinese hostesses being trained for the Olympics, followed by other shots of busy streets and people on public transport in China, the narrator says: 'But Cummings was not alone. Across the world there was a growing feeling that politics had completely lost touch with the people and was therefore losing its power to hold society together'. Shortly afterwards, a police bureaucrat of the city of Guiyang proudly explains, and demonstrates, the way in which individual citizens are marked and tracked in all of their social interactions in the offline world, as well as in the online. Good behaviour is rewarded with 'social credits' and the failure to submit to this form of conditioning over time leads to confinement and so-called 're-education'.

Quoting Karl Marx's *Gundrisse*, Han reminds us that 'it is not the individuals who are set free by free competition; it is, rather, capital which is set free'.[42] The lack of freedom for individuals and neutralisation of resistance to this situation in the USA is mirrored in visuals that pan down a big glass skyscraper from a low camera angle, to see the American and Texas flags reflected in it. This cuts to a low-angle

view of a similar looking skyscraper from inside the opposite glass building (giving the effect of a cage) which pans down and across to take in a man in a suit coming up the escalator. Interspersed with interview footage of him, Tupak Shakur says:

> You know those little things that they have for the mice, where they go through around in a circle and there's little blocks for it and everything, well society is like that. They'll let you go as far as you want but as soon as you start asking questions and you're ready to change — boom.

Through examining these different forms of control, from the base punitive anatomo-political, to the biopolitical control of people's lives and its final evolution into the digital psycho-political, Curtis demonstrates that many of these technologies of control overlap and enhance each other. It is only through the counter-archival examination all of these different 'tributaries' that make up the 'sea of now' that we can apprehend what the future may hold, and work to imagine it differently.

Conclusion

The counter-archival, uncanny effects produced by Curtis's citational return to the archive, as well as the call to imagine the future differently, remind us of Derrida's figuration of the archive as, crucially, 'a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow'.[43] In the final episode Curtis touches on the eruption of Covid-19 into the already chaotic global reality:

> In the past, the shock of catastrophes has often led to a radical reorganisation of societies. And it may be that even in the gross uncertainty of these days, that same impulse to imagine other kinds of future will emerge.

He proceeds to speculate upon three possible futures: first, one that builds upon the Chinese model of the mass prediction and control of human behaviour that we have seen; the second is that 'the future will be like the past', which is visualised by scenes of Joe Biden coming out and waving to a crowd, implying that his election represents the continuation of the same old problematic system; and finally, 'the third possibility is to try to imagine genuinely new kinds of futures, ones that have never existed before'. This ends the series on a hopeful note, with a re-assertion of the power of the imagination, in this case prompted by Curtis's counter-archive, to shape the future differently.

As discussed, Curtis can be understood to be one of the *archons* of Derrida's 'Archive Fever'. He is afforded, by the BBC, 'the hermeneutic right... the power to interpret the archive', of which they are the guardians.[44] In a footnote to 'Archive Fever' Derrida states that 'there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory'. Furthermore, '[e]ffective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitutions, and its interpretation'.[45] In a recent interview Curtis discusses the fact of the series being released straight to BBC iPlayer, rather than being shown on terrestrial television. In a podcast interview with journalist David Chambers, Curtis is clear about the very different opportunities that making films

for the Internet, as opposed to television, have afforded him. Specifically, he talks about the added complexity obtainable when you are not 'explaining everything to everyone'. In this case, 'you know that they can stop and start and go and find things out'. As a result, 'it becomes a much looser and a much more respectful relationship with the audience because you just assume that they're going to do what they want to do rather than just being my prisoner for an hour'.[46] This proves that, despite the ostensibly didactic tone of the narration discussed in the Introduction, Curtis is well aware that he does not have control over the meanings made in the minds of the viewers.

By presenting his interpretation of the archive to the public, and by leaving them space to further make meaning of it for themselves, Curtis plays a crucial part in democratising the 'information' held in the archive. The word 'information' itself comes from the Latin noun *informatio*, 'outline, concept, idea' or the verb *informare*, 'to train, instruct, educate, shape'; thus, in a relevant sense, 'information' is not a fully-fledged piece of knowledge being transferred, as implied by current usage, but is by nature only an outline or idea expressed by the transmitter that is *in formation* into an idea or concept in the mind of the viewer.[47] Thus, Curtis democratises information and creates a counter-archive on multiple different levels: he uncovers stories from the archive that would otherwise remain hidden; he provides a narrative framework to contextualise the material historically in ways that disrupt the hegemonic and monoglossic discourses of power; and, through creative juxtapositions, dissonance, and lingering (often on the inexplicable), he conjures a form of the uncanny that successfully 'haunts' his visual ordering of the archive, crucially leaving space for the viewer to form their own understanding of themselves, the world they inhabit, and the possible futures that lie ahead.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that Curtis sets out to give a genealogical account of the present. In the same vein as Foucault, he understands discourse to be something that has shaped, and can shape, the world. The account he constructs provides an important counter-narrative to hegemonic and monoglossic discourses of (the British) empire, Chinese communism, the Cold War, the American Dream, and liberalism (among others), as well as mistakes and problematic legacies of the medical, mathematical, and psychological sciences. The establishment, late capitalism, and forms of techno- and psycho-power are all in the firing line of his verbal-visual weaponry. However, instead of just replacing one narrative with another, I argue that he encourages viewers to co-construct knowledge as the films progress. By democratising long-since-forgotten elements of the archive, Curtis creates continuity with the past in ways that can only be interpreted and forged in the mind of each individual viewer. There is much that is left unexplained and even where there is explanation the totalising tone of his narrative voice is inevitably and deliberately undermined by 'archive fever', the tendency of the archive to contradict itself and reveal the uncanny and inexplicable elements of the human experience.

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CHAPTER 3

❖

Excavation and *Entstellung*: (Media-) Archaeological Activity and Postcolonial Memory Work in William Kentridge's *Wozzeck* and *The Head & the Load*

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Cinema is a lived documentation of cultural (dis)location.
— Giuliana Bruno[1]

Best known for his charcoal animations that detail the upheavals of South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, William Kentridge's artistic philosophy and modus operandi rigorously defend uncertainty, ambiguity, and contradiction. In this chapter, I approach the Freudian model of *Entstellung* (meaning 'distortion', but also 'dis-placement') not merely as an object of psychoanalytic interpretation, but also as a prevailing condition of contemporary moving image economies and the related practices of aesthetics and politics that Kentridge seeks to engage.[2] These concerns provide a pretext for thinking about media-archaeological practice in general and Kentridge's confrontation with historical and archival violence in particular. I consider this media-archaeological sensibility as one that illuminates the violent distortions that continue to haunt Western narratives of history and representation, and historical representation, since their inauguration in Plato's cave.

This analysis reads Kentridge's performative practice as one that mobilises the experiences of spatial and temporal fragmentation — displacements and distortions — that are characteristic of contemporary cultures of moving image circulation. In so doing, Kentridge is able to present alternative or forgotten accounts of history, or counter-histories, by (re)arranging a constellation of moving images and the technologies that produce them. Examining two of Kentridge's recent stage productions, I posit his artistic practice as an answer to two key questions of scholarship on the moving image in recent years. Firstly, the question of 'where is

cinema?' that has preoccupied the likes of Raymond Bellour, Erika Balsom, and Francesco Casetti.[3] And secondly, Thomas Elsaesser's 'why media archaeology (now)?' posed in his meditation on media archaeology 'as symptom'.[4]

For Elsaesser, these questions entail thinking of media-archaeological practice in relation to a constellation of contemporary crises: of history, causality, and memory, and of representation and the image.[5] Against this turbulent background, Freud's conception of *Entstellung* is instructive as a means of thinking the archaeological and the symptomatic together. In this vein, I evaluate the ways in which Kentridge renders the distortions and deformations, of landscapes and bodies, which always contour the construction of historical narratives. In Freud's account in *Moses and Monotheism*, the distortions that all history writing is subject to are figured as a murder scene in which 'the difficulty is not in perpetrating the deed, but getting rid of its traces'. Freud notes the double meaning of the German *Entstellung*, which 'should mean not only "to change the appearance of something" but also "to put something in another place, to *displace*" '.[6] This logic of dislocation and displacement is one we can recognise in contemporary discourses on the 'where?' of cinema and in media archaeology's avowal of non-linear media histories that entail finding different media and their traces in strange and unexpected times and places.

The model of distortion is one that rests on the figure of the corpse, the criminological body that is forcibly removed, mutilated, and buried to hide the traces of violence visited upon it. Figure is thrown into ground with the hope of dissembling, forgetting, and destroying an original secret or truth. *Entstellung* thus serves as a model that allows the psychoanalytic to be thought in relation to the historical, as historical narratives function as crime scenes or sites for forensic archaeology. The investigative act of excavation, turning over soil, thus functions to disturb that which has been buried to engage processes of rupture and discontinuity and dislodge conventional or ready-made historical narratives.

Using this expanded understanding of excavation and *Entstellung*, I examine Kentridge's production of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* (2020), which follows the trajectory of a tormented soldier driven to murder by inhuman mechanisms of patriarchal authority, and of *The Head & the Load* (2018), which presents a kaleidoscopic imagining of the experiences of African 'carriers' during the First World War. Both productions explore traumatic landscapes, African and European, ravaged by industrial warfare and colonialism in the early twentieth century. While in *Wozzeck* the explicit crime scene of Marie's murder and Wozzeck's drowning is foreshadowed at the very beginning of the drama, *The Head & the Load* deals with questions of 'recording and recognising' the crimes of colonial regimes on a larger scale. The counter-historical imperative 'to exceed or negotiate the constitutive limits of the archive', in Saidiya Hartman's terms, and the specific distortions of anti-Black violence ignored by colonial records thus become a central matter of concern.[7] I contend media archaeology as performed by Kentridge suggests a way of exposing rather than disavowing the foundational distortions that structure the violence of all archival economies.[8] It is in this sense that I read Kentridge's practice as counter-archival: revealing and reclaiming distortion to narrate the alternative, multiple, and 'forgotten' histories of the colonial archive.

A Man with a Film Projector in the Opera House: *Wozzeck*

Set in the trenches of the First World War, the opening scene of Kentridge's production of *Wozzeck* for the Metropolitan Opera places media archaeology front and centre of the production. After the conductor has walked out to the applauding audience, silence falls and parts of the dimly lit set are just about visible: a few wooden gangways and, most notably, a small rectangular screen stage left. As the lights dim further, only the white-ish rectangle of the screen is discernible amid the gloom. A man dressed in a soldier's uniform and cap, the titular Wozzeck, emerges from the side of the stage, wheeling a film projector on a wooden trolley and aligning it in front of the screen at the very edge between stage and audience. Wozzeck then gingerly turns on the projector, slides a plate in, and begins turning the handle of the cinematograph to initiate a montage of various images — injured bodies and faces, a Muybridgean horse, Wozzeck's captain — all projected onto the screen. As if those figures too have been galvanised by this action, the captain marches on stage and across the screened projection while the cor anglais associated with his character springs into life in the orchestral pit.

This opening to Kentridge's production of Berg's opera inaugurates an overdetermined displacement of its own by replacing a key stage direction from Berg's libretto and the original text of Georg Büchner's drama, *Woyzeck*, written in 1836. In Büchner's play and Berg's operatic adaptation, the scene begins with Wozzeck/Woyzeck shaving the captain in front of a mirror. The captain implores Wozzeck to work more carefully ('Slowly, Wozzeck, slowly!') and admonishes him for his lack of morality, having fathered a child out of wedlock. In Kentridge's production, however, the act of shaving is replaced with, or displaced by, another manual operation: Wozzeck turning the handle of the cinematograph to produce the projection on screen. A man with a film projector has entered the opera house.

From the outset, Kentridge's production of *Wozzeck* activates a multiplicity of textual, cultural, biographical, criminal, and case histories. The historical dislocation that shifts the setting of Berg's libretto and Büchner's nineteenth-century drama to the trenches of the First World War is thus also registered by a medial shift with the incorporation of the incipient technology of cinematography at the start of the performance. Setting the action at the eve of the First World War also engages the textual and performance history of Büchner's drama: a fragment at the time of his death in 1837, it was not performed publicly until 1913.[9] It was then that Berg himself became gripped by the drama, insisting 'someone must set it to music'.[10] This conjuncture of historical moments in the development from drama to opera at the eve of war is deliberately and self-consciously imbricated with the development of film technology and an iconography of industrialised warfare that would become embedded within film history. The gas-masked figures such as Wozzeck's son, the gigantic spectre of the Sandman (Figure 3.1), and members of the chorus, for example, recall the rendering of industrial disaster and wartime experience in G. W. Pabst's *Kameradschaft* (1931) and *Westfront 1918* (1930).

The wielding of the cinematograph by the barber-soldier Wozzeck thus also suggests an emphasis on the intertwined technological development of machines

Fig. 3.1. The gigantic, gas-masked figure of the Sandman looms over *Wozzeck*'s expansive set design. Photograph courtesy of the Marian Goodman Gallery.

of film and warfare at the historical moment Kentridge chooses to stage his production. Giuliana Bruno points to the invention of the *fusil photographique* by Etienne Jules-Marey as an example of Paul Virilio's 'sight machines' common to war and photography, asserting that 'with respect to domination, the film machine and war machine are bound not only historically but perceptually'.[11] In Bruno's account, the early cinema contemporaneous to Berg's writing his libretto for *Wozzeck* was complicit in an emergent visual culture in which 'ways of seeing and systems of spatio-visual reproduction can develop into ways of *controlling and destroying*. Exploration and mapping are a means of knowledge that can be used as an instrument of conquest'.[12] Read in light of this 'historical bond with colonialism', the opening image of Wozzeck and his film projector engages a framework of associations between apparatuses of war and cinema that extends far beyond the dugouts and gangways of the expansive set design, as the act of projecting is always imbricated with the act of 'shooting', a violence not only of attrition on European soil, but also of colonial expansion and domination further afield.[13]

The Refusal of Time

The operation of the film projector also transposes the anxieties of the captain, who exhibits a pathological fear of time, to the apparatus of film technology in general, and the turning of the film reel in particular. This turning extends the central metaphor of time in Berg's composition, exploiting the ambivalence of the turning motion and the double function of the cinematograph to both record, or 'shoot', and project. The captain expresses his horror at the thought of the world turning on its axis over the course of a day, exclaiming: 'That's why I cannot see a mill wheel anymore or I get melancholy!' There subsequently appears on the projection screen the figure of the captain sketched as an anthropomorphised spinning globe. Wozzeck's turning of the cinematograph handle, the film reel, and its projection thus extend a chain of metonymic association, resonating from dramatic text to musical composition to film projection.[14] The passing of time is represented in a series of turning or spinning motifs that abound in the text (from mysterious toadstools to spiders' webs); and the metaphor of the globe and the millwheel is elaborated further still by the turning of the reel belonging to the quintessential time-based medium: film.

Given Kentridge's interest in time as something mutable rather than absolute, most notable in his deployment of projection and procession in the installation *The Refusal of Time* (2012), his attraction to Berg's use of palindromic and retrograde musical structures (in both *Wozzeck* and another of Berg's operas *Lulu* (2015)) is hardly surprising. These formal characteristics of Berg's composition lend themselves to Kentridge's investment in unsettling the distorted relations of space and time taken for granted in everyday acts of perception, which, for Kentridge, always also involve forms of misrecognition. The 'unending' cycle of fifths in Berg's score, its palindromes and retrogrades, not only unsettle a sense of linear, temporal continuity, they create a sense of time turning back on itself, returning to the point at which it began in circles or loops: a negation, or refusal, of time, '*symbolically erasing what has taken place*'.[15]

This position is made more explicit by Theodor W. Adorno in his 'reminiscence' of Berg in which he describes the use of mirror and retrograde formations as: 'anti-temporal, they organise music as if it were an intrinsic simultaneity'. Adorno attributes this 'simultaneity' to the composer's 'sense for the visual', something that 'also extended into his composing as such. He laid out plans, which became ever more complicated, according to quasi-spatial symmetrical relationships'. Clearer still, in Berg's attention to visuality through his use of musical structure Adorno identifies 'an element of indifference toward succession, something like a disposition toward musical saturation of space'.[16] With the introduction of the film camera operated by Wozzeck, Kentridge not only extends the metaphor of cyclical rather than linear time through a mechanical-embodied relation that, with the turning of the handle, might reverse temporal progression back to its beginning; he also renders the 'visuality' of Berg's composition using the medium of cinematic projection.

Kentridge's *Wozzeck* thus affirms a complex citational relation between the

Fig. 3.2. Wozzeck peers at a reel of film stock held aloft in his outstretched hands. Photograph courtesy of the Marian Goodman Gallery.

materiality and visuality of different media. In the opening scene, once the captain has begun to address Wozzeck, the latter ceases to turn the handle of the projector and instead takes the spool of film stock into his hands. Time, insofar as it has been given material or spatial form, is manifest as tangible 'simultaneity' as Wozzeck peers at the film stock and runs it through his fingers (Figure 3.2). Just as in Adorno's account of Berg's composition, Wozzeck is able to look at the film for projection not as a linear series of frames in succession, but a simultaneous organisation of material arranged in space. Film projection here is not a question of linear continuity, but instead a set of overdetermined images that foreshadow the rest of the diegesis. Just as Berg's score foreshadows the end of the opera, the projection of a corpse lying in a body of water anticipates Wozzeck's death by drowning after he has murdered Marie, the mother of his illegitimate child. The projection screen thus becomes a site and an apparatus of *Entstellung*: of dis-placement by projecting the image of the corpse in an unknown landscape, a crime scene and site of forensic investigation, or excavation, while at the same time enacting a temporal dislocation by proleptically offering a glimpse of the drama's climax in its opening scene.

Prologue

If we consider the turning of the film projector by Wozzeck not only as an extension of the formal logic of Berg's composition, but also as an elaboration of its central metaphors by another medium, it becomes possible to locate the metonymic references of this (dis)placement of the filmic apparatus within a broader media history and iconography of cinematic openings. As I have suggested, the arrival of Wozzeck and his cinematograph in the auditorium clearly bears a resemblance to the beginning of Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929).[17] And while elsewhere in his *œuvre* Kentridge has referenced landmark figures of cinema history from Muybridge to Méliès, I read the incorporation of the film projector in the place of the act of shaving in *Wozzeck* as an oblique allusion to another foundational act of filmic disfiguration: the prologue to Luis Buñuel's *Un chien andalou* (1929). Wozzeck, tentatively at first and then quite deliberately turning the handle of the cinematograph, displaces the manual operation of shaving — if not a rotary, then a curvilinear tracing of the body's surface — in the Büchner drama and Berg libretto to the action of the projectionist-filmmaker. At the same time, this action relocates the narrative of the drama to situate it as part of a particular apparatus and its associated medial genealogy.

In *Un chien andalou*, the shaving scene provides the pretext to the iconic act of violence inflicted on the organ of vision, the (camera) eye, and the female body, enacting the metonymic link between the slashing of the razor blade with the cut of the director: it is Buñuel, playing himself, director and barber, who makes the cut. In Kentridge's opening to *Wozzeck* there is an inversion of the logic that structures Buñuel's prologue: an opening scene of shaving is substituted for, or displaced by, its metonym: the operation of the cinematograph. As with Buñuel, protagonist and projectionist are united in a single figure as the hand(i)work of shaving is replaced by Wozzeck's turning, and later touching, of the film stock. This metonymic relation between two kinds of prologue, or opening scene, thus also affirms the fact that the cinematic medium is always the site of a certain manipulation: the violence of cutting done to the material of the film strip. Any apparent temporal or narrative continuity always rests on this act of cutting, which montage works to make explicit. This sense of violent rupture has perhaps never been more evident than in Buñuel's prologue, which begins in the fairy-tale temporality of 'once upon a time' before cutting to the setting 'eight years later' for the film's remaining action. The dislocations of spatio-temporal continuity in Buñuel's film thus have a particular resonance considering Kentridge's *Wozzeck* and its displacement of another opening shaving scene. With the incorporation of the cinematograph in the opening scene, Kentridge foregrounds the device, quite literally, throwing into relief the metonymic function of the filmic apparatus as figure and its inescapable associations with violence and distortion — both in the disfigurement of the human body and its displacement in space and time. Indeed, it is these very bodily and spatio-temporal forms of *Entstellung* that allow the narrative, and for Freud any narrative, to take place. Only with the turning of the film projector and all that is associated with it, can the opera begin.

Taking this comparison of the openings to *Wozzeck* and Buñuel's prologue to *Un chien andalou* into account only serves to affirm Kentridge's fidelity to Berg's musical composition in its foreshadowing of the violence to come later in the diegesis. While the unidentified body in the pond projected onto the screen in 'Scene I' portends Wozzeck's fate, the oblique allusion to Buñuel's prologue, which presents a notorious act of violence visited on the female body under a moonlit sky, likewise foreshadows the opera's ending in which Wozzeck murders Marie with a razor blade under the reddening light of the moon. There is, then, a sense that here too the metonymic link between these particular media histories ends where it has begun. The circular logic of these associations is one that clearly aligns with media archaeology's investment in probing non-linear histories across different media to prompt the notion that we have been 'here' before. In particular, Kentridge's mobilisation of distortion and displacement in his prologue suggest a form of citation through which the 'new' medium of digital scenographic projection is ambivalently 'disguised' as an old one: citing the 'obsolete' medium of cinematic exhibition.[18]

Archives and Afterlives

For Kentridge, however, this figuration of violence and distortion has another privileged metonymic site, and one which recurs across his *œuvre*: the allegory of Plato's cave. An *ur*-(media-)archaeological site, the cave inaugurates a 'nexus of enlightenment, emancipation, and violence' central to the relations of knowledge and power that structure all forms of representation in Kentridge's account. In the first of his *Six Drawing Lessons* (2014), 'In Praise of Shadows', Kentridge reminds us that the prisoners locked in the darkness of Plato's cave 'are chained feet and neck so that they can only see forward to the shadows'.[19] This state of enslavement, he argues, reflects:

> A double image: the yokes and fetters of slaves as they are marched across Africa to slave markets; but more especially, fettered inside the darkness of the hulls of the ships, in the caves of ships in the Middle Passage across the Atlantic.[20]

Kentridge's double vision of Plato's cave allegory approaches the *locus classicus* of Western civilisation as a site inextricably linked with, or yoked to, the worst kinds of racial and colonial violence, the 'forcible dragging' of slaves from Africa and their imprisonment during the Middle Passage. The fundamental association Kentridge draws between the fetters in the cave and the slave ship bears a clear affinity with the writing of scholars such as Christina Sharpe and Hartman, who approach the voids of archival erasure as a means of redressing the always already irreparable loss and violence of transatlantic slavery and its 'afterlives'.[21] The cave provides an inaugural, or premonitory, emblematic space that connects both the vessel of the slave ship in the Middle Passage and, in Sharpe's account, enduring sites of anti-Black violence such as the prison camp and the boats of refugees crossing the Mediterranean.[22]

Knowing and looking, even and especially when enlisted in a mission of

enlightenment or edification, are never innocent. On the contrary, they provide the pretext for violence and subjugation through the 'forced looking' that has haunted the Western tradition of 'representation' from its very beginning. It is this violence at the *arkhē* of Western culture that, Kentridge argues, 'reaches its emblematic highpoint in the showing of the complete vulnerability of the forced look in the razor blade that blinds the eye in *Un chien andalou*'.[23] For Kentridge, the violence of colonialism and warfare with which the vision machines of film and photography deployed in *Wozzeck* are implicated — both historically and perceptually in Bruno's account — has already begun to take place in Plato's cave. The cave can thus be thought of both as a 'vessel', a metonym for the enduring semiotic of the slave ship and the hold of the Middle Passage, and in terms of an 'edifice', figurative and literal, coeval with the document as a site of inscription in Achille Mbembe's terms, and the 'starting point' for Derrida's writing on the 'taking place' or 'having a place' of the *arkhē* at the beginning of *Archive Fever*.[24] The (co)location of originary and nomological sites, 'there where gods command, there where authority and social order are exercised', should already make us think of Plato's cave in the terms Kentridge establishes as both *arkhē* and a kind of archive: a framework of representation and recording in which knowledge and vision always prefigure a right to violence.[25]

Where, then, does the play of light and shadow in Plato's cave and Kentridge's projections leave us in relation to questions of archival logic? On the one hand, there emerges the promise of a referential relation proper to the cinematic, a claim to objectivity that is also the basis of the distortive illusions of fiction. This tension is inherent to the problematic of representation and cinematic ontology just as the model of *Entstellung* figures forms of historical record as necessarily distorted or displaced in some way. Derrida is also interested in the time as well as the place of the archive, asking, 'what is the moment *proper* to the archive', the committing to memory not as 'live or spontaneous memory' (*mnēmē* or *anamnesis*) but as 'a certain hypomnesiac and prosthetic experience of the technical substrate'.[26] Wozzeck's projector, its film stock, and projection screen might be considered such a hypomnesiac apparatus and, in its displacement of the tools of shaving, as a kind of prosthesis. Wozzeck's cinematograph is also prosthetic in the linguistic sense of being placed at the beginning, and at the front, of Kentridge's production.

Kentridge, meanwhile, sees the matter of perception as a kind of membrane between self and world: a threshold at which we 'meet the world halfway'.[27] In making the charcoal sketches that form the basis for his projections, Kentridge claims 'the sheet of paper is simply a visible extension of the retina, an emblematic demonstration of that which we know but cannot see'.[28] Wozzeck's attention to the film stock itself stresses the material and embodied relation to recording and archiving, the traces left on the skin of the film, as vulnerable to the cut of the film editor as the hand or — most vulnerable of all — the eye to the razor blade in *Un chien andalou*. In this respect too, the relations of order and authority common to the cave allegory and Derrida's meditation on the *arkheion* and *archons*, avow a violence intrinsic to archival economy: 'right on that which permits and conditions

archivisation, we will never find anything other than that which exposes to destruction'.[29] This exposure and the vulnerability of the substrate reveal the drives of destruction and oblivion that necessarily undergird the logic of the archive. As that which a priori works against itself, the archive figures a form of self-effacement not unlike the cyclical structures of Berg's composition and Kentridge's 'refusal of time' in *Wozzeck*: that which is recorded or preserved is at the same time reversed, destroyed, or erased.

From Plato's Cave to the Turbine Hall: *The Head & the Load*

Questions of archival economy and alternative records of cultural memory are central to *The Head & the Load*. The drives to destruction and forgetfulness integral to the process of archivisation in Derrida's terms are thematised in Kentridge's project seeking to 'recognise and record' the deeds of African subjects during the First World War, exploring another or counter-archive amid the penumbra of conventional narratives of the conflict. While it should be noted that productions of *The Head & the Load* have been staged in a number of venues including New York's Park Avenue Armory, the Ruhrtriennale, and the Holland Festival, and that site-specific readings of Kentridge's works can be overstated, it is worth dwelling on the importance of the time and place of the work's world premiere at Tate Modern in London.

The piece was performed from 11 to 15 July 2018 in the gallery's cavernous Turbine Hall. A space synonymous with large-scale and big-name installations, Tacita Dean's landmark installation *FILM* (2011) in particular provides a pretext for my reading of *The Head & the Load* in terms of Dean's attention to the use of the hall's architectural space and scale as a support for the obdurate materiality of analogue film projection. The performances of *The Head & the Load* formed part of the '14–18-NOW' series of First World War centenary art commissions, which also included works such as John Akomfrah's *Mimesis: African Soldier* (2018). As such, while Kentridge's decision to relocate *Wozzeck* to the trenches of the First World War stages a certain kind of historical re-enactment, *The Head & the Load* was conceived, developed, and funded within a framework of official remembrance and a programme of cultural events 'marking' the centenary of the conflict from 2014 until the end of 2019.

The site of the Turbine Hall and its association with eye-catching installations might thus have provided a backdrop for the kind of spectacular and 'giganticised' projections of the moving image that Balsom has identified as sites of less than critical scopic consumption in museum and gallery spaces.[30] Kentridge, however, is interested neither in conventional accounts of history, nor their spectacularisation, and in *The Head & the Load* moving images make up only part of a production that comprises music, choreography, performance, digital projections, and mechanised sculpture. Instead, performances of the work emphatically voice an alternative narrative of that otherwise familiar chapter of European history: the First World War. Recording the experiences of African 'carriers' ignored by historical accounts thus comes to figure as a form of counter-archival practice. The space of the

Turbine Hall can equally be considered another site of turning, like Plato's cave and Berg's spinning motifs in *Wozzeck*, appropriating the kind of 'forced looking' and pageantry that might otherwise be associated with official remembrance culture and commemoration of war in broader terms.[31]

'Turbine', with its etymological roots in the Latin *turbo* meaning 'vortex', from which 'turbulence' is also derived, itself implies a form of mechanical turning and vorticular disruption that might immediately make us recall Wozzeck's operation of the cinematograph handle and his captain's fear of the spinning millwheel. This etymological derivation bears some affinity with that of 'citation' itself as a 'movement to and fro', 'summons to appear', and 'setting into sudden motion' with which we can readily associate Kentridge's animations in particular and the production of moving images more generally.[32] This association with turbulence is also evocative of Sharpe's interpretations of 'the wake' in 'the track left on the surface of water by a ship [...] a region of disturbed flow', while the turbine might be thought of in her terms as the 'engine' of racism 'that drives the ship of state's national and imperial projects'.[33] More specifically, the function of a turbine is apt for thinking through Kentridge's thermodynamic model of his own artistic process: defined by energy, force, pressure, changes of state, and the agitation

Fig. 3.3. Dancer and choreographer Gregory Maqoma bearing the load of a 'personal locator device', an early antecedent to radar. The device evokes Kentridge's understanding of human perception as perpetual 'transmission and reception' as well as August Sander's 1929 portrait of a bricklayer in *Face of Our Time*.
Photograph courtesy of Stella Olivier

and transformation of particulate matter. A processual artistic practice described by Leora Maltz-Leca as 'embedded in an ontology of flux and becoming', this vision, in turn, recalls the kind of forceful processes that Derrida associates with the commitment, or consignment, of memory to a technical substrate.[34] Writing in 'In Praise of Shadows', Kentridge develops a model of transmission and reception that figures as a metaphor for human perception: a 'receiving station', 'scanning the earth for reports of the world, bombarded by particles of information we cannot escape [...] And transmitting, projecting, broadcasting ourselves continually' (Figure 3.3).[35]

This is, then, a thoroughly materialist model of perception, a feedback loop that circulates with a kind of vorticular energy that Kentridge's artistic practice seeks to harness in the exhibition space of the Turbine Hall. The image of particles of informatic bombardment becomes more explicitly atomic as Kentridge describes the 'membrane' of the paper he uses to draw his sketches 'catching the radiation as it reaches us, containing our ever-proliferating self'.[36] Once again, this membrane acts as a kind of prosthesis, a technology of perception that exerts pressure to record impressions of the world onto an organic or technical 'substrate'. The atomic 'exaggeration' of this model recalls Akira Lippit's account in *Atomic Light* of how 'under the glare of atomic radiation, the human body was exposed: revealed and opened, but also *displaced, thrust outward into the distant reaches of the visible world*'.[37] In this particular light, the logic of *Entstellung* figures as central to both Lippit's and Kentridge's perceptual models in which the human body is not only displaced, but radically disarticulated in the disruption of its own integrity: what Lippit terms the 'crisis in the constitution of the human body'.[38]

'To Recognise and Record': *Entstellung* as Fabulation

In *The Head & the Load*, Kentridge's explicit commitment to a project of recording and recognition articulates further affinities with Derrida's and Lippit's conceptions of an archival logic that is paradoxical, subject to the heat and compression of violence and destruction:

> *The Head & the Load* is about Africa and Africans in the First World War. That is to say about all the contradictions and paradoxes of colonialism that were *heated and compressed* by the circumstances of the war. It is about historical incomprehension (and inaudibility and invisibility). The colonial logic towards the black participants could be summed up: 'Lest their actions merit recognition, their deeds must not be recorded.' *The Head & the Load* aims to *recognise* and *record*.[39]

Here the pressures of war and colonialism compound each other as two logics of destruction and domination are enlisted in the service of each other. In the same way, the twin imperatives of the archive to preserve and destroy are bound up with the excesses of heat and pressure that Kentridge associates with the creative process of recording: that which *pushes* the process of making sense *outside* and onto the external membrane or substrate between self and world. The nexus of 'violence, emancipation, and enlightenment' at the heart of the cave allegory thus also

prefigures this process in the act of forcible expulsion from a darkness illuminated only by fire and into over-exposure and dazzling sunlight.

The relation of light in general, and fire in particular, to shadow suggests a common ground between Plato's cave and Lippit's reading of Derrida in *Atomic Light* to develop his definition of the 'shadow archive': 'Undefined and forged in ash, the shadow archive, an "archive of the virtual," as Derrida calls it, erupts from the feverish imagination of a *mal d'archive,* an archive illness and desire that *burns with a passion*'.[40] The shadow archive, which is always also a 'virtual' and 'secret' archive, thus becomes key to understanding Kentridge's rendering of African experience in the First World War as an example of what Lippit refers to as 'imaginary, phantasmatic, racialised archives'.[41] The shadow archive 'trope' is also mobilised by Tavia Nyong'o in *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life* to theorise 'a repertoire of blackness' that is 'deeply entangled with the various analogue and digital archives that unevenly document it'.[42] Nyong'o's conception of 'afro-fabulation', drawing on the 'critical' and 'speculative' models developed by Hartman and Donna Haraway respectively, suggests a way of thinking the 'shadow archive' in relation to the distortive logic of *Entstellung* as 'the tactical fictionalising of a world that is, from the point of view of black social life, already false'.[43] In *The Head & the Load,* the only means of recognising and recording the crimes expunged from the archive by colonial regimes is to make recourse to circular trajectories and choreographies, rather than the linear historiographies that (re)produce anti-Black violence.

Lippit, meanwhile, elaborates an embodied relation inherent to the violence of the shadow archive:

> The fire retreats into the shadow, hides only to retrace the path of the secret destruction of a virtual archive carried on the body, a mnemic archive inscribed on the surface of the skin — burned, as it were, on the skin's surface.[44]

In *The Head & the Load*, the substrate, the skin of the film (stock) that we see passing through Wozzeck's projector — and then through his hands — is replaced by the passage of bodies moving across the fifty-five-metre stage as performers carry figures that cast shadows on the back screen of the auditorium. These figures range from heavy artillery and grenades to warships, but also include slave ships and oil wells, rendering explicit the nexus of colonial depredation whose origin Kentridge locates in Plato's cave.

There are also a number of famous faces present, icons of anti-colonial and revolutionary struggle including Rosa Luxemburg, Sol Plaatje, and Léopold Senghor. Not unlike the projections on Wozzeck's screen, these icons make up an assemblage of displaced objects, dislocated from fixed moments in historical time, and space, carried in a procession of unfolding simultaneity that moves laterally across the screen of the back wall. The selection of displaced figures throws into relief the political urgency at the heart of Kentridge's aesthetic practice: the procession we see in *The Head & the Load* is not only pan-African but intercontinental, affirming the common ground shared by socialist revolution and anticolonial struggles in Europe and across Africa (Figure 3.4). It is not for nothing that the first act of the

Fig. 3.4. Famous faces from revolutionary and anticolonial struggle throughout the twentieth century. Photographs courtesy of Stella Olivier.

performance bears the title 'Manifestos'. Characteristically, Kentridge does not shy away from the distortive capacities of film as a medium of revolutionary political ideology. Rather, the impression is that by drawing attention to this constitutive distortion, he is able to appropriate the ideological function of the medium with the intention of recording another account of history that nonetheless has always been 'there': among the shadows of Plato's cave, of the secret, virtual and *shadow* archive.

This shadow procession revisits a practice that Kentridge has used in various installations, most notably *More Sweetly Play the Dance* (2015), and engages a genealogy of 'flickering images' at once primeval and contemporary that begins with the objects hauled in front of the firelight in Plato's cave. Kentridge refers to the 'extraordinary contemporaneity' of this processional figure in 'In Praise of Shadows' insisting: 'flickering projections of news — *displacements*, migrations, refugees, etc. The head and the load are *still* the trouble of the neck'.[45] The citation of this Ghanaian proverb with the added 'still' reaffirms the central, almost universal importance of the cave allegory as *ur*-media-archaeological topos for Kentridge. Here, as in the title of *The Head & the Load*, the logic of figuration, metonymy, and synecdoche active in the proverbial mode functions to render the geographically uneven scale and character of displacements of moving bodies, exposed and forced to flee violence and destruction.

The 'still' also indicates Kentridge's commitment to addressing the 'past that is not yet past' of the colonial violence and the ongoing 'afterlives of transatlantic slavery' in what Sharpe identifies as 'the endurance of anti-Blackness in and outside the contemporary'.[46] Like Kentridge, Sharpe connects a trajectory 'from the forced movements of the enslaved to the forced movements of the migrant and the refugee' as part of 'the unfinished project of emancipation'.[47] Likewise,

Hartman's description of critical fabulation as a strategy to 'expose and exploit the incommensurability between the experience of the enslaved and the fictions of history' describes a project similar to Kentridge's mission to recognise and record in *The Head & the Load*.[48] Kentridge's understanding of the cave allegory's contemporary significance also resembles Hartman's project of reconstructing the past in acts of critical fabulation, which she describes as 'an attempt to describe obliquely the forms of violence licensed in the present, that is, the forms of death unleashed in the name of freedom, security, civilisation, and God/the good'.[49] The constitutive distortions of narrative, linear or teleological, are thus manipulated and subordinated to a logic of circularity and simultaneity, by which the present and future are understood as coterminous with the past.

More specifically, in *The Head & the Load*, this logic figures the division of the colonial body politic and its labour under the conditions, and contradictions, of 'world' war. By suggesting the bodily strain endured by African porters to the point of exhaustion and death and the shadow cut-outs carried by the piece's performers, both form and content are adumbrated in the title of *The Head & the Load*: the (citational) medium is the message.[50] Moreover, Kentridge's title performs another conspicuous act of cutting by presenting us with only part of the whole proverb: there is a kind of figurative decapitation as head and load are separated from the neck, which might make us recall once more the inaugural mutilation of *Un chien andalou*, as well as the decapitated heads that roll around the fragmented landscape of *Wozzeck*. If this figurative logic serves as a further reminder of the violent manipulations involved in acts of archival and filmic recording, it does so through an avowal of the body as a privileged site for such forms of distortion and disfigurement.

Turbulent Cartographies, 'Choreographies of Shell Shock'

Reading *The Head & the Load* as an exploration of the shadow archive in both Lippit's and Nyong'o's terms also draws our attention to the bodies of performers moving up- and downstage to cast shadows of various shapes and scales at the same time as they themselves become illuminated by Kentridge's projections. In the early '*Ursonate*' sequence (Kentridge's citational nod to the Dadaist Kurt Schwitters's sound poem), the logics of domination and destruction that Bruno associates with 'ways of seeing and systems of spatio-visual reproduction' deployed in colonial systems of mapping and conquest are 'writ' large on the stage's backdrop and performing bodies alike. Maps of Africa demarcated according to the possessions of different colonial powers following the Berlin Conference are projected onto a tarpaulin draped across the back wall while three characters argue in 'nonsensical' (non-) language over prospective territorial possessions. This imbrication of cartographic and cinematic projections represents a recurring motif in *The Head & the Load* familiar from elsewhere in Kentridge's *œuvre* including the maps of battlefields projected as part of *Wozzeck's* cycloramic scenography. The effect in both works is to underscore the technological logic of colonial domination over both territories and bodies organised by apparatuses of vision. The bodies of the performers in

Kentridge's production catch the light of these projections and are illuminated, exposed, and inscribed by them while also casting a shadow onto the screen behind: leaving a mark or trace that is registered and destroyed at the same time.

One character, played by the production's choreographer Gregory Maqoma, whose experience as a carrier is followed throughout the performance, stands with his back to the audience watching on in horror during the '*Ursonate*' sequence so that the contested map can be seen on the back of his coat, his legs, and illuminating his jittering hands. Standing towards the front of the stage he casts a large shadow onto the same vexed colonial map, which is constantly being revised, rehashed, and torn up in the projection behind him. Meanwhile, two female figures at either end of the stage can be seen spinning back and forth towards the map, creating a sense of circularity, futility, and reversal reminiscent of Berg's palindromes and retrogrades in *Wozzeck*. Maqoma's body is at once incandescent and void, figure and ground: the site of inscription on the surface of the body that casts a shadow to devour that superficial impression. His silhouette casts a spectral trace that is displaced onto the fragmentation, abstraction, and dislocation of the maps behind him and yet also burns a black hole into them. As in *Wozzeck*, the act of projection is never straightforward and always performs a double function, throwing forward light and casting shadows at the same time.

As the scene transitions from the '*Ursonate*' to the 'Orders and Commands' sequence, the repeatedly redrawn maps are replaced by one of Kentridge's signature sketched landscapes, stretching the breadth of the back screen. In the sequence that follows, Maqoma's character is situated downstage to cast a large shadow, catching the light of the projection. A landscape that appears to have had swathes torn out from the paper 'membrane' of Kentridge's sketch, the dancer's body creates a further void in the shadow cut out of the background. Yet as before, the same body is cast off into the landscape, displaced by the light of the projection. The choreographed movement of this sequence, meanwhile, in its uncertain and perfunctory tracing of military gestures — the salute, the march — while an official describes the process from the other side of the stage, suggests a breaking-down of dancerly motion into discrete movements. Described as a 'choreography of shell shock', this sense of fragmented motion against the light of the projection lends the sequence a proto-cinematic character that recalls Eadweard Muybridge's stop-motion images of 'animal locomotion' in the 'pre-history' of the medium.[51]

This scene provides just one instance of a kind of gestural rendering of early cinema through choreographed movement as dancers and performers move with staggering, stuttering movements across the flicker of Kentridge's projections. In this sense, cinematography is rendered as choreography and follows the logic of an 'archaeology of the surface' articulated in Lippit's account of the shadow archive: 'to dig deeper, to excavate, is to return to the surface not as the inability to probe depths but rather as the capacity to render the abyssal features of the surface'.[52] The abyssal void of the body's shadow cast — blackness and nothingness — is registered on the surface of the body in 'moving impressions, as a mobile affectivity'.[53] The tremulous movements of bodies illuminated by Kentridge's projections can thus be

read as deploying such a 'mobile affectivity' as the irretrievable memory of death and destruction experienced by African carriers during the First World War (that which would be destroyed, forgotten, obliterated by official accounts) is rendered on and returned to the surface of the dancing body.

Conclusion: Media Archaeology as Shadow Archive

Media archaeology, Elsaesser claims, 'is the discourse that shadows the digital (indeed as the discourse secreted by the digital), but also resists the digital'.[54] In turn, this reflection might prompt us to question how practices like Kentridge's themselves constitute a kind of shadow archive: preserving that which might otherwise pass into obsolescence or oblivion. Nyong'o's outline of the shadow archive as a 'virtual, tenseless blackness that shadows and camouflages the communicative apparatus that colonises time' is also instructive for thinking about the specific bearings of media-archaeological practice on the particular archival violence of colonial anti-Blackness.[55] Similarly, the Derridean logic to Elsaesser's diagnosis of media archaeology as 'symptom of the disease of which it also hopes to be the cure: deconstructing and reconstructing the human *after* the digital and *through* the technological' might also describe a kind of counter-archival practice in the spirit of Hartman's 'counter-history of the human' and the project of critical fabulation.[56]

The metonymy inherent to the model of *Entstellung* means that traces of distortion, violence, and disfigurement might be hidden or displaced, but will always return to the surface for forensic examination. The pellicular surfaces of the skin and the film that stand in for each other in *Wozzeck*'s opening scene and the choreographies and processions of *The Head & the Load* affirm both the vulnerability and obduracy of material substrates. It is this materiality of bodies, filmic and organic, that overshadows the moving image economies of digital technology in which claims to indexicality have passed into obsolescence. As in the model of *Entstellung*, the body is figured as that which might be destroyed but is preserved: the circular rather than linear re-turn of memory becomes inscribed on surfaces that are radically fragmented, distorted, and displaced. The circular logic of Berg's *Wozzeck* rendered visually through the turning of the cinematograph equally points up a negation, or refusal, of discrete and linear temporal progression, while the processions of *The Head & the Load* expand and extrapolate this logic of simultaneity over succession implied by Wozzeck's peering at the length of film stock in his hands.

Reading *The Head & the Load* and *Wozzeck* as renderings of a shadow archive posits Kentridge's media-archaeological practice as a means of drawing our attention to fragmented and distorted, but also displaced and variously situated constructions of history and memory by orienting ourselves differently towards a 'past that is not past'. By illuminating the wilful distortions of all archival economies — the paradoxical heat and pressure of inscription and expunction — and histories of war and colonialism in particular, Kentridge's counter-archival practice appropriates the 'forced looking' that begins at the *arkhē* of Plato's cave for the

purposes of recording alternative versions of colonial history. In this context, Kentridge's acutely referential practice and nuanced mobilisation of citation lend themselves to the mediation of disruption and discontinuity intrinsic to artworks and performances that reappraise settled historical accounts in the present moment. Just as the 'flickering images' of the bodies and objects cast as shadows by firelight in the cave share a contemporaneity with the displacements and forced migrations caught by the glare of today's news media, the multiplicity of media histories exposed and explored in Kentridge's aesthetic practices demonstrates a connection of the primeval to the contemporary that disavows linear accounts of history, media or otherwise.

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Notes to Chapter 3

1. Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York: Verso, 2018), p. 95.
2. See Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism: An Outline of Psycho-Analysis and Other Works (1937–1939)*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001).
3. See Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), pp. 30–31, and *After Uniqueness: A History of Film and Video Art in Circulation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Raymond Bellour, *La Querelle des dispositifs: cinéma, installations, expositions* (Paris: P.O.L, 2012); and Francesco Casetti, 'The Relocation of Cinema', in *Post-Cinema: Theorising 21st Century Film*, ed. by Shane Denson and Julia Leyda (Falmer: REFRAME Books, 2016), pp. 569–615 (pp. 572–73).
4. Thomas Elsaesser, 'Media Archaeology as Symptom', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 14.2 (2016), 181–215 (p. 183).
5. Ibid., p. 188.
6. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, p. 43. Emphasis in original.
7. Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe*, 26 (2008), 1–14 (p. 11).
8. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Akira Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
9. The textual history of *Woyzeck/Wozzeck* is also one of distortion. It was only with great difficulty that Büchner's handwritten text was later adapted to be performed on stage. The 'microscopic handwriting' of Büchner's original text, an illegible hand, led to the confusion between 'Woyzeck' and 'Wozzeck': a slippage in (proper) naming, from 'original' or *arkhē* to adaptation, of the kind that provides the grounds for Freud's claim in *Moses and Monotheism* that Moses had been Egyptian based on the etymology of his name. See Douglas Jarman, *Alban Berg, Wozzeck* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
10. Ibid., p. 1.
11. Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 77.
12. Ibid., pp. 77–78. Emphasis added.
13. Ibid., p. 77.
14. This attention to the filmic medium might also remind us of Werner Herzog's cinematic adaptation of *Woyzeck* (1979), another citational node in the constellation of media histories that emerge from Büchner's drama as a pretext for Kentridge's production.
15. Jarman, *Alban Berg, Wozzeck*, pp. 26, 63. Emphasis in original.

16. Theodor W. Adorno, *Alban Berg Master of the Smallest Link*, trans. by Juliane Brand (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), p. 14.
17. Just as the abundance of turning and spinning motifs might also prompt us to think of the Soviet filmmaker's pseudonym which can be loosely translated from Ukrainian as 'spinning top'.
18. In this context, citation is aligned with the logic of 'remediation' as it has been theorised by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin: 'the promise of reform inevitably leads us to become aware of the new medium as a medium'. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), p. 17.
19. William Kentridge, *Six Drawing Lessons* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 26.
20. Ibid.
21. See Christina Elizabeth Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); and Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts'.
22. Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p. 21.
23. Kentridge, *Six Drawing Lessons*, p. 27.
24. Achille Mbembe, 'The Power of the Archive and its Limits', trans. by Judith Inggs, in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. by Carolyn Hamilton (Dordrecht & Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic, 2002), pp. 19–26 (p. 19); and Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 9.
25. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 9.
26. Ibid., p. 25.
27. Kentridge, *Six Drawing Lessons*, p.18.
28. Ibid., p. 19.
29. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 14.
30. Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*, pp. 18–19.
31. With reference to *Wozzeck* and *Un chien andalou*, it is worth noting that Plato's cave is also a site of turning a certain kind of look: ' "There would, therefore," I said, "be an art of this turning around, concerned with the way in which this power can most easily and efficiently be turned around, not an art of producing sight in it. Rather, this art takes as given that sight is there, but not rightly turned nor looking at what it ought to look at, and accomplishes this object" '. Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans. by Allan Bloom, 2nd edn (New York: Basic Books, 1991), p. 197.
32. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 'Citation' <https://www.etymonline.com/word/citation> [accessed 15 December 2022].
33. Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p. 3.
34. Leora Maltz-Leca, *William Kentridge: Process as Metaphor and Other Doubtful Enterprises* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), p. 4.
35. Kentridge, *Six Drawing Lessons*, p. 25.
36. Ibid.
37. Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)*, p. 4. Emphasis added.
38. Ibid.
39. William Kentridge, *The Head & the Load*, programme notes (London: Tate Modern, 2018). Emphasis added.
40. Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)*, p. 10. Emphasis in original.
41. Ibid., p. 13.
42. Tavia Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life*, Sexual Cultures, 14 (New York: New York University Press, 2019), p. 12.
43. Ibid., p. 6; and see also Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC, & London: Duke University Press, 2016).
44. Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)*, p. 18.
45. Kentridge, *Six Drawing Lessons*, p. 28. Emphasis added.
46. Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p. 14.
47. Ibid., p. 5.
48. Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', p. 10.
49. Ibid., p. 13.
50. Perhaps the best example of this logic is the figure who carries a wooden structure that looks like a phonograph speaker or megaphone but is, in fact, a 'personal sound locator' used to

detect aircraft before the invention of radar. Its conical shape is interrupted by a space through which the performer's face is visible, creating a clear visual reference to August Sander's photograph 'Bricklayer' in his *Face of Our Time* (1929). The image in Kentridge's production is thus a characteristically overdetermined one, suggesting both the obscure history of an obsolete wartime technology and citing the media history of a tendency towards 'New Objectivity' in photography in the period after the First World War.

51. William Kentridge, *William Kentridge: The Head & the Load* (Munich, London, & New York: Prestel Art, 2020), p. 286.
52. Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)*, p. 28.
53. Ibid.
54. Elsaesser, 'Media Archaeology as Symptom', p. 207.
55. Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations*, p. 11,
56. Elsaesser, 'Media Archaeology as Symptom', pp. 207–08; and Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', p. 3. Emphasis in original.

CHAPTER 4

❖

Critique, Repair and Care: Rebuilding the Black and Decolonial Archive with Theaster Gates and Kader Attia

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How might Black and decolonial archives be refound, repaired, or rebuilt, in light of their notable omission from the stories that museums and archives have told? This question is of course not solely mine to ask. The question itself suggests that omission implies absence, lack, or deficiency — not only that there is insufficient evidence to be admissible into the archive, but that this leads to ontological insufficiency. This does not speak of plenitude as an expression of abundance or amplitude in the richness of stories untold about Black and global majority lives. Indeed the omission of Black life from the archive is closely allied to racist and racialising epistemological claims about lack, absence, or deficiency as defining features of Black and postcolonial life. Archives are, as Ariella Aïsha Azoulay identifies, not simply a collection of documents or their institutional housing, but also a regime that systematises imperial violence, which 'shapes a world, not just distorts the ways it is perceived (its representations)'.[1] For centuries European colonial practices, knowledge systems, and racial science have fed narratives driving white Anglo-European misperceptions of racialised lack as a negative quality inherent to Blackness.[2] It follows, then, that the conceptual conflation of omission and lack has been the focus of Black studies for some time. This is the 'zone of non-being' described by Franz Fanon, or what Zakiyyah Iman Jackson has described as 'the process of imagining black people as an empty vessel, a nonbeing, a nothing, an ontological zero'.[3] Taking my lead from scholars of postcolonial/decolonial, critical race and Black studies, my question might be better rephrased as: how to reveal the richness, radical complexity, and abundance of Black, decolonial, and pre-colonial historical life when the epistemological structures of archives and museums have prioritised narratives and knowledges of whiteness? And how might this happen in the context of moving-image media in museum spaces?

Acknowledging my positionality as a white, European person of Anglo-Indian and Huguenot heritage, and a French speaker, made not born, I aim in this chapter primarily to honour the voices of Black and global majority artists, writers, and scholars, in order to respond to these questions. My aim is to amplify without misappropriating, acknowledging the distance and connectedness of our respective voices. Indeed I hope to practise a citational politics and mode of critique that centres, rather than marginalises global majority authorship and art.[4] I identify how the moving images of contemporary multimedia artists Theaster Gates and Kader Attia create new histories by repairing old ones, rebuilding what could have or might have been, through the embodied, material, and spatio-temporal processes of installation art: in other words, what Saidiya Hartman and Tavia Nyong'o have called the 'subjunctive mood' of historical archival rebuilding.[5] The subjunctive mood — the wish, the hope, the 'what if...' — is foundational for a wider constellation of decolonial and Black thought, which includes figures like Azoulay, Fanon, Jackson, Hartman, and Nyong'o, but also Paul Gilroy, Achille Mbembe, and Christina Sharpe.[6] Within this wider constellation, the interconnected dynamics of critique, repair, and care in Gates's and Attia's works augment the subjunctive mood of wider critical and speculative archival and counter-archival practices.

Beginning with speculative models of Black and decolonial critique, and the white critiques they undo or re-envision, I turn subsequently toward a more detailed encounter with repair in two exhibitions: Theaster Gates's 'Amalgam' (exhibited at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris and at Tate Liverpool, 2019–20) and Attia's 'The Museum of Emotion' (exhibited at the Hayward Gallery, London, 2019). Both exhibitions' fine-tuned critical engagements with and ambivalence toward institutional processes reclaim space for the yet-to-be-known, through site-specific, sculptural, and contextual approaches to moving-image installation and sound. Gates's emerging method of amalgamation (as melding, as impurity, and as alchemical, rather than algorithmic recombination) creates new forms of speculative citational repair to the Black Atlantic archive via both sculpture and film. Speculative does not always mean joyful either: acts of mourning are also part of the subjunctive mood; the 'what if...' that calls across the fragments of the archive towards the dead. By contrast, Attia's decades-long inquiry into reparative but never fully restorative intercultural healing reveals visible and invisible scars, on people, objects, and places. The scar, profound and ambivalent, or the *cicatrice*, to use the French term, is also citational, discursive, the site of intellectual language as well as the body's own terms.

While the audio-visual field of the moving image is key to understanding these works, I also emphasise the contextual field of wider creative praxis, which includes Gates's and Attia's sculptural assemblages, in addition to their actions and reflections beyond the gallery space. Referring to the title of this volume, I consider these screen-based multimedia works as citational media that emulate, refashion, and undertake the visible, critical work of repair in relation to colonial and racial trauma, not as singular voices, but as part of a chorus of reflection and intervention that has been ongoing throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I therefore consider

citational praxis from a global majority perspective as a critical tool that diffuses the tendencies of white post-Enlightenment European criticism and archival practices to dissect, control, atomise, and abstract. Instead this decolonial model, drawn from many sources, offers hopeful, messy, collective, reparative modes of citation: a web of constellations in response to white Enlightenment dualism. In response, I write in the subjunctive mood of upholding these constellations, asking what it would be neither to tokenise nor overburden nor appropriate their voices, but instead to support the conditions under which they might thrive. My attendant responsibility to this ever-present ethical process is therefore itself a process of non-innocent care, of unlearning.

Critical Fabulation and 'Potential History'

Repair, restitution, and conciliation have been the subject of decades of processive enquiry in critical race and postcolonial studies, from the twentieth-century Marxist-informed critical approaches of Fanon and W. E. B. Du Bois to the more recent diasporic and 'fugitive' strategies of Gilroy, Mbembe, and Sharpe, for example.[7] This constellation of critical reflection has since influenced a recent turn towards restitution and repair in recent decolonial museologies, which draw on interdisciplinary studies of trauma and psychoanalysis, alongside models of restorative justice and conciliation.[8] The drive toward repair through speculative practices of abundance is equally present in Saidiya Hartman's exploratory accounts of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Black American women and *femmes* in her foundational book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019). Hartman describes her project as 'an archive of the exorbitant, a dream book for existing otherwise'.[9] Through intensive restoration of small lives assembled from archival documents often linked to criminalisation and psychiatric institutionalisation, Hartman's solutions to rebuilding the Black archive embrace inquiring curiosity, political activation, and new speculative conditions of possibility. Based on a practice of 'critical fabulation' that she developed substantively over time, her creative and rigorously evidence-based critical address fills the so-called archival void with the choral plenitude of often discarded voices, each 'a singular thread of the collective utterance'.[10]

For Hartman, and other Black and/or queer feminist scholars (Angela Davis, Anne Carson), the archival chorus, classical or contemporary, holds a unique capacity for philosophical expression.[11] This speculative chorus, itself a citational matrix, offers the capacity for existing otherwise than the dominant structures of colonial patriarchal capitalism, which privileges singular voice over collective experience. 'Critical fabulation', as Hartman elaborates, is a method of speculative creative-critical inquiry and counter-archival practice, developed to investigate how to 'exceed or negotiate the constitutive limits of the archive'.[12] The critical act of fabulation within the contexts of the archive thus also presents an historical capacity for living otherwise than the strict delimitations of archival visibility. In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, Hartman's method makes retrospective,

loving, cumulative narrative space for the voices and lives of a multitude of Black American working-class women living in the early twentieth century, assembling a chorus of voices, rather than tracking and identifying a singular archival subject. This reparative model of citational praxis — which relays and recombines archival sources in order to create a more ample speculative counter-history of Black life — is an impulse which also runs throughout Gates's exhibition, 'Amalgam', as I will discuss in subsequent sections.

The capacity and hope for existing otherwise is equally present in Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's decade-long study of imperial museum appropriation *Potential History* (2019).[13] For Aïsha Azoulay, museums are not empty of Black, African, and decolonial history; rather the art objects contained within Euro-Western collections lay bare the amplitude and richness of material contexts that were subsequently brutally separated from the people and cultures who made and embodied their living value. These museum objects are indisputably the result of looting by imperial agents over centuries. Aïsha Azoulay writes: 'a *potential history* of plunder insists that in such pre-imperial moments, diverse modalities of practicing art existed inseparably from diverse political formations, providing people with places within a material world they helped to shape' (emphasis mine).[14] Her 'potential history' consequently points not to the void or the absence of global majority and colonised cultural abundance; instead it brings into the visible world the violent separation between people and their material worlds brought about by European imperialism's accumulation of capital assets. Incontestably, museum discourses have forced an historical separation between the public museum's roots in colonial appropriation and the professional language of curation, preservation, and display which claims to keep art objects 'safe'.[15] A potential history thus attempts to reunite people with material worlds — those who are long dead, but whose restitution becomes a form of unlearning imperial practice, to bring forth the possibility of a world without it. If, as Aïsha Azoulay writes, 'the regime of the archive shapes a world', potential history is therefore a process of unlearning institutional models of knowledge established via museum and archival practices.[16]

Aïsha Azoulay's potential history and Hartman's critical fabulation both adopt reparative and speculative processes which involve the artefacts and texts of the museum and archive. They also form part of a chorus of reparative praxis. This is taken up, I suggest, in recent screen-based practices within museum and gallery contexts, such as those by Gates and Attia. Aïsha Azoulay and Hartman, Gates and Attia, offer specific modalities of repair to Black Atlantic and decolonial lives, past and present, in such a way that omissions in the archival record become polymorphous sites of fruitful, even healing exploration, citation, and reconfiguration. And yet, at this moment, I also feel an ethical call to clarify my own position. Within the complex matrix of racial capitalism, colonisation and empire, neocolonialism and contemporary white nationalisms of precisely the kind that Aïsha Azoulay critiques, I acknowledge the perpetration and persecution that are contained within my own ancestry. I also recognise the structural advantages that facilitate my writing about contemporary Black and global majority visual artists and the Black and decolonial

archive. And I accept my humility in this (un)learning process, in which I aim to decentre myself and amplify the communities of thinking central to Gates's and Attia's wider creative approaches.

This process of unlearning is central to Aïsha Azoulay's critical position: that untethering the objective assurance of 'truth' from the Euro-Western archive, revealing the roots of its imperial manufacture, demonstrating that the structuring of the archive is itself a violent imperial fiction, is a core component to unlearning imperialism and its historical constructs. It is the start of what Aïsha Azoulay describes as the 'labour of forgiveness', which at its heart requires acceptance of the unforgiveable legacy of European imperialism: 'to render unforgivable the violence that was institutionalized as a regime-made disaster is the tedious labour of world-recovery'.[17] Taking into account what is unforgiveable in my own colonial ancestries, I proceed with the tender labour of enquiry, continuing in the next section to discuss Gates and Attia as contemporary artists who situate place-building as a critical tool with which to repair and rebuild archival, artefactual, and embodied knowledge of Black and decolonial experience.

Critique I. Theaster Gates, Kader Attia, and Third Wave Institutional Critique

Theaster Gates (*b.* 1973, Chicago) originally trained as a potter and urban planner. A professor in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago, his work has experienced prodigious success in the contemporary art world over the last two decades. He has exhibited at world-renowned galleries and museums in North America and Europe, including the Whitney Museum in New York, White Cube in London, Gropius Bau in Berlin, National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, Kunstmuseum Basel, and the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto. Variously describing himself as a hustler, trickster, and collaborative artist, Gates has developed multi-media projects that have often constituted acts of service to the majority Black American Chicago South Side neighbourhood in which he has lived for over fifteen years. In 2009 Gates established the Rebuild Foundation, whose aim was to redevelop large vacant properties in urban areas into vibrant cultural and arts spaces serving their local communities. This strategy has been highly effective in developing new sites across Chicago, including Stony Island Arts Bank, a former community savings and loan bank building, acquired from the City of Chicago and subsequently developed into an archive, cinema, incubator, and study space.

Gates has collaborated extensively with twentieth-century archival collections of Black life, for instance at the Smithsonian Institution. In 2012 the Johnson Publishing Company (JPC), founded by John H. and Eunice Johnson in 1942, and publisher of *Ebony* and *Jet*, two of the most prominent Black American photo-magazines in the USA, bequeathed to the Rebuild Foundation more than 15,000 items from its archives.[18] This included the JPC staff reference library, which now resides in part at Stony Island Arts Bank.[19] In 2018 Gates published *The Black Image Corporation*, a photobook accompanying his exhibition at the Fondazione Prada in

Milan, informed by access he had been granted to over four million photographic images collected in the *Ebony/Jet* magazine archive.[20] As a signal of the cultural significance of the JPC archive, its remaining totality was sold at private auction in 2019 for around $30 million when it was collectively acquired by the Ford Foundation, the J. Paul Getty Trust, the MacArthur Foundation, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.[21] Gates's position as a holder and custodian of Black archives is therefore also an important dimension to his ongoing archival praxis as an artist.

Simultaneously, his multidisciplinary approaches to art-making on the global stage and redevelopment/activism in Chicago are deeply invested in archival preservation, restoration, and access — both in terms of actual archival housing in the case of the JPC at Stony Island Arts Bank, and in his exhibitions, as 'Amalgam' amply demonstrates. Gates's work is consequently both site-specific and localised, and speaks to community place-building, collective re-construction, and artefactual reinvigoration. This is particularly significant both to Black American cultural life, and, what Gilroy terms, the more broadly-shared transatlantic diasporic collective consciousness and intercultural exchange/counterculture to modernity, known as the Black Atlantic.[22] In addition to Gates's activism and urban development beyond the gallery space, his practice is also creatively specific: for example in the large-scale sculptural works commissioned for 'Amalgam', his first large-scale solo show in France, which then transferred to Tate Liverpool in the UK in 2020.

'Amalgam' was commissioned by Jean de Loisy, President of the Palais de Tokyo from 2011 to 2018, and consequently was intentionally developed as a holistic, large-scale, site-specific project, attentive to the Black Atlantic relationships between Black American archives, French perpetration of slavery and colonial history, and contemporary racial complexity in Paris. The exhibition re-envisions the lives of a small interracial community who inhabited the island of Malaga off the coast of Maine in the north east of the USA in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and does so by bringing about material abundance from the sparse repositories of archival data available about Malagasy life. Prior to their expulsion from the island by the state governor in 1912, the small, impoverished interracial community of forty-five residents lived peacefully if frugally as skilled labourers and craftspeople (milliners, seamstresses, laundresses) for almost fifty years; a self-sufficient maritime economy with its own systems of care outside the institutionalising systems of taxation and education. Under the eugenicist and racist/racialising policies of the period, the community was considered 'indolent' by the local white mainlanders, whose resistance to the notion of peaceful interracial cohabitation was reinforced by the legacy of formal and informal miscegenation laws which prohibited interracial relationships between 1821 and 1883. When Malaga was identified for redevelopment as a tourist resort in 1912, the Malagasy inhabitants were evicted, unhoused, and forcibly scattered. Some were relocated on the mainland, 'involuntarily committed to psychiatric institutions', while the bones of the dead were exhumed from Malaga's cemetery, then reburied at the 'Maine School for the Feeble-Minded'.[23] No tourist resort was ever built on the island.

As Gates identifies in his opening essay for the exhibition's catalogue, his vision for 'Amalgam' and future work is 'to complicate the aesthetics of pain and neutralize the trauma of history,' consequently bringing to the fore the specific reparative power of conjunctions of moving image, performance, and musical composition, as well as sculptural, archival, and historical interventions.[24] In a manner not dissimilar to Attia's wider practices of repair, in the course of creating 'Amalgam' Gates developed a new terminology for his complex, citational, interdisciplinary reparative praxis, describing it as 'amalgamation' — a practice of material and conceptual combination to 'make sense of the "world" of Malaga' whose terminology, if not its specific intent, resonates with the work of critical race theorists such as Tavia Nyong'o.[25]

'Amalgam' draws on a dynamic range of constructed artefacts and monumental structures, performance and moving-image works, musical and sound compositions (Gates is also a musician whose experimental blues-gospel ensemble The Black Monks features in 'Amalgam'). It speculatively rebuilds the community of Malaga — the title of the exhibition of course being a near-anagram of the community's name. The exhibition reinhabits the emotional and psychological architectures and environments of this community, restoring the plenitude of their lives through a combination of tangible archival artefacts, speculative fictions of ruins and reconstructions, and performance-making through sound and moving image. It also acknowledges spaces of interracial joy, peace, and erotics, focusing not only on the grief of a community ripped apart by segregationist white supremacist politics under claims of urban planning, but also on the life, music, movement, and personhood of a lost community. In this sense, Gates describes his intention as offering 'a field of solace so that those who need Malaga could come rest'.[26] Like Attia, Gates's practice seeks to build speculative spaces of repair and restoration through a critical-creative approach to archival and artefactual sources.

Kader Attia (*b.* 1970, Dugny, France) is a French-Algerian artist, awarded the Prix Marcel Duchamp, France's highest honour for visual artists, in 2016. Having grown up in both Paris and Algeria, Attia spent time in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in South America, before training in fine and decorative arts in Paris and Barcelona. He has exhibited at some of the most prestigious galleries, museums, biennials, and festivals in the world, including Shanghai, Gwangju, Manifesta, Venice, Documenta, Kunsthalle Wien, MOMA, Tate Modern, and the Centre Pompidou. From 2016–20, Attia co-directed the forum ~~La Colonie~~ in Paris with Zico Selloum and their respective families; a space and platform for art, social gathering, activist practice, and free-ranging discussion about trans-cultural knowledge and social and cultural reparation. Since 2000 Attia has worked in increasingly complex ways across media forms and material practices, with a sustained interest in cultural, physical, and post-traumatic reparation across the borders of coloniser and colonised, as well as in post-conflict environments. Acknowledging that processes of intercultural and decolonial repair are mutually inflected between Occidental and non-Occidental cultures, as Attia describes it, his works combine juxtapositions of museum artefacts (masks, tools, and statues)

and decorative arts (textile, ceramic) with apparatuses of display (vitrines, cabinets, cages, texts), assemblages of archival material and his own constructed installations, and photographic and filmed practices.

Attia has consistently developed a praxis of repair, 'la réparation', across trans-cultural objects as a means of accessing, and potentially healing, postcolonial and decolonial trauma. For Attia, this method already pre-dates his own: he identifies it in, for example, repairs to Congolese raffia fabric with Vichy-style French textiles; or in the striking visual resonances between images of fractured and repaired African busts held in the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium, and photographs depicting facial injury and healing post-surgery on white European soldiers who fought in World War One.[27] In large-scale installations, such as *The Repair from Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures* (2012), Attia assembles these juxtapositions to reveal their 'unexpected aesthetics' and their radical potential to re-envision the dynamics of colonial power.[28] For Attia, acts of decolonial repair 'embody a sign that results from an act of cultural otherness which tries to re-appropriate the space that was taken from it to create a new state that could be understood as a kind of resurrection'.[29] This resurrection of culturally othered artefacts — particularly those which confuse Euro-Western museological and aesthetic assumptions about perfection, preservation, restoration, and provenance — are for Attia a phenomenon already at work within cultural practices of repair, which his large-scale works reveal within the spaces of contemporary art.

'The Museum of Emotion' is both a retrospective re-instantation of a number of Attia's prior works from 2000 to 2019, and a reimagining of these works' interconnectedness within the Hayward Gallery, whose concrete brutalist design resonates with the cuboid social housing architectures that Attia explores in various dimensions via sculpture, photography, and moving image (for example in *La Tour Robespierre* (2018), a single-take film that uses a drone to travel up the façade of the twenty-seven-storey Robespierre Tower in Vitry-sur-Seine). Throughout 'The Museum of Emotion', Attia combines place-building in his wider social practices — for instance in the establishment of ~~La Colonie~~ — with hybrid place-making in the form of installation. Questions of home and external surveillance, and the ambivalent relationships between the two, especially for migrant communities and global majority French people, run alongside Attia's continued investigations into the structuring powers of internal gallery and museum architectures.

Visible and invisible trauma and healing, as well as concerns about surveillance and scrutiny, testimony, and conciliation, come to the fore in 'The Museum of Emotion'. Like Gates, Attia's practice incorporates large-scale sculptural installation, drawing upon archival materials, museum artefacts, and museal methods of display; photography, projection, and moving-image installation, often combined with other sculptural surfaces and elements of the built environment; and critical discussion. The range of practices and forms, concepts and knowledges embodied in the exhibition as a whole — which include the full instantiation of the large, multi-artefactual work, *The Repair from Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures* (2012), first exhibited at the Documenta 13 art exhibition in Kassel — is expansive, ambitious, and prolific. *The Repair*, for example, is a very large-scale installed display of

hundreds of items: texts, photographs, images, statues and sculptures, tools and surgical implements, and images projected onto the gallery walls, presented partly on metal shelving as if in the collections of an imaginary museum store, and partly within the conventional teak glass-fronted cabinets that are common interior architectures of the nineteenth-century public museum's galleries. All of the artefacts draw multi-faceted juxtapositional comparison between representations of repaired facial injury in Occidental (i.e. Euro-Western) and extra-Occidental (i.e. non Euro-Western) visual cultures (Attia de-emphasises the nominative exclusions of 'oriental' by flipping the etymological gaze towards the West).

The visible scar, whether ritualistic, surgical, or both becomes an emotional trace through which repetitions of traumatic violence and attempts at healing can be understood in the midst and in the wake of colonialism and empire. In 'The Museum of Emotion' as a whole, from *La Piste d'Atterissage* (2000–02), a photographic series depicting trans Algerian sex workers living on the outskirts of Paris whom Attia befriended over the course of more than two decades, to smaller scale moving-image works such as *The Body's Legacies, Pt 2: The Postcolonial Body* (2018), Attia's scale of vision draws comparison with Gates in his reconstitution of place beyond the museum. These modalities of place remodelled within the gallery space critically engage with the architectures of institutionalised space within a critical and reparative mode: from *habitations à loyer modérés* (HLM) tower blocks in the one-take rising drone footage of *La Tour Robespierre* (2018) to public discourses of police brutality in *The Body's Legacies, Pt 2*, a filmed sequence of talking heads, to the physical and psychological locations of healing from state violence and war in South Korea and Vietnam in *Shifting Borders*, a moving-image installation originally made in 2018.

Gates's and Attia's activist and creative practices could be framed within a 'third wave' or reinvention of institutional critique. Institutional critique as a contemporary art history and art practice is, like many of the art movements that precede it, a reflexive terminology built between art critics and artists — a co-evolving cultural movement that takes as its focus critical and often politically radical engagements with the institutional and organisational structures that give art meaning, especially in Euro-Western contexts. The 'first wave' of Marxist-inspired institutional critique might be best understood via predominantly white European (often male) artists, including Marcel Duchamp, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, and Hans Haacke, who developed models of socially engaged art-making and participatory art to critique monumentalising and authorising claims made about art on behalf of large art galleries and museums. Many of these genealogies as they are relayed in art history are overwhelmingly Anglo-European and white-oriented in their frames of reference, even if recent moves to diversify the canon have begun to include both women and artists of colour; and even if subsequent forms of institutional critique were indeed taken up by global majority artists.[30]

Via artists such as Fred Wilson, Adrian Piper, and Walid Raad, second and third waves of global majority artists have brought to the fore issues of race and gender, colonisation, slavery, empire, appropriation and repatriation within the

exhibitionary practices and structures of museums. All engage critically with the conceptual formations of the exhibition, gallery, and museum, often disrupting their architectural and spatial continuities. An oft-cited work in this second wave of institutional critique is Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992), a relatively small-scale exhibition at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore, USA, which had a profound impact upon contemporary art and Museum Studies.[31] Wilson deployed the exhibition vitrine as a site of polemical social commentary, juxtaposing artefacts of wealth with the material cultures that subtended them. Juxtaposition, for example, of slave manacles with ornate nineteenth-century silverware, revealed the violent tools of discipline and subjugation used to control and direct the labour of black slaves upon whose exploitation the commodity exchange of luxury items such as silverware was dependent. Though deceptively simple, Wilson's exhibitionary and archival practices produced dialectical conjunctions of white wealth and the colonial exploitation that underpinned it, modelling critique at the heart of the museum.

Gates's and Attia's works share characteristics with the work of Wilson and other practitioners of participatory art such as Piper, Raad, and Fraser, drawing attention to the ruptures and erasures of gendered and racialised labour, space, and material cultures within museum and gallery contexts.[32] In line with site-specific installation, Gates's 'Amalgam' and Attia's 'The Museum of Emotion' are attuned to the spaces, places, and locations of their exhibition, while perhaps stopping short of the direct engagements of the social and participatory art of Piper and Fraser, for example (though this does not limit Gates's and Attia's wider social practices beyond the gallery space). While Irit Rogoff was somewhat circumspect in 2008 towards the notion of a sedimented or ossified 'educational turn' in contemporary art, there are also resonances between 'Amalgam' and 'The Museum of Emotion' and Rogoff's manifesto for transformative art. She describes this as 'the moment when we attend to the production and articulation of truths — not truth as correct, as provable, as fact, but truth as that which collects around it subjectivities that are neither gathered nor reflected by other utterances'.[33]

And indeed something in both exhibitions seeks uncomfortable, difficult, even antithetical constellations of truth. These truth constellations invest in speculative ancestry, archival uncertainty, absence and brokenness, in order make space for the possibility of healing, repair, and care, within the contexts of critique. Like the futurist orientations of critique-based moving-image installations by Black British artists Keith Piper and the Otolith Group, Gates and Attia both adopt what I would describe as a future-forward approach to historical narratives, connecting fragments of material that speak to wider constellations, collectives and forgotten communities, rather than singular narrative focal points. This is what most prominently distinguishes Gates's and Attia's moving-image installations from theatrically exhibited film: each work is designed within a wider installation of sculptural, site-specific constructions, which have outward-facing complementarity and affinity with geographical and political sites, whether present-day or historical in origin, including the museums in which they are exhibited. This critical

approach to place-building and site-specific moving-image installation casts a critical lens over the gallery as a discursive site: that it is a potential site both for visible repair and damage.

There is nonetheless an ethical discomfort in deploying ostensibly white-dominated contemporary art historical frameworks to contextualise contemporary Black and global majority artists. Positioning Gates and Attia exclusively as a 'third wave' of institutional critique risks absorbing it within white European models of critique originating in European inter-war and post-war modern art, thus decentring the archives of Black and global majority artists and diasporic cultures which they have taken such pains to revive and rebuild. Confining their work to participatory, social, or institutional frameworks shifts the focus away from Attia's and Gates's politically engaged concerns with the everyday visibility of colonial and racialised violence, and the possibility of repair through postcolonial reckonings with a racialised past. The relevance of a well-documented white archive of art history is limited when placed in relation to the meticulous, loving undertakings of Gates and Attia in understanding the networks of constellation that entwine Blackness with diasporic and transcultural aesthetics. As my next section explores, there are other ways to conceive of Black and decolonial praxis, which acknowledge what contemporary Cameroonian historian, political theorist, and philosopher Mbembe succinctly identifies: that 'Europe is no longer the center of gravity of the world'.[34]

Critique II. Black Reason and Archival Plenitude

I want to return for a moment to terminologies of Blackness. I am lingering on this question of language partly because of the formative role that language plays in archival constitution, citation, and reconstitution. The language of Blackness, and other forms of racialised otherness are also critical frames through which both Gates and Attia examine the wider roles of, for example, visible evidence, fabulation, and reparation in creating or reimagining the Black and decolonial archive. Capitalisation of the term 'Black' has become a commonplace signifier when referring to people and cultures of the pan-African diaspora, with a specific focus on communities who self-identify using this term. Nonetheless, 'Black' and 'Blackness' are ambivalent as conceptual formations, not least because of their historical colonial entwinement with configurations of absence, lack, nullification, and emptiness, as discussed in DuBois's and Fanon's earlier decolonial and critical race theories. The diasporic phenomenology of Blackness is a central concern for Gilroy's writing on race, particularly his widely cited description of the Black Atlantic.[35] Gilroy rethinks the concept as a transcultural identity formation — a diasporic 'double consciousness', drawing on DuBois's foundational writing in *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903), which identifies the antagonistic dualism of living while Black and American.[36] He anticipates DuBois's dualism of double consciousness to include Black European identity, and beyond that to a wider mode of intercultural being across Black transatlantic diasporas. Gilroy thus reconceptualises the Black

Atlantic to highlight the complex transnational and transcultural diasporic networks of Black cultures, practices, literature, arts, and music which underpin the aesthetics of modernity itself.

It follows, then, that Mbembe's formation of resistant Blackness takes up the critical address of double consciousness via DuBois, Fanon, and Gilroy, judging the problem of dualism as a fractured critical problem inherent within the modern Enlightenment project of reason. Mbembe reconsiders Blackness as a 'vertiginous assemblage' that speaks to white colonial European entwinements of race, biocapital, and human commodification, rather than an identity or descriptor of persons, cultures or communities.[37] Mbembe writes: 'like a kind of giant cage, Black reason is in truth a complicated network of doubling, uncertainty, and equivocation, built with race as its chassis'.[38] Acknowledging the impoverishment of Blackness as a racialised construct, Mbembe offers the possibility of Blackness as complex ambivalence, 'that strange subject, slippery, serial, and plastic, always masked, firmly camped on both sides of the mirror, constantly skirting the edge of the frame'.[39] Blackness thus becomes a liminal mode that re-envisions and critically reappraises some of the most tightly held tenets of Euro-Western thought. Mbembe thus develops a philosophical critique that demonstrates how the ambivalence of Blackness is itself constitutive of Black reason. Black reason is a slippery mode of undoing and complexity that both underpins and undermines the white European Enlightenment project of modernity, at whose heart lies the colonial project of race. Revealing the presence of Black reason within the Enlightenment project thus becomes a critical and transformative practice whereby modernity is revealed to itself as '*the history of reason's unreason*'.[40]

At the same time, Mbembe identifies within the structures of Black reason a second emerging narrative. In response to the instrumentalising and disqualifying narratives of colonial Enlightenment, a fragmentary constellation unfolds, of attempts by Black and pan-African diasporic people to develop an archive of lived experience. Mbembe writes:

> How could one write history in the absence of the kinds of traces that serve as sources for historiographical fact? Very early, it became clear that the history of Blacks could be written only from fragments brought together to give an account of an experience that itself was fragmented, that of a pointillist people struggling to define itself not as a disparate composite but as a community whose blood stains the entire surface of modernity.[41]

This pointillism of a people — an aesthetics of fragmentation not by will but by force — speaks directly to Hartman's and Aïsha Azoulay's concerns, as I identified in earlier sections of this chapter. Their respective models of critical fabulation and potential history both adopt aesthetic and critical strategies that fill in the impressionistic spaces left by erasure from the record, and address the underlying fragmentary, diasporic constellations from which Black and pre-colonial life can be understood. That is to say that their concepts offer reparative solutions to address the philosophical critiques underlined by a long genealogy of scholars on race; from DuBois to Fanon; Gilroy to Mbembe. I mention this to acknowledge not only the

contributions of individual scholars, but also their interrelatedness in a network of constellation that continues to reflect on the possibilities of reparation, rebuilding, and rehoming of Black lives past and present. It is from this network of constellation in Black and decolonial thought that an alternative genealogy of critique can be understood in relation to Gates's and Attia's work. This critique centres Black and decolonial praxis in genealogies of modernity, inverts white European art historical storylines, and, as Kobena Mercer identifies in his analysis of 'Amalgam', 'opens a portal into the political unconscious of race in the making of modernity'.[42]

Black and Blackness are thus wrapped up in the complex historicity of modernity and race — which Laurent Dubois in his translator's note explains are part of a triumvirate of English-language terms (Black, Blackness, the Black man) that substitute for Mbembe's use of the term *le Nègre* in the French original text.[43] Mbembe describes his critique of Black reason (*la raison nègre*) — in which terminologies of Black and Blackness take centre stage — as undertaking a:

> Genealogy of modernity that places racial capitalism at its heart as the cauldron in which the idea of Black, of Blackness, was produced [...taking] seriously the idea that Black, or Blackness, is not so much a matter of ontology as it is a matter of historicity or even contingency.[44]

For Mbembe, like Gilroy before him, Black reason is not only the product of racial capitalism, slavery, and empire, but also the 'ghost of modernity', a means of articulating deeply ambivalent historical forces underpinned by an ambivalent ideological force: race.[45] Black reason underpins the colonial Enlightenment project of white European thought, which Mbembe describes as a constellation of practices, discourses, and founding narratives designed 'to produce the Black Man as a racial subject and site of savage exteriority, who was therefore set up for moral disqualification and practical instrumentalization'.[46]

At the same time, Gilroy argues that duality (Black/European, Black/American) need not be solely a model of harm or negativity: rather in its ambiguity lies the possibility of provocation and resistance. As he writes in the opening to *The Black Atlantic*:

> Where racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these identities [Black/European] appear to be mutually exclusive, occupying the space between them or trying to demonstrate their continuity has been viewed as a provocative and even oppositional act of political insubordination.[47]

In this opening statement, Gilroy not only demonstrates the ambiguity of Black double consciousness, but also clarifies the phenomenological positioning of provocation. That is to say, provocation or insubordination are the products of perceived opposition to dualisms established and maintained by ideological formations such as racism, nationalism, and ethnic absolutism or essentialism, and not necessarily attributes or qualities of living in between those dualisms. This phenomenological obfuscation is further reduced in queer intersectional feminist scholar Sara Ahmed's more recent axiom: 'when you expose a problem you pose a problem'.[48] Blackness need not be provocative for others to be provoked.

To return to the colonial archive, Mbembe poses a specific challenge to critical practice in relation to the archive and the museum. Prominent sites for the institutionalisation of post-Enlightenment modern thought and rational empirical science, the archive and the museum both have the potential to transform and reinscribe Blackness.[49] Archives, and in particular the geographical, archaeological, and cultural distinctions of Black American, French and Francophone, and African archives, are of central concern to Mbembe. Equally so is their incompleteness, and in many instances, their absence and fragmentation. Mbembe states:

> For an incomplete, partial and fragmented archive to speak with the fullness of a voice, a supplement is necessary, it has to be created, not out of nothing but out of the debris of information, on the very site of the ruins, the remains and traces left behind by those who passed away [...]. The challenge therefore is how we can retrieve such lives from a broken existence and give them some kind of, provide them with some kind of 'home' or 'place' where they might be at peace, if you want.[50]

Mbembe's position is profoundly resonant with the critical fabulations of Hartman and Gates, and the creation of potential history activated through Aïsha Azoulay and Attia. Acts of retrieval, repair, siting, and homing consequently become acts of reparation, a provisional place of peace within a conceptual and creative praxis that, as Gates outlines in his intentions for 'Amalgam', offers solace to those who need it the most: past souls and present participants. For Gates the 'fullness of a voice' mentioned by Mbembe is enacted, practiced, and tested through acts of making: specifically the 'Amalgam' commission. These combinatory practices do indeed come out of the debris of information, on the site of ruins, remains, and traces — and also the possibility of tangible transformation, redevelopment, and renewal emerging through the creative possibility of amalgamation, collaboration, and citation. Not one single full voice, but many voices: a chorus. In the subsequent sections, I shift from a focus on critique (of art institutions and archives, of the ideologies of race that underpin Euro-Western and Enlightenment thought) to processes of creative speculation and reparation of artefactual remains and archival remnants; from problem to solution. In doing so I also want to draw attention to Gates's and his collaborators own participation in that web of constellation, the Black Atlantic and global majority scholars, writers and artists who continue to reflect the Black archive as an abundant site of grief and repair, and Blackness as a slippery mode of being.

Repair I. Amalgamation: Reclaiming the Archive in Theaster Gates's *Dance of Malaga*

Rebuilding from detritus is a fundamental aspect of Gates's practice, essential too to what Mbembe describes as the reparative potential of giving voice to the fragmented Black archive. It is what the poet and philosopher Fred Moten has described elsewhere in Gates's work as 'an extended, multi-sensorial investigation of a specific field of inhabitation given in a vast archive of things'.[51] In the case of 'Amalgam', a new gesture opens up: an act of amalgamation which reanimates extinguished interracial communities and the fragmented archives of Black Atlantic experience, located not in Gates's Chicago home suburb, but elsewhere, in an almost unknown place with little or no historical record (the island of Malaga off the coast of Maine). And also elsewhere, in a well-known arts institution of significant historical record. The Palais de Tokyo is the site of the former Palais des Musées d'art moderne, inaugurated during the International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life in 1937 — a building which has also previously housed the renowned film school La Fémis, the Centre national de la photographie, and the Palais du cinéma, among others.

This process of site-specific amalgamation or melding is extended to the structure of the Palais de Tokyo exhibition. Its installed works closest to the exhibition entrance include a large ramped immaculately-laid slate roof construction (*Altar*), leading to an unlit neon sign on a plinth laid atop a perfect circle of randomly overlapping slate pieces (*Malaga*). Both pieces recall a set of ruined buildings, as if submerged beneath the polished concrete of the Palais de Tokyo's floor. Beyond that, a series of vitrines line two walls, each containing juxtapositions of ceramics, tools, documents, limited edition casts of masks, and construction remnants, modelling uninterpreted museal display as artefactual accretions of knowledge, and the (unspoken, uninterpreted) stories told about that knowledge in the form of museal display. These vitrines frame a large sculptural assemblage: *The Island Modernity Institute and Department of Tourism*. Resonating with the Palais de Tokyo's site at the epicentre of twentieth-century modernity, the installation exhibits wooden institutional furniture: lecterns, signboards depicting reproductions of anti-abolitionist caricatures, glass-fronted storage cabinets, elongated chairs, rocks, woodblocks, concrete, masks, and two neon signs, one reading 'Malaga Dept of Tourism', and the other 'In the end, nothing is pure'. Some of these items have been exhibited elsewhere as individual artworks: the elongated chairs, for example, formed part of a pair, *Queen* and *King*, shown at the White Cube in London in 2013. To its right, the assemblage is framed by a very large slate board, on which Gates has drawn a history of Malaga Island, entwined with the histories of French colonialism, France's slave trade, miscegenation laws in the USA, and eugenics.

'Amalgam''s structural attempts to rebuild imaginatively from factual fragments of the archive employ museum vitrines and cabinets familiar to museological practice, as well as large-scale sculptural installation made of artisanal fabricated components, in addition to the music, moving-image, and sound installations that follow. This practice of amalgamation — of archival research and materials,

past artworks, structural materials, models of display and combination — is in itself hybrid, impure; an alchemical, rather than algorithmic mode. In this sense the installation challenges the white European art historical high modernisms espoused by minimalist architecture and abstract expressionism: feeling cannot be extracted from the material, racialised traces of the past. And yet, this positioning is ambivalent: modern Euro-Western inter-war art adopted clashing assemblage as a resistant practice of opposition to the institutional forces of colonialism and fascism (for example in the work of the Dada artists such as Hannah Höch and Kurt Schwitters).[52] Nonetheless — and to divert again from white European art histories — Gates's rebuilding of the archive of Malaga's lost history in 'Amalgam' is also a creative engagement with fragments that instead of erasure produces plenitude.

Taking into account the sculptural dimensions of 'Amalgam' and its wider staging of vitrines and archival evidence, I turn now to the installed film held within the centre of the exhibition's layout at the Palais de Tokyo: *Dance of Malaga*. The twenty-minute installed film centrepiece to the exhibition incorporates exquisite digital high-definition images of the abundant natural ecologies of Malaga Island, contemporary dance sequences within the island landscape choreographed and in part performed by dancer Kyle Abraham, found footage of interracial family life, Hollywood films and popular music, and filmed performances of Gates's ensemble The Black Monks. Integral to the film is its soundtrack, a deft threading of musical refrains between encompassing white noise, whose vibrations Tina M. Campt describes as resonating at 'the healing frequencies of water'.[53] What this film offers, which the prior sculptural installations cannot, is the felt presence of vibration on the skin, facilitating a bodily incorporation of the earlier sculptural amalgamations of archival and speculative histories, with all their gaps, failures, and silences. The work of archival rebuilding therefore draws inward, from externally perceived artefacts and artworks, to a felt-sensed experience of interior and pellicular sound. While I will not dwell on the haptic effects of intimate soundscapes in this chapter, the shift of aesthetic proximity from the large-scale to the personal is an important transition in the abundant embodied practices of 'Amalgam'.

Dance of Malaga brings a rich combination of audio and visual material, neither relentlessly despondent nor exclusively mourning the lives of the Malagasy community, many of whom disassembled their own homes and scattered by sea before the municipal authorities came to demolish their community in 1912. Nature connection on land and water proves a fundamental pull to the film's opening dance sequences, where dark-skinned, muscular dancer Abraham moves in slow spirals around and alongside the splayed trunk of a felled tree. Subsequent sequences are filmed from the water — either close to, or at sea level — revealing the rich slate-blue and slate-grey tones of the waters off the Maine coast, and the island of Malaga, where most of the dance sequences were shot on location. As the sequences progress, the visual source of the soundtrack's experimental vocal refrains is revealed via the form of vocalist Yaw Agyeman of The Black Monks. Agyeman's voice builds a series of experimental phrases and melodies that seem to respond to, but not directly interpret, other moving-image sequences of the film, drawing on poetic refrains like 'I think I'll stay...here | [...] where are my daughters?' The

sequences continue to build, drawing on fragments of the Malagasy archive — maps, artefacts, newspaper cuttings — combined with home movies of a young interracial family; television broadcasts of Black and white musical performers; found footage cited from golden age Hollywood dramas such as Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1959) which recounts the struggles of a light-skinned young woman who passes as white and whose Black mother is a maid to a wealthy white actress; images of trees being felled in a contemporary scene, and a contemporary interracial couple. In early fragments of *Dance of Malaga*, a lone voice reads out extracts from the miscegenation laws that were active in the USA in the early twentieth century. Throughout, Abraham's slow, tender choreography with other dark-skinned and light-skinned performers and the land of Malaga are interspersed with this tapestry of woven images.

The film's structure emerges from a citational entwining of fact and fiction, acts of contemporary creative performance, and fragments from the audio-visual archive of the long twentieth century. Instead of a documentary re-enactment of the lives of the Malagasy community, *Dance of Malaga* instead refuses to fill gaps which cannot be known, or to provide voices when none can be heard. It is a film formed in relation to the tragedy that befell Malaga; not repeating it but instead exploring its critical resonances with the long impact of ideologies of miscegenation across more than a century of visual culture, music, and performance. Abraham's choreography builds a sense of proximity to the land of Malaga, to its ecological framing as an island, while Agyeman's voice resonates across the images, building poetic sorrow that grieves what has been lost without attempting to resurrect or perfectly replicate the Malagasy world. The rich collage of images critiques the ideological fiction of miscegenation, not by depicting all of its brutal human consequences, but by also representing interracial families, heterosexual couples, and communities living well. The citational interweaving of found and home movie footage with newly-filmed sequences becomes reparative, acknowledging the deepest grief while continuing to live and mourn.

Matthew D. Morrison has aligned *Dance of Malaga*'s temporal shifts (past to present to present-subjunctive — a *wish for what might be or have been*) with Sharpe's 'wake work', 'an intentional process that unpacks the paradoxes of Blackness with care, acknowledging the threat of death and dispossession placed upon Black people vis-à-vis their continued will to live and exist both within and outside of those structural conditions'.[54] Mourning is not absent from the archive of Black life; instead mourning *is* the archive; the means by which it is lived, enriched, cared for. This is where critical fabulation and potential history meet. The film's creative (non)fictions and fictionalised re-enactment develop the responsive potential of the 'fullness of a voice', both in the wider sense of the chorus as elaborated in earlier sections of the chapter, and in the specific sense of the singing voice, and more particularly those acts of embodied vocalisation which form from music, performance and, song. Situated at the beating heart of 'Amalgam', *Dance of Malaga* embraces an ephemeral and speculative practice of archival plenitude, focused not solely on the depth of the intergenerational, psychological, historical wounds, but also on the immense, oceanic capacity for cultural repair.

Repair II. Cicatrice/Citation: Visible Repairs in Attia's 'The Museum of Emotion'

What does repair mean to Attia's wider creative practice? Not hiding the damage; making the scars visible; ambivalence; the equivocal hope for change and mourning of loss.[55] Acknowledging the parity between human scars and the scars of the world, and understanding the ritual value of scars and wounds — not to justify the violence but to acknowledge and situate the healing as a wider part of the journey towards understanding our fullest humanity, and seeing that humanity recognised in the wider world. Attia's double-mode of seeing — both the wound and its tending, both the violence and its potential restitution — is a system of non-dualist thought that resonates across the 2019 exhibition, 'The Museum of Emotion'.

The exhibition speaks to Gates's 'Amalgam' from that place of positional reckoning that Mbembe points out in his discussions of the Black American archive in *Critique of Black Reason*: the Black Francophonie. Where 'Amalgam' focuses on energetic plenitude founded in creative reconstruction, Attia's 'The Museum of Emotion' is in some ways an anthology exhibition, ranging across the historical dynamics of the many archival encounters it depicts, and across a significant swathe of Attia's works in the 2010s. Curated, rather than commissioned, the exhibition is itself a citational reassemblage of earlier work, recombined and recontextualised within the Hayward's substantial galleries.

Like 'Amalgam', 'The Museum of Emotion' incorporates a full spectrum of media, from installed moving image to photography, architectural models to sculpture and exhibition vitrines, cabinets, and shelving. The assemblages of the exhibition also bring together and contextualise several moving-image installations, from filmed conversations by prominent intellectuals about a viral video recording of French police brutalisation of a young Black French man (*The Body's Legacies, Pt. 2*), to drone images of a social housing complex in a satellite town to Paris (*La Tour Robespierre*), to interviews with healing practitioners and survivors of war and state violence in South Korea and Vietnam in *Shifting Borders*. The closing artwork of the exhibition, *Shifting Borders* incorporates direct-to-camera interviews with survivors, academics, health professionals, and traditional healers about their search for healing in the wake of traumatic political events in east and south-east Asia, in particular the 1980 Gwangju Uprising. In amongst the benches with headphones attached to enable spectators to sit in the midst of these screens, are seated mismatched pairs of outmoded prosthetic legs, bringing together the possibility of historical physical prosthesis with the creative 'supplement' that becomes so important for Achille Mbembe in the unearthing of connection to a traumatic past.

Albeit that Gates's and Attia's modes of address and conceptual frameworks relate differently to questions of museums and their infrastructures, collections, and archives, in Attia's exhibitionary practice there is a clear emphasis on betweenness, hybridity, and intercultural interdependence, and a regular adoption of museological modes of display as a medium through which to communicate the ongoing enquiry of visible and non-commensurable repair. For example, in his series of vitrines *Measure and Control* (2013), Eurocentric models of measurement and capture of the

natural world (taxidermy, telescopes, collections of beetles, photographs, makeshift plinth) are combined with African Dogon masks and statuary, providing a critical juxtaposition of cultural responses to the natural world. The vitrine series presents on the one hand a European desire to dominate nature through measurable death, and on the other, a Dogon approach to ritual, mourning, protection, and interdependence between human and more-than-human life. And, as mentioned earlier, the elaborate multi-tiered exhibitionary constructions in *The Repair from Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures*, bring together iconographic relationships of damage, trauma, and healing between colonial artefacts of Anglo-European culture, and ethnographic and anthropological artefacts; offering a decolonial, tangible model of André Malraux's *Musée imaginaire* or Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne*.

Stepping away from a focus on Euro-Western comparison, Attia's exhibition is primarily oriented towards the reparative capacities of transcultural thinking: of citational praxis (and here I extend the term 'citational' to include the exhibitionary display of artefacts as well as the reinscription of texts or documents) as a praxis of impure, conditional repair. Like Aïsha Azoulay's potential history, this citational reparation opens up the ambivalent potential of a visual collection; it neither forgives nor forgets, but instead makes visible both wound and healing. For example, *La Tour Robespierre*, the installed moving-image work that opens 'The Museum of Emotion', is a two-minute-fourteen-second high-definition colour video of a drone-generated vertical ascent of a social housing complex on the outskirts of Paris. It is accompanied in the same room by an untitled sculptural artwork from 2013, a rectangular grilled-metal case or cage, designed in scaled proportions and raised on a plinth to give the impression of an architectural model. The juxtaposition incites resonances between the moving image and installed sculpture that reverberate across the historical politics of social exclusion, confinement, and surveillance of ethnically diverse communities in metropolitan France, while also scrutinising the minute differences that frame each window in the Robespierre apartment block. The combination of surveilled concrete brutalist architecture, and the simulacrum of an architectural maquette makes more than a nod to the work of Le Corbusier, one of the key proponents of concrete brutalism in the 1960s. Le Corbusier inspired both the Southbank Centre of which the Hayward Gallery is part, and the under-served and under-resourced *HLM* projects on the outskirts of major cities in France that have since become synonymous in cinematic representations of the French metropolitan *banlieue* with migrant workers, and Black and North African Francophone life. The patient, questioning critique at play in these two juxtaposed pieces is a means of navigating the *both, and* quality of these works. The model is both a cage and a casing. The filming of the tower is both visible evidence of the complex, detailed, unique lives lived by each inhabitant in each apartment — their washing lines and plant pots on the balcony, their net curtains and shutters to each window — and an uncomfortable zone of surveillance facilitated by drone camera technology, which compels each inhabitant to remain invisible as the drone makes its ascent.

In more recent installed films, Attia explores the ambivalence and ephemerality of the moving image itself as an archival and testimonial artefact, including *The*

Body's Legacies, Pt 2 (2018), which was displayed within 'The Museum of Emotion' alongside a broken plastic chair, held together with metal staples. The content of the forty-two-minute film consists of talking heads — the writer Olivier Marboeuf, journalist Louisa Yousfi, philosopher Norman Ajari, and critic Amine Khaled located in domestic, institutional, and cultural settings — who discuss the wider impact of the release of surveillance footage documenting the assault, rape and abuse of Black youth worker Théo Luhaka by police in February 2017. The attack on Luhaka subsequently provoked protests against police brutality, and counter-responses by affiliates of the Front National, particularly when the silent surveillance footage of the incident was released. As described in the film, far-right commentators claimed that the footage presented Luhaka resisting arrest, that his body shape indicated resilience or even aggression incompatible with his claims of sexual assault and bodily harm, or that the police were behaving proportionately. The original surveillance footage of the assault is not revealed during the course of *The Body's Legacies, Pt 2*, but only referred to through the critical engagements of Marboeuf, Yousfi, Ajari, and Khaled, who discuss the colonial contexts of bodily humiliation as a disciplinary and subjugating practice, and the paucity of the footage as a silent, malleable, decontextualised archival document, which summarily fails to 'document' anything but the site of its own discursive power as it enters the public domain. *The Body's Legacies, Pt 2* responds to a desire for reparation of colonial and racial violence, without denial of the personal, social, and cultural wounding that took place, first when Luhaka was assaulted, and subsequently when public discourse turned the release of the surveillance footage depicting the assault against him.

Attia's *The Body's Legacies, Part 1: The Objects* (2018) was commissioned by the *Bauhaus imaginista* project and first exhibited at Le Cube, an independent art space in Rabat. Nonetheless, this 'part 1' is not alluded to in the second: what instead remains tangible is the repeated wounding resulting both from the paucity of archival documentation, and the subsequent racially-motivated critiques of Luhaka's body which serve to undermine both his agency and the violence enacted upon him. This desire for reparation, and the possibility or even likelihood of repair, are of necessity ambivalent. As Claire Veal notes of *The Body's Legacies, Pt 2*, 'the audibility of the four speakers' testimonies seems to represent the work's successful reparation of the wounds opened by Luhaka's assault'.[56] And yet, as a reparative form, this speaking-out-loud of the acts and discourses that wound is not enough to repair or complete the healing process; not for Luhaka, nor for the experts interviewed, nor for the wider Black, Maghrebi, and migrant communities inflamed by the evident miscarriage of justice that took place.[57] Like the broken chair, visibly repaired with metal staples and placed in front of the large flatscreen monitor onto which the film was projected, repair of a wound or break is provisory, temporary, and vulnerable inasmuch as it is also hopeful, imaginative, and improvisatory.

The film's screen, its content and the material contexts of a broken chair become part of the wider array of repair-based relationships and discourses between viewer, space, and work, across the whole of the exhibition. *The Body's Legacies, Pt 2*

acknowledges and brings into visibility the discursive spaces of critique set up by the physical location of ~~La Colonie~~ as an environment for open critical engagement with colonial and racial violence, the voices of the participants (situated within that wider discursive environment), the explicit acknowledgement of brokenness, and the visible work of repair across the spatial and temporal sites of Luhaka's assault, the release of the surveillance footage, the protests and counter-reactions all the way through to the exhibition of the work in the non-Francophone contexts of the Hayward Gallery. What is important, in this and other moving-image works by Attia, is a place from which to speak. A location, albeit changing and shifting, from which to give voice to the ambiguity and ambivalence of colonial and racial trauma, both visible and invisible, and to Black and postcolonial identity as that slippery mode of being to which Mbembe refers. For Attia's work, the visible or invisible scar — the *cicatrice* as it is named in French — is thus always also the site of *citation*, articulation, revisiting and naming, in the process of coming to understand, acknowledge, and, perhaps one day, to heal the deep wounding of colonial trauma.

Conclusion. Care and the Responsibilities of Healing

If Gates's orientation in 'Amalgam' is towards a constellation of solace, a subjunctive mood of interconnection between speculative collaboration *(Dance of Malaga)*, sculptural investigation (amalgamation), and archival rebuilding, Attia's detailed interrogation of museological object placement makes pain, suffering, and the visible healing of/from scars a front and central concern. If, as Yasmin Gunaratnam suggests, 'in form and content, archives show us how power and morality have operated at different historical moments [...] they always hold the traces — the 'dust' — of their exclusions', then the dust that Attia's 'The Museum of Emotion' picks up is that of hope made visible in the uneven healing of scars, and in the clashing material terminologies of physical and emotional, human and object-based repair.[58] This creates what Theo Reeves-Evison and Mark Justin Rainey describe as a 'new aesthetic vocabulary' producing a creative alternative of postcolonial repair for Attia, and a choral plenitude of artefactual fictions and non-fictions for Gates.[59] Both Attia's and Gates's processes of rebuilding invite techniques of reorientation, offering a fullness of creative voices, rather than paucity or absence, in making space for the black archives of the past, present, and future.

There is, however, a geopolitical coda to this chapter. The evolutionary path of my research spans both the period immediately prior to the global Covid-19 pandemic, and the social ruptures vis-à-vis questions of race that have emerged in the intervening time. Since no modulation of race is static, so too must seismic shifts be acknowledged in cultural attitudes to race between 2019 and 2023, and the concomitant turn towards Black and global majority artists and thinkers to administer to these attitudes. Since the murder of George Floyd by police in Baltimore on 25 May 2020, and the subsequent global protests against racially-motivated institutional violence which followed, a new set of socio-cultural responses to race in the sphere of culture and the arts have emerged. These responses have increased the visibility

of Black and global majority artists in prominent cultural venues, often to the great intellectual benefit of cultural organisations, but not always to the benefit of those artists and cultural leaders. There are ethical pitfalls produced by the sudden spotlighting of singular Black figures — a new kind of hypervisibility that has for so long been understood as part of the uncomfortable dualism of marginalisation (hypervisible/invisible) which Olivier Marboeuf discusses directly in Attia's *The Body's Legacies, Pt 2*. Furthermore, the prominent positioning of Black cultural leaders within cultural venues has resulted in a concomitant overwhelming burden of responsibility, not to mention tokenisation, and over-reliance on such individuals to create significant institutional change overnight; indeed expectations to heal the racial trauma of the institutions that continue to traumatise.[60] This overweening burden of healing labour also extends to artists who articulate healing through transformative methods of archival rebuilding.

It is not my desire in this chapter to replicate the systemic issue of overburdening. My ongoing self-reflection continues to ask how scholarship on global majority moving-image media might develop non-extractive practices that amplify and re-energise their speculative calls to archival, reparative care. In other words: whose job is it to heal? And who undertakes this healing labour? Who cares for or about the archival rebuilding projects expressed through Attia's and Gates's work? And what might obligate Attia and Gates to stand in as carers not only for their own work, or those archives and artefacts from which they assemble their works, but also as figurehead carers for Black and decolonial archives all over the world? Resisting the temptation to further belabour the already tender and exhaustive work of their specific practices seems paramount in developing an ethical praxis of citation between scholars and artists. In this sense, I take my cue from feminist science and technology scholar Michelle Murphy and archival scholar Daniela Agostinho. Agostinho identifies Murphy's concept of 'unsettling care' which in turn emerges from a constellation of other feminist and decolonial practices, including that of the Unsettling Minnesota collective, and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's writing on care in more-than-human worlds.[61] The concept recognises non-innocent entanglement as a foremost concern when reflecting on care: 'ways to situate affection, attention, attachment, intimacy, feelings, healing, and responsibility as non-innocent orientations circulating within larger formations'.[62] There is no altruistic position of an ethical absolute: the work of critique, repair, and care in Gates's and Attia's practices is also ambivalent, non-innocent, frictional, interconnected to a wider constellation of thought and praxis.

Just as I identified at the outset of this chapter, my positionality as a white European scholar is always in non-innocent entanglement with the reparative archival remediations present in the work of Gates and Attia. Agostinho identifies this too: 'social relations shaped by coloniality cannot be bracketed out by that encounter'.[63] Strategies of unlearning and the labour of unforgiveness highlighted by Aïsha Azoulay disrupt the burden of care that risks settling on Black and global majority artists, but this effort needs to be consistent in its attention to the non-innocent entanglements of art, archives, and colonial history. The labour of repair, care, and attentiveness also requires imagination in the rebuilding of a new mode

of decolonial history, as Agostinho explains: 'an imaginative ethos needs to be nurtured, because new worlds and modes of coexistence need to be imagined and brought into being'.[64]

Black feminist activist and poet Alexis Pauline Gumbs speculates in her 2020 book *Undrowned*, 'Are my wounds the most convenient ways for you to know me? Why do they shape so much of how I know myself? And the whole dynamic of recognition, how does it shape and scar us?'[65] Attentive to the non-innocence of care, Gumbs identifies the tender territory of wounding, the scars each of us bears, and the ways our scarring connects and identifies us among ourselves. The archive too is a network of scars, visible and invisible. Rebuilding what a reparative Black and decolonial archive might be is therefore the care-full, frictional, speculative work of many hands: a network of constellation. DuBois and Fanon. Aïsha Azoulay and Hartman. Gilroy and Mbembe. Gates and Attia. Me. You.

Notes to Chapter 4

1. Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London and Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2019), p. 171.
2. The racialised colonial logic of the Enlightenment has been discussed extensively, for example, in scholarship on Immanuel Kant. See, for example, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, 'The Color of Reason: The Idea of "Race", in Kant's Anthropology', *The Bucknell Review*, 38.2 (1995), 200–41; Robert Bernasconi, 'Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism', in *Philosophers on Race: Critical Essays*, ed. by Julie K. Ward and Tommy L. Scott (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 145–66; Howard Williams, 'Colonialism in Kant's Political Philosophy', *Diametros*, 39, 2014, 154–81; Oliver Eberl, 'Kant on Race and Barbarism: Towards a More Complex View on Racism and Anti-Colonialism in Kant', *Kantian Review*, 24.3 (2019), 385–413.
3. Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Markman (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 8; and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World*, Sexual Cultures, 53 (New York: New York University Press, 2020), p. 1.
4. For more on citational policies as a mode of intersectional feminist critique, see Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), pp. 15–17.
5. Saidiya V. Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe*, 26 (2008), 1–14 (p. 11); and Tavia Nyong'o, *Afro-Fabulations: The Queer Drama of Black Life*, Sexual Cultures, 14 (New York: New York University Press, 2019), pp. 40–42.
6. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 2002); Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. by Laurent Dubois (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); and Christina Elizabeth Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).
7. See also W. E. B DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (New York: Fawcett, 1903); Sharpe, *In the Wake*; and Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*.
8. Maria Walsh and Alexandra Kokoli, 'Trauma and Repair in the Museum: An Introduction', *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 27.1 (2022), 4–19; and Colin Sterling and Jamie Larkin, 'Towards Reparative Museology', *Museums & Social Issues*, 15.1–2 (2021), 1–3.
9. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), p. xvii.
10. Ibid., p. 346.
11. See Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999); and Anne Carson, *Antigonick*, repr. (New York: New Directions, 2015).
12. Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', p. 11; cited in Olivia R. Polk, 'Book Review of Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval, by Saidiya Hartman: W. W.

Norton & Co., 2019', *Women's Studies*, 48.6 (2019), 652–55 (p. 2).
13. I cite Aïsha Azoulay's two family names here to honour her ancestral name as a French-Arab woman, which she discusses in the early pages of her book (*Potential History*, pp. 13–15).
14. Ibid., p. 65.
15. Ibid., p. 64.
16. Ibid., p. 171.
17. Ibid., p. 571.
18. Victoria L. Valentine, 'Priceless History: Johnson Publishing Photography and Media Archive Up for Auction This Week', *Culture Type*, 14 July 2019 <https://www.culturetype.com/2019/07/14/priceless-history-johnson-publishing-photography-and-media-archive-up-for-auction-this-week/> [accessed 29 January 2023].
19. Theaster Gates, 'Stony Island Arts Bank', *Theaster Gates*, 2019 <https://www.theastergates.com/project-items/stony-island-arts-bank> [accessed 29 January 2023].
20. Antwaun Sargent, 'A Photographic Archive's Extraordinary Portrait of Black Femininity', *The Photobook Review*, 18 (2020), 18–19 (p. 18).
21. Claire Selvin, 'Philanthropic Organizations Pay $30 M. for "Ebony" and "Jet" Photo Archive, Plan Donation to Getty, Smithsonian', *Artnews*, 2019 <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/market/johnson-photo-archive-getty-smithsonian-13039/> [accessed 29 January 2023].
22. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, pp. 1-40.
23. Palais de Tokyo, 'Theaster Gates, Amalgam', 2018 <https://www.palaisdetokyo.com/en/event/theaster-gates> [accessed 11 June 2019]; and Kate McMahon, 'The Use of Material Culture and Recovering Black Maine', *Material Culture Review*, 77-78 (2013), 92–106 (p. 100); cited in Tina M. Campt, 'The Healing Frequency of Water', in *Amalgam – Theaster Gates: Tate Liverpool*, ed. by Kasia Redzisz and Laura Bruni (London: Tate Publishing, 2022), pp. 141–48 (p. 142).
24. Theaster Gates, 'A Shade Darker, a Shade Lighter: Notes on Sculpture, Exhibition Making and the Monument of Miscegenation', in *Amalgam – Theaster Gates, Tate Liverpool*, ed. by Redzisz and Bruni, pp. 37–40 (p. 39).
25. Ibid., p. 39; and Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); referred to in Matthew D. Morrison, '"I Think I'll Stay Here": (Re)Hearing Malaga Island's Lost Sounds', in *Amalgam – Theaster Gates, Tate Liverpool*, ed. by Redzisz and Bruni, pp. 179–93 (p. 179).
26. Gates, 'A Shade Darker, a Shade Lighter', p. 40.
27. Kader Attia, 'Open Your Eyes: "La Réparation" in Africa and in the Occident', *Third Text*, 32.1 (2018), 16–31 (pp. 16, 29–30).
28. Ibid., p. 30.
29. Ibid.
30. MTL Collective, 'From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation? A Decolonial Perspective on the Crises of Contemporary Art', *October*, 165 (2018), 192–227 (p. 208). This article usefully contextualises more recent shifts towards decolonial practices of institutional critique/re-formation.
31. Lisa G. Corrin, 'Mining the Museum: An Installation Confronting History', in *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*, ed. by Gail Anderson (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2004), pp. 248–57.
32. Consider, for instance: Adrian Piper's public performance *Mythic Being* (1973), in which she dressed and acted on the street as a stereotyped Black man, documenting her own and others' responses; and *My Calling (Card) #1 (Reactive Guerrilla Performance for Dinners and Cocktail Parties)* (1986-90) which calls out racist remarks made to her based on the assumption that she passes as white; and Walid Raad's epic project on Lebanese histories of war *The Atlas Group* (1984).
33. Irit Rogoff, 'Turning', *E-Flux*, 00 (2008) <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/00/68470/turning/> [accessed 10 June 2019].
34. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, p. 1.
35. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, pp. 1–40.
36. Ibid., p. 126.
37. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, p. 2.

38. Ibid, p. 10.
39. Ibid., p. 7.
40. David Theo Goldberg and Achille Mbembe, '"The Reason of Unreason": Achille Mbembe and David Theo Goldberg in Conversation about *Critique of Black Reason*', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 35.7–8 (2018), 205–27 (p. 208).
41. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, pp. 28–29.
42. Kobena Mercer, 'Dispossession Island', in *Amalgam – Theaster Gates, Tate Liverpool*, ed. by Redzisz and Bruni, pp. 43–53 (p. 45).
43. Laurent Dubois, 'Translator's Introduction', in Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, pp. ix–xv (p. xiv).
44. Goldberg and Mbembe, '"The Reason of Unreason"', p. 206.
45. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, p. 121.
46. Ibid., p. 28.
47. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 1.
48. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, p. 37.
49. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, p. 27.
50. Goldberg and Mbembe, '"The Reason of Unreason"', p. 208.
51. Fred Moten, 'Nowhere, Everywhere', in *Theaster Gates: My Labor Is My Protest*, ed. by Honey Luard (London: White Cube, 2012), pp. 70–76 (p. 73).
52. Former Senior Curator at Tate Liverpool and current Director of KANAL-Centre Pompidou, Brussels, Kasia Redzisz identifies the relationship between Gates's amalgamation and the assemblages of Schwitters in her essay accompanying the 'Amalgam' catalogue when the exhibition travelled to Tate Liverpool in 2020. See Kasia Redzisz, 'Amalgam as Method: The Politics of Mixed Parts', in *Amalgam – Theaster Gates, Tate Liverpool*, ed. by Redzisz and Bruni, pp. 89–100 (p. 95).
53. Campt, 'The Healing Frequency of Water', p. 142.
54. Morrison, '"I Think I'll Stay Here"', p. 181; Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p. 5.
55. See Kitty Scott, '"In Conversation: Kitty Scott and Kader Attia Discuss the Concept of Repair"', in Kader Attia, *The Repair: From Occident to Extra-Occidental Cultures* (Berlin: Green Box, 2014), pp. 163–70.
56. Clare Veal, 'Under Erasure: Kader Attia's Museum of Emotion Hayward Gallery, London, 2019', *ISSUE*, 8 (2019), 59–67 (p. 63).
57. While then-president of France François Hollande visited Luhaka's hospital bedside to promise that 'justice will be done', the police disciplinary board recommended only a reprimand for the police officers involved in the assault, against the recommendations of French prosecutors who pushed for greater sanctions. Jean Beaman, 'Racial Progress amid Global State Violence', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 46.13 (2023), 1–7 (p. 4).
58. Yasmin Gunaratnam, *Death and the Migrant: Bodies, Borders and Care* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), p. 34; cited in Theo Reeves-Evison and Mark Justin Rainey, 'Ethico-Aesthetic Repairs: Introduction', *Third Text*, 32.1 (2018), 1–15 (p. 13).
59. Reeves-Evison and Rainey, 'Ethico-Aesthetic Repairs', p. 13.
60. I would like to thank Gaylene Gould for our conversations about the effects of the cultural sector's response to BLM on global majority cultural leaders, including failures of support and tokenistic demands for additional labour that placed escalating pressures on such leaders at a time of significant trauma and vulnerability. Her research on restorative care practices in cultural leadership is forthcoming with the Clore Foundation.
61. Daniela Agostinho, 'Archival Encounters: Rethinking Access and Care in Digital Colonial Archives', *Archival Science*, 19.2 (2019), 141–65; María Puig de la Bellacasa, *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Michelle Murphy, 'Unsettling Care: Troubling Transnational Itineraries of Care in Feminist Health Practices', *Social Studies of Science*, 45.5 (2015), 717–37; and *Unsettling Ourselves: Reflections and Resources for Deconstructing Colonial Mentality*, ed. by Unsettling Minnesota (Minneapolis: Unsettling Minnesota, 2009) <https://unsettlingminnesota.files.wordpress.com/2009/11/um_sourcebook_jan10_revision.pdf> [accessed 27 March 2023].

62. Murphy, 'Unsettling Care', p. 722.
63. Agostinho, 'Archival Encounters', p. 161.
64. Daniela Agostinho, 'Care', in *Uncertain Archives: Critical Keywords for Big Data*, ed. by Nanna Bonde Thylstrup and others (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021), e-book.
65. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2020), e-book.

CHAPTER 5

❖

Counter-Archiving Coloniality in the Americas: Rita Indiana and others' *After School* (2020)

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> How does one rewrite the chronicle
> of a death foretold and anticipated,
> as a collective biography of dead subjects,
> as a counter-history of the human,
> as the practice of freedom?
>
> — Saidiya Hartman[1]

Introduction: Coloniality, Connection, and Counter-Archival Collaboration

Rita Indiana and others' thirteen-minute performance video *After School* was filmed in a former school in Puerto Rico on 27 August 2020, at a moment of widespread and heightened attention to racial inequality.[2] The Covid-19 pandemic had disproportionately affected people of colour in the USA (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021) and the Black Lives Matter movement had gained global momentum in the wake of the killing of George Floyd in May 2020. When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, Puerto Rico was still in a long process of recovery following Hurricanes Irma and Maria in September 2017 and the 2019–20 earthquakes on the archipelago. The effects of Hurricane Maria, in particular, were compounded by the woeful US federal response under Donald Trump.[3] Both the hurricanes and the earthquakes resulted in schools being closed on top of a general trend of closures from the 1990s onwards, which had picked up pace from 2016 as part of a series of austerity measures under Puerto Rico's then Governor Ricardo Rosselló and Secretary of Education Julia Keleher. In this chapter, we explore how the video draws attention to obscured colonial histories and imagines the future undoing of coloniality and capitalism through a queer/anti-racist alliance. Our reading of the video as counter-archive draws on the work of critics who have centred issues of racialisation and dehumanisation in theorisations of

and engagements with colonial archives and archival practices, including Saidiya Hartman, Lisa Lowe, and Alexander Weheliye. We also discuss whether the video unwittingly re-enacts racial hierarchies through 'mestizaje logics', despite its anti-colonial stance.

The performance video, which disrupts our expectations of a single-track music video, opens with a reflection on slavery and death by Dominican artist, actor, and choreographer Vicente Santos, who emerges from a room in darkness to speak, looking directly into the camera:

> En una aula vacía me acompañan
> marca blanca y negra superficie
> el gemido antes de que me asfixie huele a agua de colonia y artimaña
> el producto de cifras imposibles
> que en su barco en un día calcularon
> mi sangrienta geografía subastaron
> de esos gritos se acuerda lo invisible.
>
> [In an empty classroom I am accompanied by a | white mark and a black surface | the wail before I suffocate smells of *eau de Cologne* and tricks | the product of impossible numbers | that they calculated one day in their boat | they auctioned my bloody geography | the invisible remembers those screams.][4]

From the start of the video, then, our attention is drawn to issues of 'race', to the afterlives of slavery in the present, and the ongoing realities of consumerism/capitalism and colonisation. Santos describes white chalk metaphorically marking a black surface in the classroom; white knowledge written onto a black background. At the end of his intervention, Santos flips this vision of education through signalling his Black perspective as a site of authority and learning — 'Mi pequeña lección ha comenzado' [My little lesson has begun] — before turning away from the camera and walking back into the darkness. The screen goes black for a few seconds before the first song commences. We then see, in black and white, close-ups of the hands of musicians in the Dominican Republic playing drums and shakers before the video cuts to Rita Indiana. We observe her in a classroom that is largely empty (apart from the presence of the performers), run down, and no longer used as a classroom, with school chairs stacked haphazardly in the corner. We soon realise that the musicians we first saw, are projected onto the blackboard, rather than being physically present in the room. In this way, through what we might consider as the visual citation of a different location, our attention is drawn to absent presences, in other words, to virtual presences, or absences made present through the use of technology. Through the projection, the stacked chairs, and candles lit by Santos (Figure 5.1), we are encouraged to think about other absent presences and present absences in the former school. In this way, the visual setting stages Santos's reflection on memory residing within the realm of the invisible.

The video connects a broad spectrum of political issues across the Americas through the citation of various politically-charged contexts. After Santos's spoken opening comes 'Pa' Ayotzinapa' [For Ayotzinapa], a song about grief, mourning, and transnational solidarity following the disappearance of forty-three students from a rural teachers' college in Mexico. The college is an important site for the

Fig. 5.1. Santos lights candles in front of stacked chairs next to the blackboard upon which Dominican musicians are projected in black and white with Rita Indiana blurred in the foreground of the shot, still from *After School*, dir. by Noelia Quintero Herencia (Puerto Rico, 2020).

organisation of movements for social justice. The next song is called 'The Heist'. It is about 'Águila Blanca' [White Eagle], the 1983 robbery of a Wells Fargo depot by Los Macheteros, an organisation fighting for Puerto Rican independence from the USA. The 'heist' took place on the birthday of Black Puerto Rican independence figure Pedro Albizu Campos (1891–1965), a portrait of whom appears in the video. After 'The Heist' we see thermal imagery footage of Hurricane Maria interspersed and overlaid with forests on fire (Figure 5.2) and close-ups of a face and teeth, that we later learn are the face and teeth of Dominican singer Kiko El Crazy. This footage is accompanied by a haunting voiceover in Norwegian, thus acting as a disruption or moment of unintelligibility for viewers who do not know that language.[5] The final song, 'Mandinga Times', the title track from Indiana's most recent album, is a rallying cry against capitalism and colonialism and a celebration of queer/*cuir*/Black solidarity.

While canonical cultural theorisations of the archive, such as those of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, do not centre issues of racialisation, a number of other critics have expanded our critical understanding of the archive.[6] Drawing on the work of Hartman, Lowe, and Weheliye, our reading of technology and ideas of the counter-archival brings to the fore issues of racialisation and ideas of dehumanisation on which 'racialising assemblages' are constructed. In *Habeas Viscus* (2014), Weheliye argues that these 'racialising assemblages represent [...] the visual modalities in which dehumanisation is practiced and lived'.[7] In this chapter we ask: how might counter-archival practices work against the dehumanising effects of dominant visual, discursive, and technological modalities? Given that coloniality

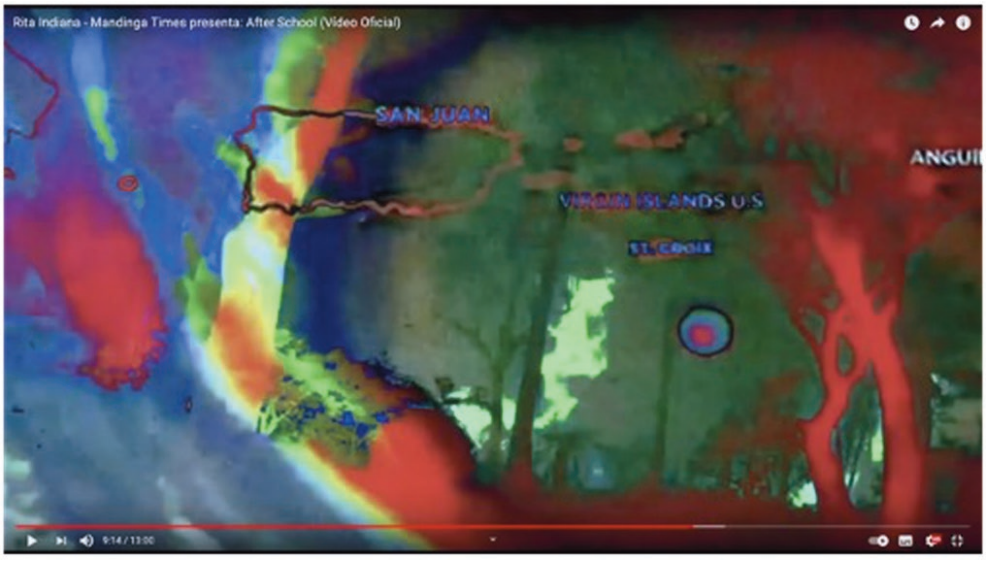

Fig. 5.2. Thermal imagery footage of Hurricane Maria approaching Puerto Rico overlaid with trees on fire, still from *After School*, dir. by Quintero Herencia (Puerto Rico, 2020).

functions, in part, through surveillance and control of what is visible and what is concealed, we see the visual as a site for countering coloniality and, what Weheliye terms 'racialising assemblages', though it also has the capacity to reinforce these assemblages unwittingly, even as it tries to undo them.[8]

We feel moved to write this chapter that explores notions of the counter-archival in an unconventional (and, perhaps, counter-archival) mode that does not necessarily compel us to unify our perspectives into one voice throughout. Instead, our discussions and ensuing chapter structure and style reflect an approach to collaboration that does not require total agreement, but seeks to encourage a willingness to be swayed by each other's perspectives and a genuine openness to different disciplinary approaches. Throughout the course of our collaboration and as we watched and rewatched *After School*, the impact of our different positionalities and disciplinary backgrounds on our interpretation of the video became clear. Thinking together reinforced our awareness of the importance of acknowledging the embodied researcher in work that seeks to highlight issues of racialisation, an issue to which queer, feminist, and anti-racist scholars have long drawn attention.

R (they/them) is an historical sociologist whose research focus includes critical eugenics, reproduction, social inequalities, and scientific racism in Latin America and the Caribbean. R is both from Puerto Rico and a scholar of Puerto Rico and Mexico and describes themselves as a light-skinned Puerto Rican. Natasha (she/her) is a cultural and literary studies scholar whose work focuses on transnational queer, feminist, and anti-racist movements and cultures, especially in Spain and the Americas. As a second-generation immigrant born in the UK to Indian parents born in Tanzania and Kenya, Natasha has first-hand experience of racism (both directed at her and her family in the UK and elsewhere and amongst her Indian-

origin community towards Black Kenyans) and racialisation (like R), though not in the Puerto Rican context. While Natasha seeks to foster and maintain activist and scholarly collaborations in Latin America and elsewhere, her knowledge of Puerto Rico is obviously less intimate than that of R. While we do not believe that inhabiting a particular identity *necessarily* equips one to analyse the context in which that identity exists (including being attentive to one's own power and privilege or lack thereof), we are acutely aware of the power of lived experience as a form of knowledge generation that is often undervalued in academia. R's family were directly affected by some of the events discussed in this chapter, especially Hurricane Maria and the earthquakes. Their work is informed by their experience of growing up in Puerto Rico and their regular visits to the archipelago, though they also note that they are not currently living there, and, like Natasha, have spent recent years studying and working at elite institutions in the UK.

Our process has required an openness to each other's perspectives, and, in part, the undoing of any of our own certainties. Our different perspectives can be summarised in broad strokes as follows: R's approach is situated predominantly within critical race theory and its heterodox approach to assemblage theory; they are suspicious of how Black and Brown bodies are used in cultural production and highly attentive to the ways in which cultural works can fall into the very logics they seek to critique. While also aware of the stubborn persistence of racist logics, Natasha is more optimistic about the transformational potential of queer, anti-colonial, and transnational cultural production, especially where it points to possible alliances across different groups. Throughout the course of the collaboration, Natasha has become more critical of *After School*. Nonetheless, she still clings to the hope that cultural forms have the power to reveal injustices and to inspire, shape, and sustain action for structural transformation. R's wariness of any cultural production that seems to celebrate 'multiculturalism' has, if anything, been reinforced by the collaboration. In what follows, Natasha first offers a reading of the video as operating in a counter-archival mode that incorporates opacity, unintelligibility, and a messy connectedness, often through gestures of citation, as an anti-colonial practice of freedom. She goes on to argue that the video deploys technology and plays with virtuality (in the sense of present absences and absent presences) to conjure a sense of pan-Caribbean/pan-American solidarity. R then offers a rebuttal to these arguments. They posit that the video's 'opacity', in the sense of what it continues to obscure through centring whiteness, reinforces 'racialising assemblages' through its aesthetics and politics of mestizaje. We 'conclude' with an inconclusive dialogue.

Counter-Archival Modes, Technology, and Virtuality (Natasha inflected by R)

In this section, I argue that the video and its visual technologies of projection, blackouts, and thermal imaging constitute a counter-archival practice in the sense that they make present what remains absent — be those people, violent histories, and/or the connections between these elements — without providing closure or purporting to offer a 'full picture'. The video's emphasis on conjuring absences through recourse to the virtual, understood as something not physically existing in a particular space but made to appear so, through the use of digital technology or otherwise, fosters what Edward Said terms contrapuntal reading; reading between the lines of dominant narratives that obscure that on which they depend.[9] However, Indiana's counter-archival practice does not simply render visible these gaps in colonial narratives with an emphasis on the transparency, clarity, and epistemic mastery often desired by technology regimes and archival modes, but enacts processes of unseeing and unknowing that point to the political potential of opacity.[10] If the archive is a Foucauldian system of discursivity that establishes what can be said, might the counter-archival be that which resists being articulated in transparent terms?[11] If an archival drive involves the accumulation of information that is then separated and categorised for ease of access and legibility, the counter-archival drive might tend towards connections and connectedness between issues, people, and places that have often been presented as disparate, a messy relationality that is not easily legible, that slips from our grasp.

In *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015), Lisa Lowe describes the archive as a technology of colonial governance that rests on practices of classification that rationalise colonial violence: 'the archive that mediates the imperatives of the state subsumes colonial violence within narratives of modern reason and progress'.[12] For Lowe, as for Weheliye, colonial and racist practices rest on how people are situated at different distances from the category of the human: 'The social inequalities of our time are a legacy of these processes through which "the human" is "freed" by liberal forms, while other subjects, practices, and geographies are placed at a distance from "the human." '[13] Writing of the archives of colonial governance (in her case the UK National Archives), she states: 'its imperatives are classification, collection, and documentation, rather than connection or convergence'; instead, she aims to 'devise other ways of reading'.[14] Following Lowe's analysis of archives, the reading of social inequalities offered in *After School* could be described as counter-archival in the sense that its imperatives *are* connection and convergence, as revealed both by its content and its form.

After School itself enacts a disruption to expectations of a music video. Bringing together sites, struggles, and three tracks from a music album, the video refuses to delineate and separate issues in different geographic locations. Using this unusual form of a performance video that opens with a speech, followed by three tracks, interspersed with footage of musicians in the Dominican Republic, monochrome negative film effect, and thermal imagery footage of the hurricane with a voiceover in Norwegian, highlights the connectedness of struggles across Mexico and the Caribbean (Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic), especially in the

relationship of these countries to the USA. It shows the breadth and depth of the impact of coloniality and ongoing inequalities in the present that are both its legacy and its continued present. The presence in the space of both the musicians projected onto the blackboard and those in the classroom offers a layering of sites in the space in which the video is filmed, thus creating a sense of connectedness across the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. The video also features disorientating shifts between close-ups of the musicians/singers projected onto the blackboard and those same musicians/singers seen in the background. Especially in the interlude featuring thermal imagery footage of Hurricane Maria, the aesthetics push against linearity and separation, revealing a preference for visual layering and blurring that more accurately reflects the entanglements of coloniality. Forests on fire, the satellite imagery of the hurricane, and Kiko El Crazy's face appear and disappear through overlapping of the images in an aesthetic that enacts what Donna Haraway describes in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) as our epoch's tentacular linkage of the human and nonhuman.[15] The voiceover in Norwegian and loud 'white noise' are aural representations of unintelligibility and indecipherability. If the archival drive is one of a push towards total knowledge as an element of a desire to control, might counter-archival practices centre a practice of unknowing and unseeing? Indiana's face paint in the video, which includes a form of painted blindfold over her eyes, also resonates with this acceptance of what cannot be fully seen and known, what is often obscured in history and the fraught ethics of what can be represented, and how.

Writing of the figure of the dehumanised slave in what she terms 'the archive of Atlantic Slavery', Hartman states in the article 'Venus in Two Acts' (2008) that:

> The archive is, in this case, a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhea, a few lines about a whore's life, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history.[16]

Therefore, for Hartman, the colonial archives both minimise/erase and hypervisualise the dehumanised figure of the enslaved woman. Given that we are analysing a piece of visual culture that opens with a reflection on slavery, Hartman's comments are pertinent. She argues that narrative restraint is an ethical method for discussing slavery in the present:

> The refusal to fill in the gaps and provide closure, is a requirement of this method, as is the imperative to respect black noise — the shrieks, the moans, the nonsense, and the opacity, which are always in excess of legibility and of the law and which hint at and embody aspirations that are wildly utopian, derelict to capitalism, and antithetical to its attendant discourse of Man.[17]

In my reading of the video I am, therefore, attentive to obscurity as violence, but also to the idea of 'display', aware that legibility and transparency may also be acts of violence. In such contexts, might opacity and unintelligibility follow Hartman's 'imperative to respect black noise' as a practice of freedom? Hartman's approach resonates with that of Édouard Glissant who, in *Poetics of Relation* (1997), argued that opacity is the only possible basis for ethical community, i.e. relationality that centres liberation: 'Widespread consent to specific opacities is the most straightforward

equivalent of nonbarbarism. We clamor for the right to opacity for everyone'.[18] While focusing on the effects of coloniality in the present, rather than archives of the trade in enslaved African people that Hartman is discussing, the video's own shrieks, black-outs, and disorientating footage of destruction by fire and Hurricane Maria could be read as a visual equivalent of these attempts to preserve opacity in creating narratives from archives created by those who did not include Black people in the category of the human.

The video's opacity is also an aesthetic counterpoint to the global reach and extensive surveillance activity of technological regimes, an issue to which I will now turn. Despite its critique of coloniality, capitalism, and insertion into a lineage of Puerto Rican independence fighters, the video's dissemination on the US platform YouTube, where it was premiered on 8 December 2020, points to how musicians and performers often depend on technology companies and platforms that they implicitly critique for dissemination of their work.[19] Before moving on to further analysis of the video itself, I will provide some background to technology in Puerto Rico. Investment in technology companies and the relocation of workers in the industry to the archipelago was presented as vital to its development after the devastation wrought by Hurricane Maria. On 23 August 2018, almost exactly two years before the filming of *After School* and around a year after the hurricane, then Governor of Puerto Rico, Ricardo Rosselló, wrote an opinion piece for wired.com to lure companies to the archipelago. He celebrates the archipelago as 'an ecosystem to attract new technology investments'.[20] With brief mention of the work being 'hard' (an understated allusion to the between three and five thousand deaths that resulted from the hurricane, a long-term power outage that seriously hampered post-hurricane recovery, and severe mental health implications for the archipelago's inhabitants), Rosselló focuses on the 'endless opportunities at hand'.[21] He describes the archipelago as 'a blank canvas' for experimentation — with clear echoes of the colonial terra nullius — in a process of accelerated modernisation on what he describes as 'a once-unimaginable scale'.[22]

Rosselló hopes to attract technology workers to the archipelago from the US mainland and elsewhere. In a grossly insensitive turn of phrase in light of the devastation wrought by Hurricanes Irma and Maria (both in September 2017), he goes on to comment on the appeal of the archipelago's climate for technology workers: 'you can't beat our tropical climate'.[23] He envisages this new influx of technology workers across the archipelago as forming a 'human cloud' in the technology infrastructure he hopes to foster:

> I would like to see Puerto Rico become a place where businesses serve customers and coordinate operations throughout the Americas, what I like to think of as a 'human cloud,' where workers spread across the island handle tasks remotely for businesses around the world.[24]

The image of 'human clouds' supporting a technological endeavour conjures a form of dematerialisation radically different to the racialising technologies of empire that rested on the dehumanisation of Black people as described by researchers including Lowe, Weheliye, and Hartman. In the case of the technology workers

lured to Puerto Rico, their dematerialised human state involves an ascendance into a floating, celestial god-like state immune to the material realities of the post-hurricane archipelago. These technological gods whose control spreads across the world with the border-crossing spirit of neoliberal entrepreneurialism thus exist in a very different form of virtuality to racialised Puerto Ricans and others whose dehumanisation is figured as an imbrication with the earth and the ground, with what Vincente Santos describes as his 'sangrienta geografía' [bloody geography]. We see this, for example, in how Kiko El Crazy's face, teeth, and hands appear layered with the footage of Hurricane Maria and the burning forests. Reading the video in the context of Rosselló's article draws attention to how virtuality through the disembodied, dematerialised 'human clouds' of the technology regimes is a very privileged form of absent presence or human-but-also-not-quite-human presence that is free from having to really think about the vulnerabilities and material realities of the body and spaces through which it moves.

If we might associate 'technology', as hailed by Rosselló, with clarity and stratification (like Lowe's conceptualisation of the colonial archive), floating above and beyond the ground through a 'human cloud', what we have in this video, in contrast, is an increasingly embodied assertion of the human. Before turning to this explosive embodiment, I will discuss 'virtuality' in the video, in the sense of present absences and absent presences. The video blurs the distinction between presence and absence. It puts obscured bodies back into its counter-archive, bringing up visual and aural traces of what has disappeared, as well as reflecting upon what wills and longs for 'opacity' and allowing the hypervisible to become obscured without losing its presence. Therefore, even the distinctions between transparency and opacity are blurred. Indeed, the first words uttered by Dominican dancer and choreographer Santos are 'En una aula vacía me acompañan' [In an empty classroom they accompany me], pointing to the simultaneity of absence, 'una aula vacía' and presence, 'me acompañan'. In a transnational gesture of virtual presence, the first images we see as the credits roll are what we later learn is a close-up of a black and white projection of Dominican musicians, including Kiko El Crazy, onto the blackboard in the classroom; virtual presences in the space of the classroom that, projected onto the blackboard, form part of the video's 'lesson'. The connection of spaces through these aesthetics of the virtual form part of the video's pan-Caribbean and pan-American politics.

Thinking of the 'aula vacía' in which our 'pequeña lección' commences, the location where the video is shot is loaded with absences, of spaces repurposed, both at the level of the building itself and the barrio in which it is located. The video is filmed in a former public school, Dr Pedro G. Goyco Elementary School, closed by the government in 2016. The building has been repurposed as a community centre that continues to carry Goyco's name, Taller Comunidad La Goyco. Interestingly for the video's pan-Caribbean collaboration across Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, Pedro Goyco was a Puerto Rican doctor and abolitionist who spent time studying in the Dominican Republic. The location of the building in the Barrio Machuchal de Santurce is also significant. The area now known as Santurce was

first settled by the Taíno and later by formerly enslaved people. Since 2010 it has undergone a process of rapid gentrification that has seen the historically Black area become increasingly inhabited by white residents.[25]

In the very setting of the video the issue of who occupies spaces and how, and the histories that haunt spaces, is thrown into sharp relief. We see school chairs and tables piled in the corner of the room, and plants creeping through the window blinds. In the post-hurricane context, the dark and abandoned classroom recalls scenes of schools underfunded, underequipped, and closed, with many of those remaining open then left without power in the longest power outage in US history after Hurricane Maria and the further closing of schools after the 2019–20 earthquakes. It is significant that the polysemic title of the video, *After School*, is rendered in English, given Puerto Rico's colonial status vis-à-vis the USA and the effect of this colonial context on the education system, as demonstrated by the highly controversial former Puerto Rico Secretary of Education, Julia Keleher, now indicted for theft of federal funds and fraud.[26] The title could be interpreted as referring to what this building is used for after it ceases to function as a school (a community-run space), it also gestures to learning that takes place outside the context of formal education, what children learn 'on the streets' after the school day and, in this context particularly, given extensive school closures, it could point to a longer temporality, asking what happens to education in a context where the system is chronically underfunded and communities must fend for themselves.

The school chairs are also a visual form of connection with another context of impunity and attacks on education: the disappearance of forty-three students from an *escuela normal* in Ayotzinapa, Iguala, Mexico, in September 2014, the subject of the first song. Numerous protests about state complicity and impunity in the disappearance of these students have involved pinning black-and-white photos of their faces onto school chairs in otherwise empty spaces. The presence of the stacked chairs next to the projected black and white images of the musicians in *After School* cites this practice of protest that became iconic of the global response of solidarity with Ayotzinapa. Throughout the song, Santos lights candles, forming a sort of shrine around the pile of disused school chairs in the corner; a form of memorialisation for past presences and a symbol of mourning. The chairs are precariously balanced, symbolic of the fragile state of public education in neoliberal contexts. In this first song, 'Pa' Ayotzinapa', described on the social media platform Somos Grandes as a 'bolero grunge', Indiana and the guitarist are seated at a microphone.[27] The movement that gestures towards pan-American solidarity is described in the lyrics, rather than through the movement of their bodies:

> Vine por mar y por tierra
> yo no soy de por aquí
> Voy camino a Ayotzinapa
> a encender una vela allí.
>
> [I came by sea and by land | I'm not from around here | I'm on my way to Ayotzinapa | to light a candle there.]

This memorialisation of violence and impunity in a context where one is not from

is a gesture of solidarity across public education in poorer and often rural areas that is under threat from austerity politics and states and other organisations seeking to quash social mobilisation.

As the video progresses, there is an increasing emphasis on embodiment, on visceral bodily presence, even if mediated through the virtual. The second song, 'The Heist' (another English title) which started out as a *plena* (an Afro-Puerto Rican form with its roots in *bomba* that originated amongst enslaved people in Puerto Rico) is described on Somos Grandes as a 'melodía inspirada en el spaghetti western' [melody inspired by the Spaghetti Western], and, therefore, another transnational form. In this song, Indiana and co-performer MIMA are standing, with some slow movement as MIMA walks over to the portrait of Puerto Rican independence fighter Pedro Albizu Campos, on whose birthday the Wells Fargo heist took place.[28] As well as transgeographical connection and solidarity, the video fosters a sense of a transtemporal and cross-'racial' lineage in Puerto Rico itself. This is especially evident when white Puerto Rican MIMA first walks over to and looks at a portrait of iconic Black independence fighter Albizu Campos on the classroom wall before adopting his pose as she stands in front of the portrait (Figure 5.3). We might consider this gesture a form of bodily citation of the painting. The Norwegian section of the video that appears as a voiceover over footage of Hurricane Maria also refers to lineage:

> Risen out from your lineage and shame
> you stepped out of your powerlessness
> made yourself a chosen one.[29]

The message is unintelligible to those who do not speak Norwegian, but the words point to the power to be harnessed from one's ancestors in continuing political

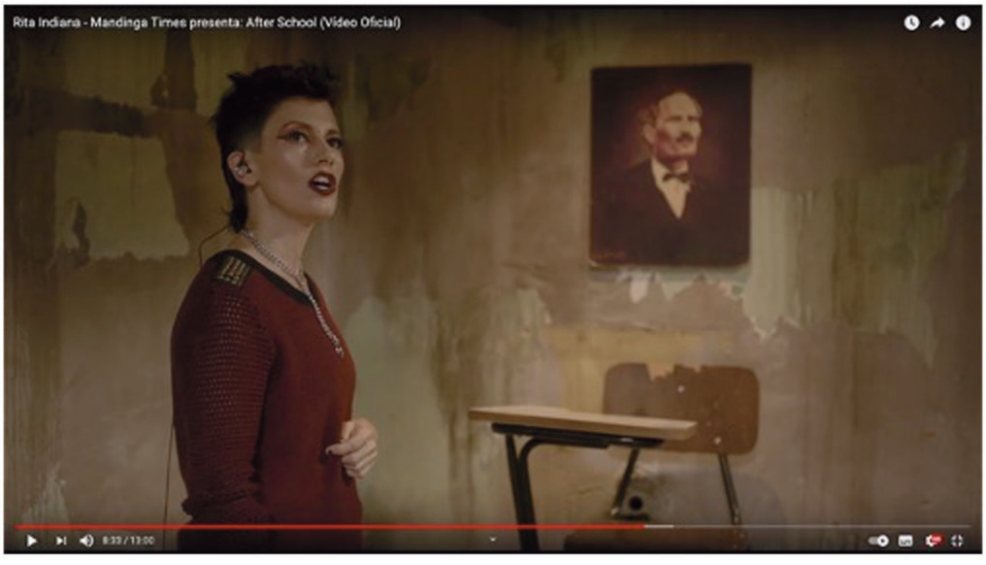

Fig. 5.3. MIMA in front of a portrait of Pedro Albizu Campos, still from *After School*, dir. by Quintero Herencia (Puerto Rico, 2020).

struggles. While the use of Norwegian might be read as a gesture towards the political potential of opacity and indecipherability, the fact that this part of the video is in Norwegian might also convey that this powerful inheritance can be activated through transnational alliances.

After 'The Heist' there is a shift to what Indiana has described as an 'Afro Punk' song. 'Mandinga Times' is, in its themes, the most transnational song of the album *Mandinga Times* from which all of the songs are taken, with its bilingual title perhaps reflecting its global outlook. Indiana herself acknowledges this in an interview: 'El Juidero was introspective, but the search in Mandinga Times is more global in terms of themes. My wife calls this song an apocalyptic newscast, because it's kind of an overview of so many different conflicts we're experiencing right now'.[30] Nonetheless, its locality is signalled through its repeated use of Puerto Rican and Dominican slang and rhythms.

In this part of the video, aesthetics of the virtual are used to emphasise a politics of pan-Caribbean solidarity. First we see a close-up of Dominican Dembow artist Kiko El Crazy projected onto the blackboard with monochrome negative film effect (Figure 5.4). This footage focuses on Kiko El Crazy's face and teeth in such a way that his bodily presence gains equal or greater prominence than the figures in the room, again gesturing to a bringing-together of the musicians/singers in the classroom and those in the Dominican Republic, present via a projection. The emphasis on Kiko El Crazy's face and body translates to a more embodied presence within the classroom, but the monochrome negative effect is also an aesthetic of hypervisualisation that perhaps reflects the surveillance to which Black people are subjected.

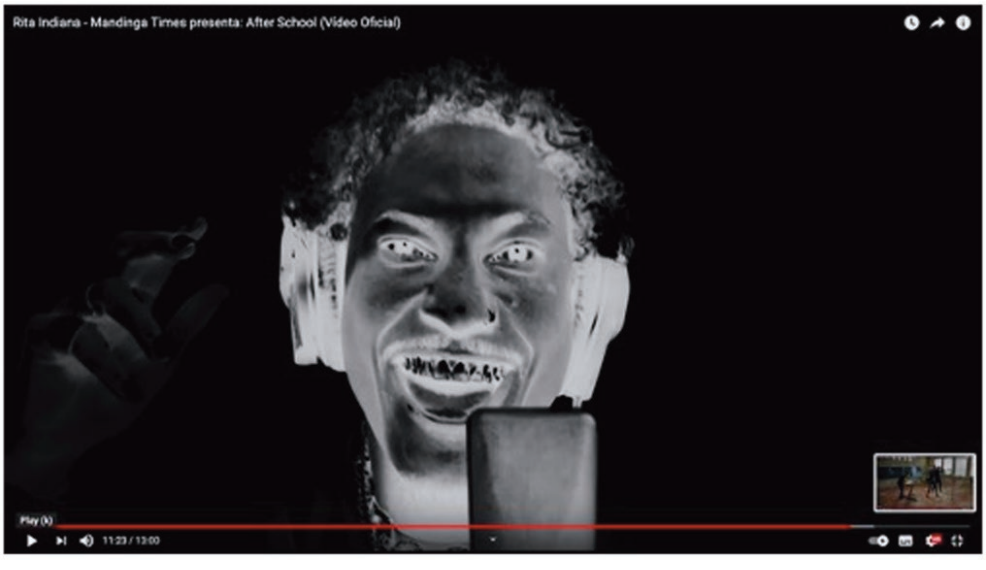

Fig. 5.4. Kiko El Crazy projected onto the blackboard with monochrome negative film effect, still from *After School*, dir. by Quintero Herencia (Puerto Rico, 2020).

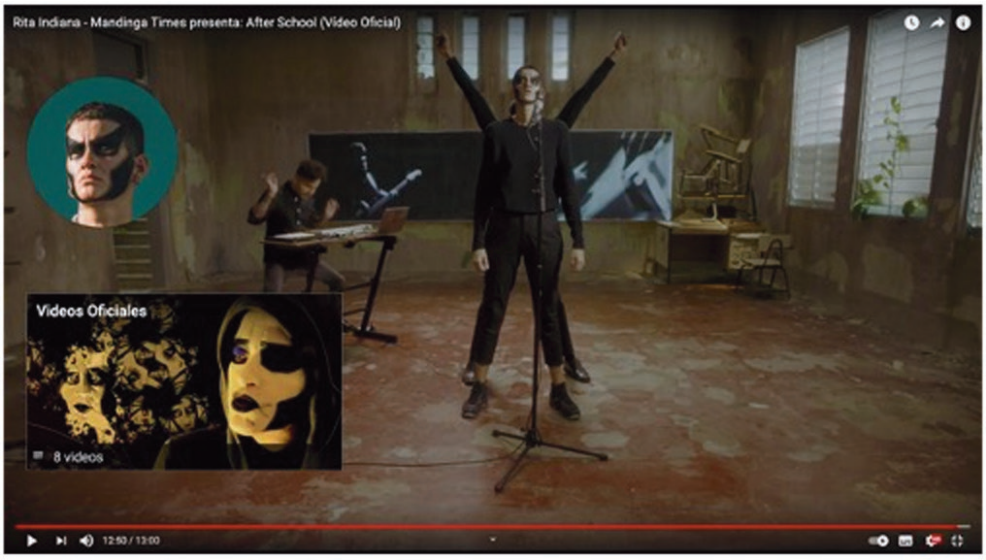

Fig. 5.5. Indiana stands in front of Santos, whose arms and hands appear from behind her, raised and outstretched, still from *After School*, dir. by Quintero Herencia (Puerto Rico, 2020).

In the final song, 'Mandinga Times', Indiana and Santos (both Dominicans in Puerto Rico; one white and one Black) there is much more energetic movement, with the final shot of Indiana's body overlapping with that of Santos (Figure 5.5). Both their synchronised movement and the overlapping of their bodies gesture again to a sort of mestizo identity through the combination of Black and white bodies where, significantly, Indiana remains in front, and most visible, incorporating Santos. Santos also does not appear in the list of title credits, which describes the video as being 'con Rita Indiana' and 'featuring' MIMA, Kiko el Crazy, and Eduardo Cabra, or at the end of the video when the director is named (Indiana's partner Noelia Quintero Herencia). While we have participants said to be 'featuring' in the video whether or not they are physically present in that space, Indiana remains in the foreground and some of the people, including Santos, are not named at all.

What is at stake in the converging of sites, struggles, and subjects? The final song centres on a shifting 'Mandinga' form. Indiana describes 'Mandinga' as a 'demonising' and 'othering' term with a wide range of reference beyond the Mandinka people of West Africa, one of the biggest ethnic groups brought to Puerto Rico during the slave trade. She describes how the term has come to refer to witchcraft, Black latinx person, queer person, hypersexualised man.[31] It is here appropriated, much as queer/*cuir* has been, to signal both an apocalyptic moment, but also the possibility of a new future to come if alliances and acts of solidarity flourish amidst marginalised groups.[32] I read this amalgamation of the marginalised as an empowering alliance through which to work towards alternative futures.

In conclusion to this section, I argue that the video engages with a counter-archival aesthetic and uses virtuality to make evident what is obscured but also uses

wilful opacity in order not to be totally legible. I see the result of this as being a form of pan-Caribbean/pan-American solidarity and community. However, what might remain obscured within an intentional opacity such that certain hierarchies are preserved? In the next section, R discusses the limitations of the solidarity I have read into the video through focusing on 'racialising assemblages' and the common elision of Blackness through the aesthetics and politics of mestizaje. R reads the video as clumping together different manifestations of 'otherness' in a mestizo gesture that obscures differences in how marginalisation and oppression are experienced by different people.

'Lo queer no te quita lo racista' [your queerness doesn't take away your racism]: *Mestizaje*, *Mandinga Times*, and Multiculturalism (R inflected by Natasha)

As a way of accounting for the ongoing processes of racialisation, gendered, and sexualised progression that delimit the modern subject we will be using 'racialising assemblages'. This concept 'construes race not as a biological or cultural classification but as a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-human, and non-human'.[33] To fully understand racialising assemblages, we must look at the role of technology and its capacity to manipulate the human environment.[34] In Indiana's music video the politicisation and critique of the transnational inequalities and colonialism in Latin America signify the simultaneous territorialisation and de-territorialisation of racialising assemblages.[35] In this sense, the logics of mestizaje territorialise racialising practices and discourses while claiming a de-territorialisation of racial hierarchies through an assumed racial democracy. This, in turn, allows Indiana's music video to acquire 'an open totality of movement' through the use of technology.[36] These relational processes permit an interconnected existence bound by the legacies of coloniality in the region while creating a sense of pan-American identity which has been historically thought through the figure of the mestizo as an organising principle.[37]

According to Weheliye, for Deleuze and Guattari assemblages 'constitute continuously shifting relational totalities comprised of spasmodic networks between different entities (content) and their articulation within "acts and statements" (expression)'.[38] However, following Manuel DeLanda there are various difficulties with the translation of the concept both as a product and a process, as well as challenges posed by the number of definitions of assemblage offered by Deleuze and Guattari.[39] DeLanda's work provides a more cohesive definition of 'assemblage' by trying to smooth out the contentious and dichotomous/oppositional points of the theory (i.e. tree/rhizome, striated/smooth, molar/molecular, and stratum/assemblage).[40] To do this, he explores assemblages as 'a concept with knobs that can be set to different values to yield either strata or assemblages'.[41] This allows us to explore different gradients in the theory without falling on oppositional points that would otherwise prohibit us from seeing the complexities of assemblages that sometimes work independently, in tandem and/or collaboration with each other. In this sense, Indiana's music video will be used as a way of showing how the counter-

archival use of technologies is not exempt from historical racialising assemblages. This will allow us to observe the different movements and relations of subjects and objects in association with other axes of oppression like 'race', gender, sexuality, class, among others.

In this section I use assemblage theory to analyse the complex dynamics of Indiana's music video. However, it is important firstly to note the problematic origins of assemblage theory. Both Weheliye and Peter Wade critique strict Deleuzianism as it keeps assemblage theory constricted to 'colonial structures of knowledge' that tend to privilege masculinist perspectives and European knowledge production.[42] This is especially evident in the ways in which Deleuze and Guattari privilege racial hybridity or mixed-racedness in a way in that ends up replicating and enforcing racial hierarchies utilising a 'post-racial' framework. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) they state that '[a] race is defined not by its purity but rather by the impurity conferred upon it by a system of domination. Bastard and mixed-blood are the true names of race'.[43] By overlooking 'mixedness' as a sociohistorical and biopolitical category vis-à-vis 'purity', Deleuze and Guattari reinforce, naturalise, and territorialise racial thinking and, with it, racial hierarchies. Therefore, a heterodox understanding of assemblage theory is needed to break away from the production of colonial, racial, and gendered thinking.

'Mandinga Times' by Indiana is a post-apocalyptic way of equating different axes of oppression without truly questioning how these operate in heterogeneous ways, which risks the erasure of intersectional and structural dynamics of power. In an interview Indiana gave to Alejandra Beltrán in 2020, she expresses that *Mandinga* is a word that resides in the lexicon of many Latin American countries and that got to Latin America during the slave trade. However, Indiana also states that 'la palabra ha sobrevivido en muchos países con distintos significados y todos son para demonizar a ciertas minorías, como los homosexuales, los negros, gente que practica religiones que no son cristianas' [the word persists in many countries with different meanings, and in all cases it is used to demonise certain minorities like homosexuals, Black people, people who do not practice Christianity].[44] To her, *Mandinga* is:

> Perfecta para hablar de los tiempos que vivimos y todo lo que estamos sobreviviendo en vez de viviendo, y todas ellas son producto de ese estado colonial en el que permanecemos de muchas formas. Son los tiempos de Mandinga, son muchas cosas y ella o él o ellos es un ser nominario, monstruoso, mitad alienígena mitad criatura de mar, mitad ángel caído, es una combinación de cosas como es la misma música que hago.
>
> [Perfect to talk about the times we live in and everything that we are surviving instead of living, and all of these events are remnants of a colonial state in which, in many ways, we remain. These are *Mandinga* times and this means lots of different things; *Mandinga* is a monstrosity, half alien, half sea creature, half fallen angel, it is a combination of things similar to the music I make.]

By equating 'race', gender, sexuality, religion and ascribing post-human qualities, despite blaming these dynamics of power on colonialism, 'whites have developed powerful explanations — which have ultimately become justifications — for

contemporary racial inequality that exculpate them from any responsibility for the status of people of color'.[45] I believe Indiana is not exempt from these dynamics that permeate due to racialising assemblages in Latin America which are often masqueraded as racial democracy through the mestizo as an organising principle to homogenise, invisibilise, and control.

When discussing ideas that organise the mestizo as an assemblage, Wade argues that it is imperative to explore the ways in which assemblages of relations and objects emerge through different practices, which often construct relationships that are assumed to be implicit. Using a Latourian approach he argues that the mestizo, disregarding its accounts of hybridisation, in fact, becomes 'purified', in his words 'a pure hybrid'. This process of purification makes the mestizo 'an object that is taken for granted and made stable through the work of assembly'.[46] In this sense the mestizo is endorsed through a milieu of ontological forms, society, culture, language, science, technology among others; and it is used according to the temporal and spatial priorities of these networks. Indiana's *After School* often takes for granted these processes of 'purification' that make the mestizo a stable entity in the Latin American context. This, in turn, allows the repetition of networks that historically have been used to pathologise and categorise people into non-human, not-quite-human, and human through racialising assemblages. By claiming a pan-American/pan-Caribbean identity Indiana both invites us to analyse critically the legacies of colonialism in Latin America and the Caribbean as well as using the assemblage of the mestizo to cement narratives and practices engrained in racialising processes. This, in turn, produces a counter-archive that — while critical of the legacies of colonialism — tends to fall into the racialising tropes of mestizaje logics as a way of trying to create a cohesive pan-American/pan-Caribbean identity.[47]

The heterogeneous element or object of the network and the relations that it produces allows us to use Wade's take on assemblage theory as a useful tool for analysis. Wade invites us to:

> Think of objects/concepts (e.g. the mestizo) as acquiring different material realities in the various settings of institutional practice and knowledge-making while also seeing these settings as a part of a broader reticular network, which allows the object/concept to move between settings.[48]

After School is part of this network as it uses the mestizo as a binding pan-American identarian element while using a former institutional setting (the school) to contest racial democracy and produce knowledge about the legacies of colonialism and the legacies of slavery in Latin America, as well as environmental racism and structural violence created by seemingly liberal states. This, in turn, allows Indiana to map a broader reticular network of pan-Americanism moving through different temporalities, spaces, and instances of state repression, including Spanish colonisation, Ayotzinapa, Hurricane Maria, and Puerto Rican nationalist revolt. However, by creating a sense of pan-American identity Indiana does not escape the logics of the mestizo that gravitates from racial democracy to a structural hierarchisation of racial difference. Despite the assumed multiracial/multicultural approach, this only shows that 'multiculturalist reform does not necessarily disperse

with mestizaje as a set of ideas and practices that enact the mestizo nation and the mestizo individual'.[49]

The concept of pan-Americanism that creates the mestizo in Indiana's music video is not the same mestizo of José Vasconcelos or Octavio Paz but all three of them are somewhat 'distinct, but recognisable, versions of each other'.[50] Topology allows us to understand the relation and continuity that makes the mestizo unsimilar but related to the historical conceptions of the mestizo that binds together the pan-American identity that Indiana alludes to. This dynamism of the mestizo is not paradoxical but relatable as an assemblage in itself, which is simultaneously, part of other assemblages. Thus, even if the mestizo is moved, in a multicultural society, towards racelessness, it can also gravitate towards racial difference.[51] However, these specific notions that materialise and structure the mestizo even in close relation to each other could be open to rearticulation. Therefore, some questions still remain: is multiculturalism a useful tool for rearticulating the mestizo? How does Indiana's music video conceive of the assemblages that seek to create a cohesive pan-American identity while topologically gravitating towards a consciousness of the pernicious effects of racial difference in Latin America? Is it possible to conceive of a pan-American identity without the mestizo?

The creation of mestizo nations signified the erasure of everything that fell outside of the heteropatriarchal understanding of coloniality and reproduction. This is to say, mestizaje fed from ideas of compulsory heterosexuality, ableist notions, and the erasure of Black and indigenous bodies, among others. The mestizo as an assemblage operated as a way of (re)producing national ideas that responded to the legacies of coloniality, anti-Blackness, and white supremacy, according to the assumed needs of each country, as a way of providing a sense of homogeneity. In this sense, 'state heterosexualism' was used, by Latin American elites, as a way of social control to produce the ideal mestizo through racialising eugenic practices and ideas that persist in social, political, cultural, and scientific understandings in the region.[52]

To understand the mestizo as an assemblage we need to see how it operates with other assemblages and intersectionalities. A critical approach to what makes Latin American identity is imperative for understanding broader networks around gender, sexuality, 'race', and class. For instance, rearticulations of the mestizo led to the ideological constructions of anti-colonial conceptions that coexisted with the leftist and heteropatriarchal formulation of the 'new man'.[53] This means that heterocentric ideas of masculinity were still operating as an organising principle for the mestizo nation which, in turn, pathologised everything that fell outside the heterosexual-able-mestizo body. In recent decades however, there has been a surge of a new 'queer' left in Latin America that contests heteropatriarchal assemblages and links queerness to coloniality as well as other axes of oppression.[54] I argue that Indiana can be read as part of this new queer left that comes to contest transnational violence in Latin America through *After School*. In this sense, Indiana's relation to the long history of imperialism in the Caribbean allows her to link the necropolitical past and future to rearticulate queer theory.[55] However, by using the

mestizo as the organising trope for this assumed homogeneous identity, Indiana uses intersectionality as a way of supporting the normative and mainstream discourse of liberal multiculturalism that 'colludes with the disciplinary apparatus of the state'.[56] In this sense, the exclusionary inclusion of subjectivities inside the logics of mestizaje needs to be problematised and critiqued 'not through identity but an assemblage'.[57]

For Sara Ahmed:

> Queer is a word that has been flung like a stone, picked up and hurled at us; a word we can claim for *us*. Queer: odd, strange, unseemly, disturbed, disturbing. Queer: a feeling, a sick feeling; feeling queer as feeling nauseous [...]. These proximities tell a story.[58]

However, what happens when these proximities become transnational; meaningless but substantial? The word 'queer' has been adapted and critiqued by a diverse range of scholars and activists from Latin America. The heterogeneity of Latin America and its transcultural dimensions have made scholars and activists question 'queerness' as a way of appropriating and adapting this concept. Queerness in Latin America is transmuted as *cuir*, *kuir*, *meco*, among others, as a way of exploring identities as a process that obligates us to reformulate historical categories (or assemblages) that privilege heteropatriarchal structures.[59] *After School* can be thought of as *cuir* in the ways in which it portrays non-normative bodies gravitating through different transnational settings marked by violence and colonialism. However, it is important to acknowledge that these bodies do not have the same experiences and are not marked by the same axes of oppression. This is one of the limits of multicultural practices and narratives.

This movement, mutation, and gravitation of Latin American queerness or *lo cuir* can be analysed through what I term '*cuir* topologies'. *Cuir* topology permits us to understand the transnational relations of 'queerness' but also how it gravitates to the mestizo and its racialising dynamics, even if it is used as a mode of contestation to gender and sexual violence in the region. In this sense the *cuir* subject becomes a part of the mestizo assemblage to give it a sense of structure and relational continuity to blur racialisation practices in this broader reticular network. In other words, 'lo queer no te quita lo racista' [your cuir-ness doesn't take away your racism], a slogan used on placards at protests by racialised migrants in Madrid.[60] For instance, in 2011, Indiana created a music video titled *Da' pa' los dos* in which she sought to show and contest the tensions among the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Karen Jaime argues that Indiana uses disidentification to critique Dominican colourism in relation to Haiti and displays a 'queer Afro-diasporic version of Dominicanness'.[61] Towards the end of the video Indiana appeared in blackface, dressed as the Blessed Virgin Mary. Jaime argues that by doing this, Indiana reappropriated 'the toxic imaginary and iconography of black-/brownface [as a way of forging] a powerful social and political critique' to the processes of whitening through Catholicism in the Dominican Republic vis-à-vis religious syncretism of Haitian Vodun and Santería.[62] Jaime goes on to argue that by using blackface, Indiana seeks to 'subvert' whitening practices and represent a 'global subjectivity'.[63] This global subjectivity

or *cuir* topology is also represented in *After School* when she introduces transnational connections of violence and coloniality in Latin America. Nonetheless, in both cases her 'global subjectivity' is created and represented at the expense of Black and Brown bodies that experience the violence of erasure by mestizaje and mestizo logics.[64]

I use '*cuir* topology' here as a way of showcasing how *cuir* dynamics are not exempt from the racialising assemblages produced by the mestizo. The concept of *cuir* topology is important as a way of exploring how different bodies that have been historically pathologised and Othered do not necessarily escape the racialising logics of mestizaje. Drawing on Celia Lury, Luciana Parisi, and Tiziana Terranova, Wade argues that topology:

> Highlights relationality and continuum; things are not separated but always related; boundaries connect as well as divide; it flattens social space and makes everything contiguous and equivalent; a frame does not separate an inside from an outside in a stable way, but is itself dynamic and remakes relations; change is immanent in continuity, they are not opposed.[65]

This is to say, *cuir* topology gravitates towards the racialising logics of the mestizo without questioning the pernicious effects of the myth of racial democracy in Latin America. *Cuir*-ness and the *cuir* subject as well as the mestizo tend to relate and connect in different ways that are often uncontested due to the work of assembly. While remaking and questioning the relation of colonialism, Indiana's whiteness permits her to gravitate towards different spaces without contesting racialising assemblages that make the mestizo a stable category. This allows the mestizo to acquire material realities through the work of assembly. Following Wade, I argue that multiculturalism masks 'inequality by pretending different cultures are of equal standing, rather than acknowledging the hierarchies of 'race' and class that attach to cultural difference'.[66] In short, Indiana's blackface in *Da pa' los dos* and her celebration of a pan-American identity in *After School* allow us to observe how *lo cuir* gravitates towards the mestizo without a serious commitment to questioning racialising assemblages in the region.

Inconclusive Duet

> Read this book like a song. No never, ever like a book of theory.
> — Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley[67]

The fact that the video is titled *After School* and is shot in a former classroom leads us to reflect on the function of formal education and the future of spaces of learning, both formal and informal, in a variety of contexts. Indeed, YouTube itself is a site of learning sometimes used within formal education settings, but also, as with many online platforms, as a space for the exchange of ideas and cultural production. Access to it varies, of course, depending on access to digital technologies, another site of inequality. In the video, other locations, such as Ayotzinapa and the Dominican Republic, are brought into the Puerto Rican school setting: the musicians in

the Dominican Republic are projected within the frame of the blackboard, the candles lit by Santos in front of the blackboard and on the precarious pile of school chairs forms a shrine both to education and to the disappeared student-teachers of Ayotzinapa. What sort of processes of (un)learning does the video depict? Who does it centre in the production of knowledge?

Reflecting on the knowledges valued in higher education, in *The Fire Now* (2018) Beth Kamunge draws on an exchange with Osop Abdi Ali to note that:

> Publishing standards tend to construct detached, 'objective', 'rational', inaccessible writing as good writing [...]. Is there room for 'messy' writing that calls for speculation? that poses more questions than it does answers? that embodies grief and lament — a dirge of sorts?[68]

Responding to this call for anti-racist scholarship not to sit within neat accepted academic forms and in a spirit of collaboration as an ongoing conversation, we offer an inconclusive conclusion here. It takes the form of an extract from our conversations as we grappled with our arguments and counter-arguments, illustrating the ways in which we are changed through conversation, and how we can write together without necessarily having to offer a unified voice. The video involves the repurposing of both a physical space (the school) and of the music video form, which typically offers a visual representation of a single song. Here, we repurpose the academic conclusion through leaving our questions unanswered and the tensions across our different perspectives unresolved in a deliberate act of unlearning and unknowing. Might this be what it means to read theory or academic work 'like a song', as Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley instructs us to do? Just as Tinsley calls for us to read theory like a song, might we watch this video and its songs as a theoretical treatise on solidarity, a call for the collective unlearning of the histories that are typically emphasised in formal education, and a call to action both within and beyond such spaces?

R: I'm still very critical of the video. Successful white music artist sings about coloniality and deploys some Black artists in secondary roles. It is Rita Indiana *featuring* the others.

NATASHA: You have convinced me on that front... Santos's name isn't even mentioned in the credits in the video... and he's the first person to appear, starting off his 'little lesson'. But isn't the very act of assuming that the Black dancers and musicians in the video are somehow being used to enact another violence? What about the agency of Black musicians and artists even when they appear alongside a white singer with a huge platform, be their presence physical or virtual in the space? The musicians in the Dominican Republic, including Kiko El Crazy, are given an important place in the classroom through being projected onto the blackboard. They have a virtual presence in a space that is traditionally the site of authority onto which a teacher writes as they stand at the front of a classroom.

R: That's all true... but Rita Indiana needs to step aside. Or at least not stay centre stage. Share her platform, but not stay centre stage.

NATASHA: What if the others didn't want to be centre stage? There definitely could have been more of a flattening out of hierarchies but I do think the video plays with that in a way through its engagements with presence and

absence, the virtual and with technology...But you're right that Indiana is the constant throughout. Perhaps I am overreading how self-reflective the whole thing is...There is a big part of me that believes in the power of this queer/*cuir* interracial solidarity... what Jasbir Puar calls, where is it... 'Desires for reciprocating, intersectional, and co-constituted assemblages of solidarity'.[69] So, in response to your focus on 'racialising assemblages', isn't this what we need, these 'assemblages of solidarity'? Having said that, I have also been thinking a lot recently about the limits of solidarity, the limits of empathy, positional knowledge and how difficult that can be to transmit, you know?

R: Yes, exactly. Is *this* form of solidarity all we can hope for? That big-name white musicians give some space to Black and Brown bodies in their performances?

NATASHA: There are what seem like collective periods of greater consciousness, as with last summer and the Black Lives Matter protests, and then cycles of denial, or turning away. Surely it's good that Indiana is using her platform to draw attention to these issues and looking to a better future that might be fashioned 'after school', that is to say beyond formal institutions of learning. I am very much of the view that we are all racist, to differing degrees, whether that is internalised racism or otherwise, and we must engage in the ongoing process of *unlearning* this racism, which often persists as anti-Blackness in otherwise progressive movements. Indiana isn't just saying 'let's make a space for everyone within the status quo'. Indeed the video itself disrupts expectations of its form. The final song in the video calls for a radically different future, to the end of capitalism through the Black/*cuir* alliance of 'Mandinga Times' across multiple sites. I don't think she is necessarily equating oppressions in calling for this...

R: But Indiana is still the main voice, the most predominant presence. Is this all we can hope for?

NATASHA: Who are we to say? We can't speak for others either. But I do see what you are saying... and with those logics in mind, maybe we should...

R & NATASHA: ...get out of the way too?

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Notes to Chapter 5

1. Saidiya Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe*, 26 (2008), 1–14 (p. 3).
2. The video was directed by Noelia Quintero Herencia, whose name appears in the final credits. In the title credits, after Rita Indiana's name the following people are listed as 'featuring' in the video: Kiko El Crazy, Mima, Eduardo Cabra. A full list of contributors, including choreographer Vicente Santos who also features heavily in the video, can be found in the description of the video on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvyZEEGCYRM> [accessed 1 June 2021].
3. For further detail about the federal response to Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico compared to Hurricanes Harvey and Irma in Texas and Florida, see Charley E. Willison and others, 'Quantifying Inequities in US Federal Response to Hurricane Disaster in Texas and Florida Compared with Puerto Rico', *BMJ Global Health*, 4.1 (2019) <https://gh.bmj.com/content/bmjgh/4/1/e001191.full.pdf> [accessed 19 April 2023].
4. All translations from Spanish into English are our own. There is a play on words in the Spanish

phrase 'agua de colonia', which could be translated as 'Eau de Cologne', or, more literally, as 'water of a colony'.

5. From the written information provided below the video on YouTube, we learn that this piece is 'Approaching' by Norwegian singer Sakari Jäntti and Schmerzwelt.
6. For a valuable summary of cultural theories of the archive that have been developed since Derrida's and Foucault's theorisations, see Daniela Agostinho and others, 'Uncertain Archives: Approaching the Unknowns, Errors, and Vulnerabilities of Big Data through Cultural Theories of the Archive', *Surveillance & Society*, 17.3–4 (2019), 422–41 (pp. 424–25).
7. Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC, & London: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 6.
8. See Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham, NC, & London: Duke University Press, 2017).
9. See Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).
10. See Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).
11. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith, 2nd edn (London & New York: Routledge, 2002).
12. Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC, & London: Duke University Press, 2015), p. 2.
13. Ibid., p. 3.
14. Ibid., pp. 5, 2.
15. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC, & London: Duke University Press, 2016).
16. Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', p. 2. In 'Venus in Two Acts', Hartman refers to 'the archive of Atlantic Slavery'. Through her work she creates an 'archive' or 'counter-archive' of the lives of Black women in the Atlantic world that does not physically exist. She cites a number of different possible sources that could make up this body of material: 'a *dead girl* named in a legal indictment against a slave ship captain tried for the murder of two Negro girls [...] a ship's ledger in the tally of debits [...] an overseer's journal [...] the narrative of a mercenary soldier in Surinam [...] in a traveler's account of the prostitutes of Barbados [...] in a nineteenth-century pornographic novel' (p. 1). Of this figure she calls 'Venus', she states that 'no one remembered her name or recorded the things she said, or observed that she refused to say anything at all. Hers is an untimely story told by a failed witness' (p. 2). This archival absence of the perspectives of the colonised and enslaved and a need to imagine such archives into being complicates Bridget Whearty's important 2018 critique of the pervasive engagement with the archive as metaphor in the humanities, 'Invisible in "The Archive": Librarians, Archivists, and The Caswell Test', *English, General Literature, and Rhetoric Faculty Scholarship*, 4 (2018) <https://orb.binghamton.edu/english_fac/4> [accessed 1 March 2021]. Whearty calls for *specific* archives to be mentioned in scholarly work on archival practices, partly in order to acknowledge the embodied presence and labour of archivists. In an interesting counterpoint to the desire for concrete specificity, Hartman states that '[o]ne cannot ask, "Who is Venus?" because it would be impossible to answer such a question. There are hundreds of thousands of other girls who share her circumstances and these circumstances have generated few stories' (p. 2).
17. Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', p. 12.
18. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, p. 4.
19. See Annie Ring, 'Complicity', in *Uncertain Archives: Critical Keywords for Big Data*, ed. by Nanna Bonde Thylstrup and others (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021), pp. 87–98 (pp. 91–92), on the difficulties of extracting ourselves as technology consumers from daily entanglements with technology companies, regardless of our awareness of their dubious ethics.
20. Ricardo Rosselló, 'Puerto Rico's Governor: The Island is Ready to Welcome Tech', 23 August 2018 <https://www.wired.com/story/opinion-puerto-rico-is-ready-to-welcome-tech/> [accessed 1 May 2023].
21. In one study, researchers comment on the high levels of 'PTSD and depressive symptoms' amongst youth in Puerto Rico. Rosaura Orengo-Aguayo, and others, 'Disaster Exposure and

Mental Health Among Puerto Rican Youths After Hurricane Maria', *JAMA Network Open*, 2.4. (2019) <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.2619> [accessed 4 September 2023].

22. Rosselló, 'Puerto Rico's Governor'.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. See Minette A. M. Bonilla Ramos, 'Urbanism in Time: Creativity and Resilience in Santurce Throughout the 20th and 21st Century' (unpublished Masters' thesis, University of Puerto Rico, 2018).
26. For further information on school closures in Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria and a historical account of earlier closures, see Rima Brusi, 'No Savings, Just Pain: School Closures and "Reform" in Puerto Rico', *Alternautas*, 7.2 (2020), 20–36. Brusi describes how some closures were due to demographic factors such as low enrolment due to out-migration, but also due to increasing privatisation of the public school system through connections with the US charter school industry. Keleher was only in her role as Secretary of Education for less than three years before she resigned and was indicted for federal charges including theft of government funds and fraud. During her time as Secretary, experts estimate that over four hundred schools were closed as part of her neoliberal education reform, which amounts to 'roughly a third of the schools Puerto Rico had before 2016' (p. 25). As the article details, Keleher was involved in Puerto Rican education from 2007 when she worked for the US federal Education Department and oversaw Puerto Rico's Department of Education (pp. 21–22).
27. Somos Grandes, 'Mandinga Times: El After School de Rita Indiana; una obra maestra arraigada en el folklore caribeño', 9 September 2020 <https://www.somosgrandes.org/post/mandinga-times-after-school-rita-indiana> [accessed 1 March 2021].
28. Ibid.
29. Our thanks to Tamsin Blaxter for the translation from Norwegian into English of this part of the video: 'den eldste i blandt oss har falt | den frommeste gravlegges med ham | du hevdet at du var blitt kalt | steg ut fra din linje og skam | du trådde ut av din avmakt | gjorde deg selv til en utvalgt | før var du blendet og bergtatt* | nå er du våken og hauglagt' [the oldest among us has fallen | the meekest are buried with him | you asserted you had been called | risen out from your lineage and shame | you stepped out of your powerlessness | made yourself a chosen one | before you were blinded and beguiled | now you are awoken and entombed]. **bergta* is a favourite word of mine: it would literally be calqued as 'mountain-take' (so here this is 'before you were blinded and mountain-taken') but it's a folk-tale word referring to *bergekongen*, the elven 'mountain-king' who kidnaps people by enthralling them. It's really 'to be taken by the mountain king'.
30. Richard Villegas, 'Rita Indiana Breaks Down Every Track on Her Apocalyptic New Album, "Mandinga Times"', interview, *Remezcla*, 8 September 2020 <https://remezcla.com/lists/music/rita-indiana-track-by-track-review-mandinga-times-album-interview/> [accessed 1 May 2023].
31. Alejandra Beltrán, '"Mandinga times": el regreso musical de Rita Indiana', interview, *Radionica*, 30 October 2020 <https://www.radionica.rocks/entrevistas/mandinga-times-rita-indiana> [accessed 1 May 2023]; and Lulu García-Navarro, 'Rita Indiana Returns to Music After Decade-Long Hiatus', interview, *NPR Weekend Edition Sunday*, 13 September 2020 <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/13/912424757/rita-indiana-returns-to-music-after-decade-long-hiatus?t=1622817049792> [accessed 1 May 2023].
32. García-Navarro, 'Rita Indiana Returns to Music After Decade-Long Hiatus'.
33. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 4.
34. Ibid., p. 12.
35. See Mabel Rodríguez Centeno, 'Por una historia cuir/queer en "After School" y "Mandinga Times"', *Commonwealth*, 18 December 2020 <http://commonwealths.art/es/por-una-historia-cuir-queer-en-after-school-y-mandinga-times/> [accessed 1 March 2021].
36. Glissant, cited in Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 12.
37. See Aníbal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America', *International Sociology*, 15 (2000), 215–32.
38. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 46.

39. See Manuel DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory, Speculative Realism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).
40. Ibid., p. 3.
41. Ibid.
42. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, p. 47. See also Peter Wade, *Degrees of Mixture, Degrees of Freedom: Genomics, Multiculturalism, and Race in Latin America* (Durham, NC, & London: Duke University Press, 2017).
43. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 379.
44. Beltrán, '"Mandinga times"'.
45. Eduardo Bonilla Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), p. 2.
46. Wade, *Degrees of Mixture, Degrees of Freedom*, p. 45.
47. See Mónica Moreno Figueroa, 'Distributed Intensities: Whiteness, Mestizaje and the Logics of Mexican Racism', *Ethnicities*, 10 (2010), 387–401.
48. Wade, *Degrees of Mixture, Degrees of Freedom*, p. 45.
49. Ibid., p. 13.
50. Ibid., p. 49. According to Wade, the 'Mexican mestizo has been materialised by intellectuals (e.g. Vasconcelos) as a heroic exemplar of *la raza cósmica* and the forger of the nation's destiny as a democracy; and also by the novelist Octavio Paz as a cursed and conflicted *hijo de la chingada*, who nevertheless was proud and defiant (and macho) (pp. 48–49).
51. Ibid., p. 50.
52. See Paul Preciado, 'Politically Assisted Procreation and the State Heterosexualism', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 11 (2016), 405–11.
53. See *Resentir lo queer en América Latina: diálogos desde/con el Sur*, ed. by Diego Falconí Trávez, Santiago Castellanos, and Maria Amelia Viteri (Barcelona & Madrid: Egales, 2014).
54. See María Lugones in Diego Falconí Trávez, *Inflexión marica: escrituras del descalabro gay en América Latina* (Barcelona & Madrid: Egales, 2018).
55. See Jasbir K. Puar, 'Queer Times, Queer Assemblages', *Social Text*, 23 (2005), 121–39.
56. Ibid., p. 128.
57. Ibid., p. 135.
58. Sara Ahmed, *What's The Use? On The Uses of Use* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 197 (my emphasis).
59. Diego Falconí Trávez, Santiago Castellanos, and María Amelia Viteri, 'Resentir lo queer en América Latina; Diálogos desde/con el Sur', in *Resentir lo queer en América Latina*, ed. by Falconí Trávez, Castellanos, and Viteri, pp. 9–18 (p. 11).
60. Leticia Rojas Miranda, Francisco Godoy Vega and others, 'acción poética / la indocumenta(dx)', in *no existe sexo sin racialización*, ed. by Leticia Rojas Miranda and Francisco Godoy Vega (Madrid: FRAGMA, 2017), pp. 74–85 (p. 78).
61. Karen Jaime, '"Da pa' lo' do"': Rita Indiana's Queer, Racialized Dominicanness', *Small Axe*, 19 (2015), 85–93 (p. 87).
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., pp. 92–93.
64. See Moreno Figueroa, 'Distributed Intensities'.
65. Wade, *Degrees of Mixture*, *Degrees of Freedom,* p. 49.
66. Ibid., p. 14.
67. Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, *Ezili's Mirrors: Imagining Black Queer Genders* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), p. 1.
68. Beth Kamunge, 'Writing in the Fire Now: Beth Dialogues with Wambui and Osop', in *The Fire Now: Anti-Racist Scholarship in Times of Explicit Racial Violence*, ed. by Azeezat Johnson, Remi Joseph-Salisbury, and Beth Kamunge (London: ZED Books, 2018), pp. 189–197 (p. 190).
69. Puar, *The Right to Maim*, p. ix.

CHAPTER 6

❖

The Material Impact of 'the Digital' in Counter-Archival Video Works by Hito Steyerl and Brenda Lien

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By 2021, more than six billion people worldwide owned Internet-enabled devices such as smartphones. The core operations of states and global economies have moved online over the past few years, and everyday lives are increasingly lived on the Internet, not least since the Covid-19 lockdowns beginning in 2020. In the same period, the Internet and networked technologies have tended to be thought about through corporate metaphors invoking immateriality. The Internet continues to be known as 'the web', data storage is referred to as existing in a remote 'Cloud', and the metaphor of the 'digital' itself has become ubiquitous for talking about all kinds of computational processes and artefacts without reference to their effects in the world. Such language encourages a focus on surface abstraction, making it difficult to picture the material impact networked technologies and their radically expanded uses are having on bodies and environments. Can it be that these phenomena do no more than glisten like webs or clouds, and glide over the life-forms present here in the world?

On the contrary, the radical changes caused by networked technologies have very material effects on lived experiences and on the planet.[1] The most world-changing technological event was the inception of the Internet, and it has led to such disturbing phenomena as remote drone warfare, the monetisation of mined personal data, and the presence of surveillant smart machines in the home, all of which risk abuse. In response to the ubiquity and purported immateriality of Internet cultures, contemporary screen artists Hito Steyerl and Brenda Lien have both deployed aesthetic strategies aimed at a new defamiliarisation, to reveal and explore the material impacts of new technologies. Repurposing some of the most familiar content and interfaces of the contemporary Internet, the citational screen works by these artists draw attention to the computational practices of our present day that are creating real but often hidden impacts on lives, bodies, and environments.

In this chapter, I analyse video works by Steyerl and Lien in which portrayals of apparently abstract technological processes are intruded upon by surprising images

of materiality. Abstraction is especially important to Steyerl's installation *Liquidity Inc.* (2014), about a high-frequency trader who turned wrestling commentator after the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. In the installation, Steyerl works as both artist and critic, at once displaying and analysing the pleasures associated with the Internet as an abstract space of play. The negative underside of today's pleasurable abstractions becomes visible when Steyerl juxtaposes animated reproductions of computer interfaces with spoof maps of conflict zones, and images of floods and overwhelming waves. Through its citational montage, the installation makes visible the harms that are washed out of sight by the smooth CGI world that envelops viewers like a beautiful, mind-numbing wave. Below, I interpret Steyerl's *Liquidity Inc.* with reference to writing by Lisa Purse on the excessive aesthetic smoothness of the digital composite image. This way of looking at the piece necessitates a return to Bertolt Brecht's theory of defamiliarisation, which illuminates how Steyerl's fragmentary citational style productively alienates viewers from unfelt complicity with the violent phenomena of our Internet age.

I then turn to the video artist and composer Brenda Lien and her video *Call of Comfort* (2018), which was shown at animation and documentary festivals as well as online. The final part of a trilogy released in 2016–18, Lien's video attends more closely than Steyerl's installation to the pain and discomfort experienced by bodies, both human and animal, in relation to the Internet's soothing imagery and hidden data-mining processes. Lien's trilogy as a whole is concerned with the extremes of objectification the Internet makes possible, particularly the objectification of women and animals, as viewers see women, cats, and men in states of injury and painful training, alongside images and tropes familiar from standard online interfaces. I analyse *Call of Comfort* in terms provided by Donna Haraway's work on the *location* of knowledge about technology. Haraway is interested in 'situated knowledges', which permit more ethical ways of assessing technology than is possible from the position she terms the 'astral', a distant plane of vision which I think here in terms of contemporary 'Cloud' computing.[2] Reading Lien's video through Haraway's concepts of situated knowledge and entangled 'trouble' draws out the connected subjectivity explored in the video. It also troubles ways of watching it with a distantly critical gaze, as some viewers may be tempted to in traditional gallery spaces.

Both Steyerl and Lien work counter-archivally, as they cite and spoof ubiquitous Internet interfaces such as search results pages and data-sacrificing 'consent' screens. They both appropriate popular memes and commercial video formats and set them alongside live-action and CGI footage related to their chosen topics of new technologies, finance, and/or data mining. In Steyerl's installation, repurposed images appear from classic animated film and even famous artworks, while Lien turns to computer games and memes to explore the pain and pleasure of life online. These citational video-works render the content of today's 'digital' archives vulnerable to ethical examination, which is at once connected, as a form of 'situated knowledge', and ambivalent. Neither artist simply advocates switching off our screens and withdrawing into an apparently pure life offline, cut off from

the webs and threads of Internet connectivity. Therefore, through their challenging aesthetic effects, these works pose questions that are problematically absent from the abstractions of commercial language about the Internet. More, their methods of appropriation and re-use raise the topic of the interdependence and even complicity of visual arts with contemporary technologies, allowing, so I argue, for a productively entangled interpretation.

The Material Life of Technology

In this so-called 'digital' age, there is a perception that both the Internet, and the data it makes available for misuse by governments and surveillance companies around the world, operate in an abstract, immaterial sphere. Data are said to be stored in a space known by its corporate name, the 'Cloud' and the Internet has long been described euphemistically as 'the web', metaphors invoking porosity, flexibility, and insubstantiality rather than material consequences in a world utterly changed by its developing technologies. The metaphor of 'the digital' itself is misleading, too. 'Digital' refers simply to linear numerical functions of any kind, and as such has little to do with the specific ways technologies operate and have effects.

Leading theorists of technology have been predicting the increased prevalence of immaterial thinking since the beginning of the Internet age. In the 'Cyborg Manifesto' (1985), Donna Haraway anticipated that human bodies would themselves take on more immaterial qualities, changing from the 'material and opaque' bodies of the analogue age to the ethereal cyborg body, implanted with technological prostheses.[3] N. Katherine Hayles developed Haraway's idea, arguing that embodied thinking was neglected in a world of 0's and 1's: while it was aided and accompanied by more effective machines, the human body in the burgeoning age of the Internet was being philosophically neglected in favour of a fascination with human and non-human cognition.[4] With the rise of the participatory Internet, Web 2.0, and the emergence of social media interaction on Myspace and MSN Messenger, Aylish Wood argued that the important embodied quality of these new media was still not being recognised.[5]

Despite early technological optimism, life in the age of the Internet continued to be highly unequal, and there is a wealth of recent work concerned with the complicity of digital technologies with the persistence of inequality and resulting material harm to people's lives, bodies, and futures. Safiya Noble writes that the Internet 'is wholly material in all of its qualities', moreover 'our experiences with it are as real as any other aspect of life'.[6] Noble's insistence on the material character of the Internet comes from her investigation of Google's search algorithms, whose racist coding means that different groups are represented very differently online, and she argues persuasively that such algorithmic biases lead to a perpetuation of discrimination in the world beyond the screen. Meanwhile, Cathy O'Neil and Virginia Eubanks have examined how the exploitation of big data harms data subjects differently based on their social positionality, in terms of class and global geography, among other factors.[7] With regard to the gendered impacts of

big data, Caroline Criado Perez has revealed bias in the way data are applied in heart medication and car safety-testing, creating dangerously different outcomes dependent on patients' and drivers' gender.[8]

These harms done by the apparently immaterial phenomena of the Internet and data-analytics are happening alongside material harms to the environment. Networked devices stay switched on 24/7, and research by Kaminska has found that the 'ICT sector [is] using 50 per cent more energy than global aviation', and the production of personal networked devices has a significant carbon footprint.[9] These devices are made of substances mined in unacceptable working conditions. The materiality suggested by data-*mining* is meaningful too, in the sense that the large quantities of data produced by networked technology use are stored and processed in vast server farms made from silicon, steel, and glass, containing thousands of computers powered by fossil fuels. Data centres are connected by heavy fibre-optic cables laid under the ocean, and they are always on, contributing significantly to climate change as well as damaging local environments, entrenching harmful colonial and military legacies, rural marginalization, and post-industrial decline.[10]

Further inequality exists in the distribution of networked technology's impact on the planet, with those living in poorer parts of the world already most likely to experience the worst effects of climate breakdown. By contrast, new technologies have usually been privatised phenomena, and as such they concentrate power into the hands of a tiny group of companies such as Google and Amazon, whose unstoppable monopolies enjoy low regulation and non-existent taxation. The data those companies skim from Internet use become the material which AIs, owned by those same companies, experiment on. Cognising machines learn quickly when they have access to large datasets, so their owners have been capable of developing sophisticated machine cognition without incurring any cost.

Metaphors such as the 'web', the 'Cloud', and the 'digital' obscure these tangible ways in which networked technologies materially impact communities and exacerbate inequalities. In the face of the combined invisibility and inevitability of tech users' implication in the 'digital', with all the harms and abuses that implies, more material viewpoints, concerned with the way technologies are connected to living bodies and environments, are extremely valuable. To think the body and the natural world back into the context of our contemporary life can make conscious what is happening in this era of new media, which Wendy Hui Kyong Chun rightly views as being designed for 'habitual' rather than fully conscious use. Entangled with these technologies through habitual consumption, Chun argues, our bodies become 'archives' of the networked world, holding stores of unacknowledged behaviours of complicity with the hidden material harms of our 'digital' age.[11] Countering such forgetful complicity, with its dangers of abstracted domination, come the counter-archival video works of Hito Steyerl and Brenda Lien. These videos share a counter-archival technique of mixed-media citation, aimed at encouraging more conscious modes of using and interacting with networked technologies.

Against Smoothness: Fragmentary Materiality in *Liquidity Inc.* (Hito Steyerl, 2014)

What can progressive filmmaking look like in the era of computerised 'film' production? The computer-generated composite images that replaced analogue film may have seemed to signify a radical break from Hollywood-style cinema, with its well-sutured sequences of cuts that provide soothing narrative and visual continuities. Yet, as Lisa Purse writes, '[d]igital compositing [...] is distinguished from its predecessor by its capacity to erase edge bleed and other indicators of co-presence at pixel level'.[12] 'Digital' video benefits from the technical capacities of computer editing to smooth the appearance of edges in an image, caused for instance by superimposed material. Free of the more rudimentary editing techniques of earlier analogue film, the digital composite image is even more capable than analogue of eliding the cuts and shifts of perspective between shots.

Thus, contemporary 'digital' filmmaking does not guarantee more productively fragmented aesthetics, which could help viewers adopt critical perspectives on today's smoothly mediated realities. Moreover, no matter how participatory today's Internet is, it is also defined by visual formats that leave little interstitial space for different ways of seeing. Hito Steyerl's video installations pose a challenge to the excessive seamlessness of these contemporary visual cultures. In *Liquidity Inc.*, she explores the affordances of digital video to disrupt the problematic smoothness of current visual formats, creating mixed montages of found footage, live action, and CGI in citational montages with jarring, rather than suturing, effects. These citational montages are designed to prompt viewers to analyse the current regimes of techno-capitalism that tend to appear inevitable, and so render other options invisible or un-picture-able too.

Liquidity Inc., a thirty-minute-long single-channel video installation, was released in 2014 for gallery display. Its title cites Derrida's theoretical text *Limited Inc.* (1988), in which he argues that language is subject to 'nonclosure', in the sense that it can never be comfortingly fixed, because the coordinates for its meaning are context dependent.[13] In line with Derrida's idea of linguistic nonclosure, Steyerl's citational mixed-footage video explores the threshold and limit-zones where contemporary knowledge is constructed. Like others of Steyerl's works, *Liquidity Inc.* has the character of a collage. Viewers see a wild mixing of both live action and computer-generated footage, the latter made up of animated mock-ups of common television, smartphone, and Internet interfaces such as weather reports and the smartphone lock screen. The installation's opening theme is the 'digital' economy. This economic era began with the rise of big tech companies, like Microsoft and Amazon, that boomed in the dotcom bubble of the 1990s, and it continued through the financial crisis of 2008 to boom again in the mid-2000s with the rise of big data and the big profits they make available to a small number of corporations. From that starting point, the installation takes in the inception of 'Cloud' computing and draws connections between technologies and military power throughout the twentieth century and into the present day. As the titular theme indicates, the material qualities of water guide the installation's aesthetic exploration of these 'digital' histories and their material impacts.

The installation's plot presents a parable of the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. Its first section tells the story of Jacob Wood, a financial analyst who lost his job during the crisis and ensuing recession and became a professional mixed martial arts (MMA) commentator. In telling Jacob's story, the installation articulates a fascinating code of conduct regarding the type of subjectivity required in the post-crisis age of 'liquid modernity'.[14] Viewers hear this code communicated at the start of the installation in words quoted from Bruce Lee's advice to martial artists to 'be like water'. We hear Lee advising them to adapt, as water does, to the shape of any container. While Lee's voice intones the mantra of total flexibility, a digital desktop background is gradually replaced with the computer-generated image of a rippling sea (Figure 6.1).

Fig. 6.1. A defamiliarised desktop reveals rippling water as Bruce Lee intones a code of conduct for total flexibility, still from *Liquidity Inc.*, dir. by Hito Steyerl (Germany, 2014). This and all subsequent images from this installation are CC 4.0 Hito Steyerl, courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, and Esther Schipper, Berlin/Paris/Seoul.

The sea in the new image ripples realistically, but at the same time it is being generated via clicks of a visible cursor. In this opening montage, the video shows on several levels how a 'reality' can be created: this is one in which subjectivity becomes more entrepreneurial, or more liquid, while the container (the financial world) supplies less and less security. It is also a troubling 'reality' in which the appearance of a natural environment can be created through computerised manipulation of a few pixels.

The installation abruptly cuts to the next scene, the cut accompanied by jerking sounds of audio recordings gone wrong. Viewers see a montage of the build-up to an MMA fight, at times in double-projection (Figure 6.2). Women in bikinis warm the audience up for the match which will involve high impact punching between

players. MMA is based on ancient Asian cage fighting traditions and its players are trained to keep moving in order to win. A full contact sport, MMA matches are won by force, and are not staged like in the physical theatre of WWF Wrestling, for instance. To win, a competitor has to fight their opponent to the ground, causing physical injury in order to come out on top. Echoing the physical force required by MMA fighting, Steyerl introduces a new image into her sequence in the arena, using the screen in the backdrop to project footage she filmed of huge waves crashing onto a beach in California. The commentators in bikinis look vulnerable among the fully-dressed spectators; with the image of the overwhelming wave looming behind them, that impression of vulnerability is increased. Moreover, this sense of vulnerability is linked to the theme of global economies underpinning the installation as a whole.

Fig. 6.2. A mix of footage appears in double projection in the wrestling hall sequence, still from *Liquidity Inc.*, dir. by Steyerl (Germany, 2014).

At the end of this montage, the excited voices of the crowd fade, and Jacob's voiceover narrates the collapse of Lehman Brothers on a day he was entering a fight. He lost his job the following morning and moved on to work in MMA. The financial crash had an unmistakable impact on the life of this former white-collar worker, an impact reflected in the form of the huge crashing waves. The wave footage indeed carries over into the next sequence. This shows a re-enactment of Jacob setting up a company, which takes on the same name as Steyerl's installation. The 'Liquidity Inc' company's headed letter paper is shown in an animation of water bubbling and swelling, making the screen of the installation appear as if in 3D (Figure 6.3). Meanwhile, a feeling of dread builds as Jacob tells the story of the financial crisis.

Jacob recalls how 'there were purges every year because of the economy'. The language of 'purges' invokes the violence committed by Stalin in the early

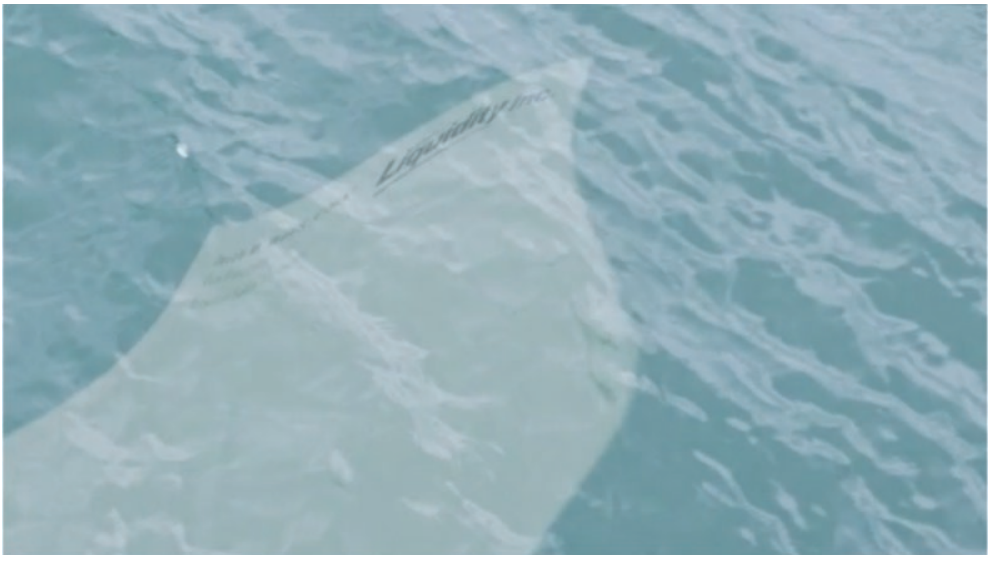

Fig. 6.3. The computer-generated image bulges with the hapticity of water, still from *Liquidity Inc.*, dir. by Steyerl (Germany, 2014).

twentieth century. However, Jacob is describing redundancies made in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis, firing practices which are now built into the structure of capitalism's current flexible forms. Jacob and his colleagues in the financial industry needed to become ultra-flexible, like the liquidity in the name of his new company. He speaks about an entrepreneurial, post-crisis subject who needs to be 'shockproof', and adaptable to the market with the same fluidity that Lee advocated: 'you don't wanna be frozen. That's the kiss of death'. The montage now returns to the MMA match, showing the fighters warming up. They rehearse the constant, fluid movement they will perform together in the fight, never staying still or 'freezing'.

The theme of a fluid, flexible subject continues through the remainder of the installation. In it, Steyerl seeks to link the exhaustion of the entrepreneurial subject, who risks going under in the world of speculative, high-speed finance, to global geopolitics. The installation's middle section begins to articulate these links, tracing a relationship between an entrepreneurial post-crisis capitalism — which is ironically inflexible in the entrenched forms of precarity it now employs as a defining norm — and images of harm to bodies. After the MMA sequences, a rough animation shows graph figures being dropped into water as if falling from aeroplanes, or placed there by a large machinic hand.

The graph-figures have the shape of human bodies bobbing just underwater (Figure 6.4), seemingly the right way up — though the location of ground is unclear in the image. They appear to bounce on what could be the bottom of a pool or an upturned sky. These figures are not linked in the piece to any particular national or ideological context. Therefore, the sequence represents a generic mass of people, their graph forms recalling machine vision, as well as the linked techniques of

Fig. 6.4. Graph-bodies bobbing in water accompanied by the haunting notification: 'budget cancelled', still from *Liquidity Inc.*, dir. by Steyerl (Germany, 2014).

psychometric surveillance which now map out a person's psychological contours for data-mining, without accounting for effects of this dataveillance on the mapped subject's individual life.

When a notification box pops up on the bottom screen, viewers see an email has arrived (from Steyerl herself) announcing a budget is being cancelled. The notification is a citation of a familiar format from computer desktops. At the same time, the cancellation of a budget generates a sense of threat to accompany the non-specific images of graph-people bobbing helplessly in water. This worrying yet familiar-feeling animation is explained more as the installation returns to Jacob's story, and he recounts how he would open his computer daily and see the companies of the dotcom boom growing and attracting more investment. The workers who needed to remain 'liquid' and flexible did not benefit from the boom. This inequality is illustrated when the camera's distance from Jacob's desk grows and his bed is revealed to be just offscreen and very close to his workspace, in a manner redolent of the home-working conditions some people benefited (and suffered) from during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Through this narrative sequencing, viewers are guided to link the graph-bodies to the story of people losing their work in the dotcom industries, which boomed, then faltered in the 2008 crisis, and re-emerged into more profitable — because more insecure — work contexts.

This story at the start of the installation is disquieting but still tells a tale of relative safety for Jacob, who has found a way of subsisting after he was purged from his job when the dotcom bubble burst. However, the sense of a disaster which has built up through the overwhelming wave footage and drowning animation comes crashing in in the second section. The installation returns to the MMA arena, but now, Steyerl's California surf-wave footage is replaced with television

footage of a terrible storm, and of freak weather events: a tsunami, a tornado, floods. This footage of catastrophic weather then travels from the screen at the arena to a smartphone in the next sequence, lying on Jacob's desk, and later onto his television. The footage also appears within a mock-up of a Tumblr page, which shows search results for the hashtag #Hokusai. Steyerl edited the classic nineteenth-century woodblock print *Great Wave Off Kanagawa* by Katsushika Hokusai to show it blinking in rainbow colours like a stock Internet image ready to be copied and re-circulated ad infinitum. The installation's threatening mood continues as these Hokusai rip-offs appear and reappear alongside the frame of the raging tornado.

Here, the installation's techniques of montage and appropriation recall Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* [alienation effect], his political and aesthetic theory that sought to break artistic productions down into productively fragmented form. Brechtian, political aesthetics went radically against the *Gesamtkunstwerk* [total work of art], an emotionally-consuming production, such as Wagner introduced to the German and international stage in the second half of the nineteenth century in Europe, whose aesthetic conventions encouraged the spectator to relax and forget themselves and their contexts. For Brecht, the total artwork is an ideological fantasy that covers up political tensions; in its place, he advocated for a radical separation of the elements of the theatrical production, so that it no longer held its audiences in enthralled and anaesthetised states, but instead woke them up to the political contradictions defining their lives.[15] Fragmenting the production involved a use of non-naturalistic acting, and a deconstruction of standard theatrical practice, for instance by showing rehearsals as part of a performance, and through the excessive, destabilising repetition of words and events. Such fragmentation was used politically in Brecht's theories to generate critical understanding rather than passive consumption of performance.

As the treatment of the Hokusai print implies, nothing is sacred in the installation's techniques of a new post-Brechtian defamiliarisation, even as it addresses such disastrous topics as the Global Financial Crisis and the climate collapse of the twenty-first century. In the next sequence of the installation, a weatherman appears in a balaclava, suggesting he belongs to the black-bloc or *Autonomen* protest groups, as well as an owl t-shirt designed to prevent machine-vision from reading his face. He stands in this disguise before a mocked-up map of a horrifying new world order, in which disturbing new sovereignties are foretold. This spoof version of the geopolitical events since the turn of the millennium includes a Middle East where arrows point at random to places labelled with 'collapsed state', 'conquered insurgent state', and 'stateless people'. The passage reminds viewers that the financial crisis, thematised in the first part of the installation, happened soon after the second Gulf War, which heralded another kind of global instability, alongside the development of advanced military technologies.

These new technologies are invoked by the large black and white label 'The Cloud', which enters the frame as a force overseeing a scene of geopolitical chaos shown on the map. The weather reporter's computer-generated voice reports that the Cloud is causing problems, because 'huge quantities of data are raining down

from their cloud storage'. His words appear in large speech bubbles, producing a comic effect, as the spoof weather report gives an outlandishly material description of the effects new technologies are having in the world. While the metaphor of the 'Cloud' evokes an evanescent and inoffensive phenomenon, here it is depicted as the overarching cause of the geopolitical and climate disasters befalling the spoof world map. The same 'Cloud' is also linked in the weatherman's script to self-improvement discourses based on the idea that individual behaviour can improve the state of the world. Apparently, the viewer can control the weather with their mind. Surely then, it is up to the entrepreneurial subjects watching the report to solve the crisis being mapped out before them.

The third section of the installation travels back earlier in the history of modern warfare, to take in the ripple effects of the Vietnam war. The voiceover reveals that Jacob came to the USA in 1975 as part of the tragic 'Operation Baby Lift', an airlift authorised by President Ford to bring babies from orphanages in Vietnam to the US for adoption. Hundreds of the babies died when one of the planes crashed, just after take-off, into the sea near Saigon. As a voiceover narrates this background to Jacob's story, opaque silhouettes are shown plummeting into a choppy sea. This sequence, along with the voiceover about the deaths of the orphaned babies from Saigon, invokes the Vietnam War's legacy, the many people it killed, and the repercussions for those like Jacob who live with the loss of family members and displacement. The sequence is followed by more reports from the weatherman, who is shown dancing to jarringly upbeat techno music, and from Steyerl's daughter, who appears in another anti-machine vision owl t-shirt.

The final sequences of the installation show further mixed footage, as the weatherman makes more outlandish predictions about global weather and politics forecasts. The theme of drowning continues as Steyerl introduces cut-out footage of the animated figure Kaonashi/NoFace from Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (2001). In Miyazaki's original animation, Kaonashi represents a wild mastery of energy; a silent figure who glides around formidably in the world outside, when Kaonashi enters the bath-house he begins thrashing around, then upon leaving the bath-house, returns to calm. In Steyerl's repurposing of the figure, however, Kaonashi is not the master of alternating stillness and powerful splashing; rather, he is being washed helplessly underwater.

The waves that have been building up throughout the video overwhelm Kaonashi in this graphic montage, as his figure is overlaid with images of waves that threaten to pull him under (Figure 6.5). The image of drowning is layered into a collage of more email notifications and common Internet-era symbols of a camera and a smiley. The meaning of this citational montage is not immediately clear. It follows on from the anxiety-inducing weather report, and the story of the drowned Vietnamese orphans. Through its rhetorics of mixing and cutting, the sequence links the drowning of the usually sovereign and masterful anime figure to the geopolitical disasters indicated on the map.

The viewer is left wondering about the precise nature of the connection between these images of water: of Hokusai's paintings of the great wave, of Kaonashi, and

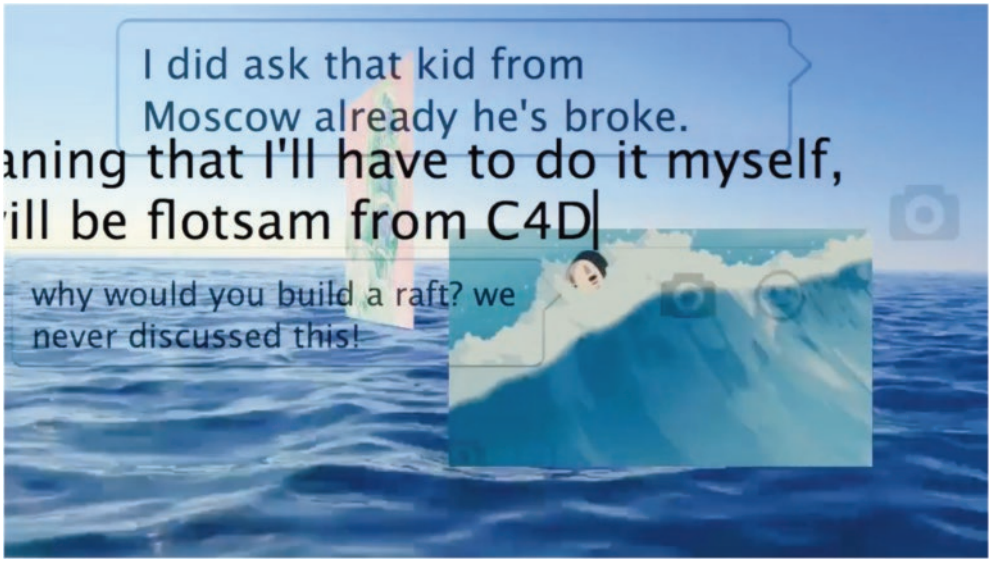

Fig. 6.5. The layered montage shows a repurposed Kaonashi not splashing but drowning, still from *Liquidity Inc.*, dir. by Steyerl (Germany, 2014).

of the MMA fights. They might ask: why does Steyerl's daughter appear late in the video? This representative of a new generation summons Walter Benjamin and the *Angelus Novus*, the figure from Paul Klee's oil and watercolour print of 1920, who observes the disasters of history unfolding as he is blown irrevocably into the future by strong winds.[16] The montage of citations in Steyerl's installation works to connect apparently disparate events from the histories of war, the climate, and finance. The collage confronts viewers, moreover, with images of extreme materiality: the crashing waves, the bodies that punch and are punched in the MMA arena, the images of bodies tumbling and drowning. We see these material images amid tropes familiar from the surface world of the Internet, that Cloud phenomenon into which all history threatens to disappear as just so many results from a hashtag search.

A present-day example of Brecht's alienation effect, the installation seeks to generate critical understanding of the smoothness new technologies create in the online world and even in the aesthetic forms of computerised filmmaking, such as Purse analysed. Against the smooth flow of water, the installation employs its rough and choppy montage, defamiliarising well-known machine interfaces, from smartphones, weather reports, Google searches, and email platforms, and placing them within a collage-narrative of fictional and historic disasters. Thematically, the liquidity of the installation's title shifts in meaning, as the topic moves from the injunction to be a flexible, entrepreneurial subject, to the memory of the deaths of children in the Vietnam War. By bringing these disparate topics together in one flood of images, Steyerl attempts to divert, or, in the words of the Situationist International, *détourner* the metaphor of liquidity, rerouting it from a positive aspiration to a metaphor that can reveal the complicity between global finance, military power and new technologies. Moreover, the repeated citation of Internet

interfaces and demonstrative showing of hardware such as television screens and smartphones suggests that the factor connecting all these phenomena is technology; or rather, the interest of the finance and technology companies whose profits are sourced from speculative economics and data-extraction. These are immaterial sources of wealth, and, at the same time, they are based on the extraction of lived experience, as well as being implicated in the fates of their less powerful players, like Jacob Wood. These players are then blamed for their failure in the game of financial speculation, exhorted to be more entrepreneurial, and encouraged to reinvent themselves constantly if they are to survive materially in an extremely turbulent future.

Making Dataveillance Palpable: *Call of Comfort* (Brenda Lien, 2018)

Like Steyerl, filmmaker and composer Brenda Lien employs a mixed-footage approach in her work, bringing in live-action drama, CGI, and original animations, and reproducing familiar images and tropes from the participatory Internet. She also makes original vocal and instrumental soundtracks to accompany her videos' citational formats. One of Lien's most substantial works to date is her *Call of...* video trilogy, released in 2016–18, which investigates the impact of the Internet's personalised interpellations to users to give up data in order to improve themselves and their experiences on the Internet. The trilogy cites such familiar content as influencer videos, cat memes, and the infamous 'consent' screen that invites technology users to agree to delicious-sounding 'cookies' (another misleadingly harmless metaphor) in return for a promise of more relevant advertising. Citational versions of this content appear in collages that include imagery as diverse and shocking as rotoscoped animations of famous cat memes being mutilated, and slow-motion close-ups of male genitalia bleeding. The trilogy's layered richness and Lien's use of bright neon colour and lighting lend its scenarios heightened, visceral qualities.

My focus here is on the final video in the trilogy, *Call of Comfort* (2018), a piece of eight and a half minutes, which won the German Short Film Award in 2018. This English-language short depicts a sci-fi world where people are fitted with implants that surveil their bodily and emotional state in real time. Lien mixes live-action footage in the piece with animations of spoof Internet interfaces and data centres, as well as close-up body shots. The combination makes palpable the exploitative data-mining practices to which Internet users consent when they go online. And yet the video's pretty and sensuous visual effects are confusing: Lien's Internet is a place of pleasure and pain at once; 'digital' images and data-extracting practices are both abstract *and* harmful to their users, who cannot withdraw from their ambivalent entanglement with technology.

The video opens with a flawless spoof of a YouTube advert purporting to come from a big data company. In the advert, a data-mining firm addresses itself to smaller businesses, asking: 'do you want to sell your product, service or ideology?' The spoof shows up how online advertising seeks to generate anxiety in business owners with lines such as: 'I master the new data economy: will you?' Like the entrepreneurial subject in Steyerl's video, the recipient of this advertisement is

exhorted to stay on their toes and keep up to date with a new economy based on data-trading. The main body of the video then consists of live-action scenes of technicians, who are giving 'treatments' to a patient, applying make-up that can purportedly mine emotional and psychographic data. These passages bring in a gender critique to the topic of data-mining: the material being painted onto the data-subject's skin can read facial expressions and extrapolate psychological and emotional states from them. They are also sold as beauty products, as part of an industry typically targeting women consumers.

The passage does not specify what the gender of the subject receiving the data-mining make-up is. Meanwhile, the choice of a Black actress to play one of the data-mining technicians brings in a further challenge to viewer expectations. The second technician seen is played by Yodit Tarikwa, who applies layers of data-mining 'make-up' to the face of the data-subject. Tarikwa adopts a tone at once soothing and deceptive, representing the voice of the data-mining practices that trap users into giving false consent to processes they can neither refuse nor control. Given the way current surveillance regimes subject Black people and other People of Colour to disproportionately high levels of surveillance, as explored by Noble, this reversal keeps Lien's own viewers on their toes. The sequence destabilizes expectations about which kinds of subject are operated on by surveillance, and who risks being co-opted into carrying out the operations of data-trading industry.

The practitioner played by Tarikwa explains that facial expressions say a lot about the subject's 'emotional, mental and physical condition', and these will all be monitored by the layer being applied to the skin, in order to generate an optimised experience of the Internet for the user — and to bring in the profits promised by the Datacore advert. In these sequences of the datafied body being irreparably modified, Lien's video sets up a fictional scenario in which the body is totally implanted with technological features, like the cyborg in Haraway's 'Manifesto', but without any of the liberating potential associated with that figure.[17]

Lien does all she can to make this scenario of datafication — or cyborgisation — palpable to the viewer. The data-mining implants are applied as if they were make-up, and they are painted directly onto the camera lens, such that the viewer takes on the perspective of the data-subject who is being operated on (Figure 6.6). Viewers are dazzled meanwhile with colour, for instance through the bright pink light that is shone into the data subject's eyes to check the sensor-lens implants are in place. This light almost blinds the viewer with mesmerising and image-blocking light from a miniature torch, recalling the eye-cutting sequence at the opening of *Un chien andalou* (Luis Buñuel, 1929), analysed by Lawrence Alexander in his chapter above, which frames spectators as complicit with classic film's violent cuts and splices — but using the newest videographic and CGI techniques. The screen also shimmers as if in response at each touch of the make-up/data-mining artist. The artist's touch, carried out with fingers, pads, and brushes, is presented as if the screen itself had a skin that responded to the touch of the data-mining technology. The message is that the human body here is yielding to the pleasurable experience of being pampered and, at the same time, to the high-profit extractions of

Fig. 6.6. Yodit Tarikwa plays a technician painting a layer of data-mining 'make-up' onto the viewing subject's face, still from *Call of Comfort*, dir. by Brenda Lien (Germany, 2018). This and all subsequent images from this film are printed by kind permission of Brenda Lien.

datamining.

The palpable touching of the face as screen, which is visualised in these sequences, mimes what technology users do more and more, namely, to touch sensitive, smart computing devices in order to operate them (and so be operated upon by them). Thus, as the second practitioner wipes off the viewer's current 'face mapping mask' and presses the ('organic') cotton wool ball in towards the camera, the screen glows with a purple pattern similar to that on the Datacore icon. Like under the pink light above, here, it is as if the data-subject's skin is made up of a network of data-points rather than veins and dermal layers. The screen as face is therefore shown to be enmeshed with data-gathering technologies. Unable to separate itself from that net, this skin-as-web yields to being touched. Here, the confusion of pleasure and pain in Lien's representation of the Internet is especially palpable. The shimmering of the screen in rainbow colours, pink, and gold even invokes a luxuriating of the body in the pleasures of the Internet, despite the horrendous surveillance implants that are being applied. The video thus makes palpable the experience of being surveilled through data-mining, and, at the same time, it places emphasis on pleasure through a script that repeats the idea of 'fluffiness', regarding the 'fluffy' blanket the agent comfortingly rubs her face against, as well as the 'fluffy' cotton wool, and 'this fluffy brush' used to apply even more data-mining 'make-up'.

The unseen protagonist does not relax, however, and more tension arises when a consent screen pops up, asking them to agree to an 'update', which involves relinquishing all their biometric information to Datacore (Figure 6.7). We momentarily see a drop-down view of the terms and conditions, a lengthy document informing

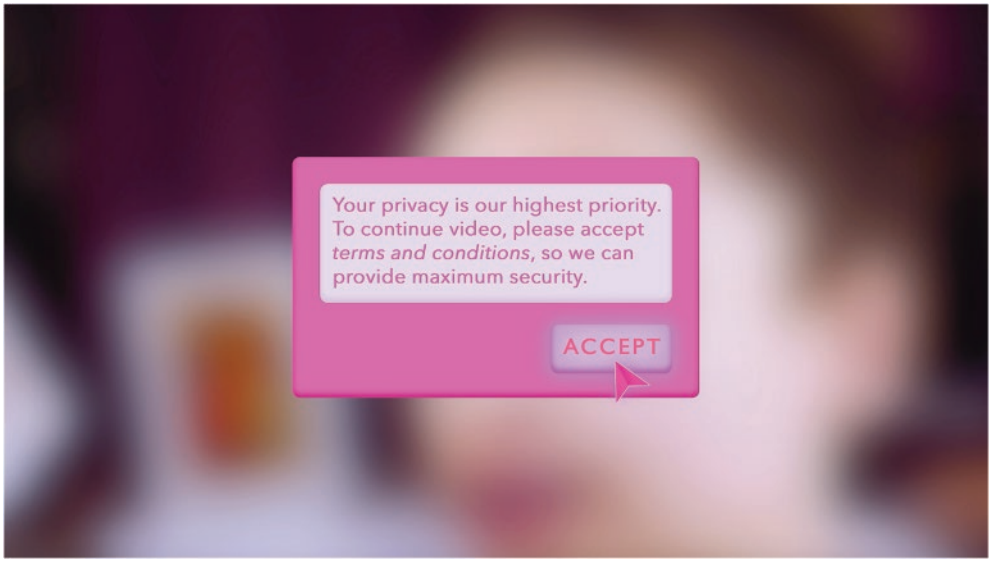

Fig. 6.7. A spoof 'consent' screen gives only one option, still from *Call of Comfort*, dir. by Lien (Germany, 2018).

the user that their data will be gathered by Google and other corporations. This is a spoof of the common consent screen, with its false promises that the user can take back sovereignty over their data by 'managing cookies' or 'requesting' apps do not track them. The lack of any option other than 'accept' in this spoof shows it is more difficult to withdraw from surveillance than online consent screens suggest. Lien's user character, behind the cursor, at first attempts not to accept the terms and conditions, and quickly receives a negative response to this decision from the machine. A jarring 'blonk' sound plays each time they attempt in vain to access messages, online shopping, and contacts.

Contact and sustenance, symbolised by familiar icons for the mailbox and the shopping trolley, are now behind a firewall that the user cannot pass without consenting to more surveillance. We see from the block screen that they cannot be part of 'the Community', as the online space is cosily called, unless they agree to the data-mining update and its privacy violations. How can the user now be recognised as part of a social system, if they cannot communicate with others or participate in the marketplace? The anxiety caused by such exclusion is underlined as the video shows the user's cursor moving frantically around the screen (Figure 6.8). The panicked movements make palpable the fear of being shut out of the Internet, now that contacts, shopping basket, and even a phone line are out of reach. It is impossible to withdraw and simply say no to data-mining, because this would shut out the possibility of fulfilling material needs such as online banking, paying rent and bills, accessing healthcare, and staying in touch with others.

Finally, the protagonist accepts the terms and conditions and logs back in, agreeing to have a forced update of data-mining implants. The final 'data-mining' procedure shown in the video brings in the most shocking sequence in Lien's works

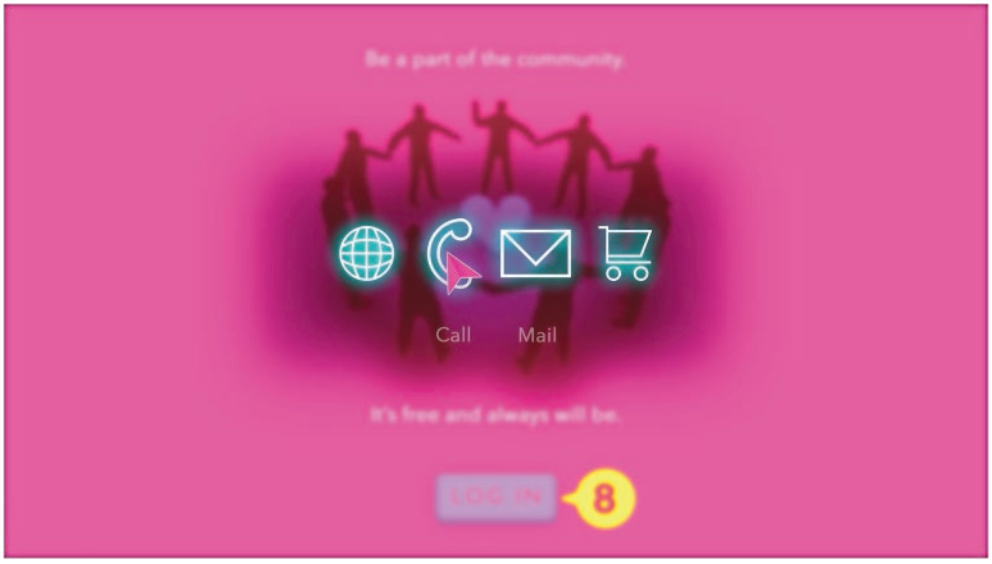

Fig. 6.8. A cursor moves frantically as a tech user tries to access the Internet without giving up data, still from *Call of Comfort*, dir. by Lien (Germany, 2018).

to date. A voiceover of a woman leading a breathing exercise runs over footage of a pair of legs opening, revealing male genitalia. A woman's hand rubs talc into the pubic hair, then mixes a bowl of hot wax in slow motion as the voice guides the data-subject: 'inhale... and... exhale, your body becomes heavy, relax'. The genitals are then shown being waxed in graphic close-up, and some of the skin bleeds as the wax strips are torn away. The sequence is shocking to see, yet the soundtrack also gives it a mesmerising quality. The breathing meditation gives way to Lien's composition of pastiche-sacred choral music, and though the image suggests — just like in Steyerl's piece — that nothing is sacred anymore, the music implies an important and even pleasurable ritual is being performed.

There is a level of gender critique to this sequence. To show male genitals being waxed until they bleed is to both cite and *détourne* conventional rituals of beauty and self-improvement, to which women are more often subjected. One way to read Lien's close-up of the genital waxing is as an obverse citation of Andy Warhol's early video installation *Blow Job* (1964), which consists of a long-duration shot of man's face, on which rumination and pleasure play out. In the Warhol film, the face has a metaphorical function, communicating the physicality happening outside the shot. In Lien's waxing sequence, however, there is a direct display of genital physicality, so that individual experiences of pleasure or thoughtfulness become secondary. In place of the metaphorical function, of a face conveying physicality elsewhere, in the waxing sequence there is no subjectivity, and a close-up image of extreme vulnerability.

Lien's video deploys beauty treatments as metaphor for a subject being datafied for the profit of Internet companies. This data-subject is manipulated into being a free provider of matter for an industry destructive to democracy and to a private life not

monetised by corporations. In order to explore the phenomenon of dataveillance, Lien creates palpable audiovisual effects that draw out what it means to experience surveillance in the age of the 'digital', effects that are often confusing and at times intensely haptic. The bright colour and language of fluffiness in the make-up scenes contrast starkly with the scene of genital waxing, evoking extremes of pleasure and pain, and bringing bodily physicality into the depiction of 'digital' surveillance as an extremely material process. The user's forced compliance is presented as an intimately painful process of beautification-as-mutilation, of a body being subjected to technological processes as extreme bodily modification. And Lien's techniques of collage and citation are always at work anchoring the viewer's experience in the embodied world of sensation. The final images in *Call of Comfort* show further spoof advertisements, offering more videos of interest, titled '<3 Positive Affirmations' and 'Boyfriend Roleplay ASMR'. The citation is so persuasive here that viewers cannot immediately tell if this screen is part of Lien's video or if it is really a link to pleasure-inducing videos that they could watch next.

However, the sensation most powerfully invoked in the video is pain, and this creates effects that are arguably somewhat one-sided. Through the pain it conjures up, the video even risks making the case that privacy should be prized above risky Internet-connectivity. It might reflect the view that technology has a negative impact on 'authentic' human selves, espoused for instance by conservative German cultural theorist Peter Sloterdijk, who writes of our 'infinite need for noncommunication'.[18] Sloterdijk advocates for a distant attitude that lacks the possibility of having positive impact in a shared world because it is so individualistic. And yet, there is a more progressive implication to Lien's representation of datafication as painful modification too, for instance in the sequence with the quivering cursor, demonstrating how frightening it is to be excluded from basic services such as banking and food shopping. That sequence shows how, if an Internet user is not willing to accept the terms and conditions of life online (i.e. surveillance), then not only will inconveniences ensue, like not being able to play a game or access a news report, but also more serious exclusions.

Rather than a Sloterdijkian argument for logging off, we can instead think about Lien's representation of a life inevitably entangled with the high-surveillance Internet in terms developed by Haraway since her 'Cyborg Manifesto'. In the 1980s, Haraway argued for 'situated knowledges' that reject 'rational knowledge claims', in favour of 'the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above'.[19] This 'view from above' is a god's-eye view that exhibits no care for the world it maps. Given the ongoing importance of aerial surveillance for drone warfare today, and the harmful effects of data being stored in the 'Cloud', Haraway's worry about these gods of the skies, which also continues into her most recent work, is pertinent.[20] Contemporary screen artist Lien shows life on the Internet as inevitably entangled and as having serious material impacts, not least the discrimination that theorists such as Noble see happening via dataveillance and algorithmic governmentality. To think about the web in this way, and admit all of our entanglement with it, means moving away

from the destructive aloofness associated with Haraway's sky gods. It turns viewers instead towards a situated sense of human entanglement with technologies. Many of these are designed, at present, for surveillance and profit — but these are by no means the only options.

Anarchival Citation and Picking Up the Thread of the Web

Both Steyerl's and Lien's mixed-footage videos seek to make visible the impact of the Internet's uses and cultures, and in doing so they reveal the inescapability of technology consumers' complicity with those impacts. The entanglement of everybody who uses the Internet with the effects of new media and technologies is inescapable, and these artists insist through their works that we need to think from within it, rather than attempting to adopt a distant, apparently 'neutral' viewpoint. Such neutrality is also impossible for screen-media artists such as Steyerl and Lien, who work with the very 'digital' media their works critique. In place of scepticism about the affordances of technology, these artists engage with it, producing different kinds of defamiliarisation that are only possible by engaging with the content and tropes of the Internet, in order to critique them. As a result, these video works guide their viewers to think materially about the ways in which technology users live through the Internet and how it lives through us. Moreover, they do this work counter-archivally, in that they cite tropes and images familiar from the participatory Internet with a view to *détournement*, rerouting them, generating critical perspectives on what their presence means, in viewers' lives and in the world.

As these visual artists experiment with ways of representing the abstract matter of the 'digital' age, they each update traditional techniques of cinematic reappropriation from found-footage film. In the counter-archiving practices of both artists, a mediatic vulnerability is indexed, as 'digital' content and interfaces are appropriated and spoofed, and so shown to be vulnerable to counter-archival re-use. For instance, it is likely the viewer of Lien's video may see the Internet consent screen differently now that it has been shown in sequence with the extreme close-up of male genitals being waxed to the point of bleeding. Through this kind of horrifying juxtaposition, these appropriations of Internet content subject today's 'digital' archives to imitations that amount to ethical intervention and productive new uses. In Derrida's terminology, their works offer 'anarchival' approaches to the storage and reproduction of knowledge in digital modernity — approaches which go against the archontic authority of centralised, corporate web archives. In both pieces, troubling imitations show how familiar 'digital' aesthetics and everyday screen interfaces can be subjected to anarchival citation, in order to reintroduce bodily and material experience into thinking about networked technology.

The two artists practise this kind of anarchival citation in distinct ways. Steyerl's collages of spoofed material are aimed at creating knowing irony and distance in viewers. *Liquidity Inc.* draws on an archive of existing footage and imagery, and combines these with new animations and live-action material in order to generate

a new alienation effect. This effect works counter to the smooth visual wash that obscures the deeper histories of our technological present. She repurposes images of the technological present as counter-archival material, so producing a fragmentation that permit moments of wondering what there is beyond the familiar archive of computer-generated images. For instance, the military history of the Internet is recalled in the links Steyerl makes between dotcom finance and the history of global warfare, so that her viewers come away with more perspectives on how self-improvement and even entertainment are entangled with the technologies of war. Steyerl uses Internet and moving image archives in this way to counter-archive the proliferation of corporate metaphors such as the 'Cloud', which obscure the technological processes they refer to and their connections to global political events.

By contrast, Lien's citational video seeks to incite feeling about the Internet, the fear of being shut outside it, and the vulnerability it elicits with regard to privacy and personhood in a time when both of these qualities are monetisable. Lien's citational practice is less distantiating than Steyerl's because it brings the body back into the realm of 'the digital', in a depiction of dataveillance as a grim process of intrusive beautification. In this way, the body is shown to be matter that is violently shaped, even produced by dataveillance. More than Steyerl's, Lien's work borders at times on scepticism about the potential of technology, and, for some viewers, could seem to advocate switching off all Internet-enabled devices and withdrawing from using current technologies. However, it ultimately insists on the impossibility of staying away from the Internet for long. Her data-subject finally submits to total surveillance rather than live without access to the services the Internet provides. More, her video even explores the pleasures that continue to tempt technology users back onto the Internet, as at once a risky zone of surveillance and a necessary space of encounter and exchange, without which life can be much poorer.

Given the impossibility of withdrawing from new technologies and the abuse of data they make possible, I have written elsewhere of the need to find new forms of cooperation, including with machine intelligence.[21] In their counter-archival practices, these video works give examples of just such a cooperation with technology, in this case through the citation of content, tropes, and gestures from the participatory Internet in appealing and challenging aesthetic forms. The resulting screen works are destabilising and oddly anxiety-inducing as they reveal glimpses of the hidden matter of dataveillance and violence, which technology users are interpellated to consent to when they participate in life online. Viewers come away from both of them understandably horrified at times, but also with a sense that their options are not just a seamless drowning in technology that overwhelms and obfuscates, or the Sloterdijkian position of separation and switching off communication entirely. A third position emerges here, one of grappling with the images that are constructing a world of meaning around technology users, coming to consciousness of the web they are entangled in, and picking up the image-material that constitutes that web anew, not as a trapping snare, but as a malleable and useable thread. At their best, these counter-archival works therefore call on their viewers to be less docile spectators and more active users of the archives and images available to them.

Notes to Chapter 6

1. See Annie Ring, 'Data that Matter: On Metaphors of Obfuscation, Thinking "the Digital" as Material and Posthuman Co-Operation with AI', *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory*, 46.2 (2023), 176–91.
2. Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14.3 (1988), 575–99 (p. 581).
3. Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 149–81 (p. 153).
4. See N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999).
5. See Aylish Wood, *Digital Encounters* (London: Routledge, 2007).
6. Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), p. 61.
7. See Cathy O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (New York: Crown, 2016); and Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools, Profile, Police and Punish the Poor* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2018).
8. See Caroline Criado Perez, *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* (London: Penguin Books, 2019).
9. Izabella Kaminska, 'Just Because It's Digital Doesn't Mean It's Green', *Financial Times: Alphaville*, 2019 <https://ftalphaville.ft.com/2019/03/06/1551886838000/Just-because-it-s-digital-doesn-t-mean-it-s-green/> [accessed 25 March 2024].
10. See Nicole Starosielski, *The Undersea Network: Sign, Storage, Transmission* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Mél Hogan, 'Data Flows and Water Woes: The Utah Data Center', *Big Data & Society*, (July-December, 2015), 1–12; Julia Velkova, 'Data Centers as Impermanent Infrastructure', *Culture Machine*, 18 (2019), 1–11; Alix Johnson, 'Data Centers as Infrastructural In-betweens: Expanding Connections and Enduing Marginalities in Iceland', *American Ethnologist*, 46.1 (2019), 75–88; Jenna Burrell, 'On Half-Built Assemblages: Waiting for a Data Center in Prineville, Oregon', *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*, 6 (2020), 283–305; Asta Vonderau, 'Technologies of Imagination: Locating the Cloud in Sweden's North', *Imaginations*, 8.2 (2017), 8–21; and Graham Pickren, 'The Factories of the Past are Turning in to the Data Centers of the Future', *The Conversation*, 2017 <https://theconversation.com/the-factories-of-the-past-are-turning-into-the-data-centers-of-the-future-70033> [accessed 13 August 2021].
11. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (Cambridge, MA, & London: MIT Press, 2017), p. xi.
12. Lisa Purse, 'Layered Encounters: Mainstream Cinema and the Disaggregate Digital Composite', *Film-Philosophy*, 22.2 (2018), 148–67 (p. 150).
13. Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, ed. by Gerald Graff, trans. by Jeffrey Mehlman and Samuel Weber (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 136.
14. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).
15. Bertolt Brecht, 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre: Notes to the Opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*', in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. by John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), pp. 33–42.
16. Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), pp. 253–64 (p. 257).
17. See Emily Baker and Annie Ring, 'Now Are We Cyborgs?: Affinities and Technology in the Covid-19 Lockdowns', in *Lockdown Culture: The Arts and Humanities in the Year of the Pandemic, 2020–21*, ed. by Stella Bruzzi and Maurice Biriotti (London: UCL Press, 2022), pp. 58–67.
18. Peter Sloterdijk, 'Spheres Theory: Talking to Myself about the Poetics of Space', *Harvard Design Magazine*, 30.1 (2009) <http://www.harvarddesignmagazine.org/issues/30/talking-to-myself-about-the-poetics-of-space> [accessed 18 April 2023].
19. Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', p. 589.

20. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 31.
21. Annie Ring, 'Complicity', in *Uncertain Archives: Critical Keywords for Big Data*, ed. by Nanna Bonde Thylstrup and others (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021), pp. 87–98 (pp. 92–94).

CHAPTER 7

❖

From the Cyborg to the Rendered Body: Conceptualising Redistributions in Composite Agency Through Hito Steyerl's Citational Figures

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In 1985, Donna Haraway instated the cyborg as a provocative conceptual figure expressing the entangled dynamics of power, control, and protest in the information age.[1] Haraway's cyborg theory was pathbreaking in part because of the challenge it posed to the prevailing tendency within feminism to seek 'alliance with nature and against technology'.[2] Technology was widely understood to be complicit with 'patriarchal capitalism', 'militarism', and 'state socialism', given its development in these contexts.[3] Haraway's cyborg, however, maintains an ambivalent connection to these beginnings: 'from one perspective,' Haraway wrote, 'a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet', yet the cyborg is also 'exceedingly unfaithful to its origins'.[4] Such unfaithfulness was central to Haraway's recuperation of the cyborg as a unifying figure for progressive politics and protest. For Haraway argued that the cyborg could inspire political alliances across differences while combatting essentialism, due in part to its 'chimerical' composition. A hybrid figure, Haraway's cyborg undercuts stable ontological boundaries, undermining divisions between humans and machines, human and nonhuman animals, mind and body, and science fiction and reality. The cyborg relatedly embraces 'permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints'. This utopian portrayal of the cyborg as a chimerical protest figure hence marked a departure from progressive viewpoints that 'insisted on the necessary domination of technics and recalled us to an imagined organic body to integrate our resistance'. By contrast, Haraway asserted persuasively that 'cyborg unities are monstrous and illegitimate; in our present political circumstances, we could hardly hope for more potent myths *for resistance and recoupling*'.[5]

It is difficult to overstate the influence Haraway's cyborg has held across disciplines. Even today, almost forty years on from the publication of the 'Manifesto',

the cyborg arguably remains the most prominent figure for conceptualising entangled relationships between humans and technology. Yet, despite this enduring influence, already in 2006 N. Katherine Hayles suggested that the cyborg was beginning to look out of date.[6] In 'Unfinished Work', Hayles argued that the cyborg was neither 'networked' nor 'distributed' enough to remain the 'most compelling metaphor through which to understand our contemporary situation'; the cyborg, therefore, could no longer inspire 'the same heady brew of resistance and co-option'.[7] In particular, Hayles suggested that Haraway's cyborg did not capture the widespread distribution of agency and cognition between humans and technology that characterises twenty-first-century networked media, distributions giving rise to entanglements 'at once more subtle and more far-reaching than the figure of the cyborg allows'.[8] Hayles hence proposed replacing the cyborg, not with another figure, but with a concept: 'the cognisphere', a term drawn from the work of Thomas Whalen and that gave 'a name and shape to the globally interconnected cognitive systems in which humans are increasingly embedded'. She emphasised the 'crucial' role of 'machine cognizers' within these cognitive systems, contending that 'if our machines are "lively" (as Haraway provocatively characterised them in the "Manifesto") they are also more intensely cognitive than ever before in human history'.[9]

Machinic agency and cognition have only expanded since the publication of 'Unfinished Work', an expansion generating further departures from Haraway's cyborg theory. Moving from the 'cognisphere' to the comparable notion of the 'cognitive assemblage', Hayles's more recent book *Unthought* (2017) discusses how prominent sociotechnical processes including high-frequency trading and drone warfare are animated by a shift from what she refers to as 'human-machine ecologies' towards new 'machine-machine ecologies', the latter animated by heightened technical agency and autonomy.[10] Humans remain materially entangled with these new machine-machine ecologies, Hayles stresses, yet human oversight, decision-making and intervention are significantly reduced, for human cognition simply cannot keep pace with the operating speed and scale of contemporary machinic processes. Her discussion of 'machine-machine ecologies' points to what we might think of as a redistribution in distributed agency. These ecologies are still made up of human and machine actors — they are still composite. Yet the internal distribution of agency and cognition within the ecology tilts increasingly towards the machinic, as technology assumes a greater role. Haraway's cyborg, as a powerful figure for human-machine coupling and hybridity, does not express these recent redistributions in composite agency or the new entanglements they bring. Neither can the cyborg, therefore, conceptualise emergent forms of contestation attuned to this context of heightened automation.

My contribution to these debates is to propose that we supplement the cyborg with a new conceptual figure for the sociotechnical present: the digitally-animated figure, or 'rendered body', that appears with striking frequency across films about technology and capitalism made by some of today's most prominent artists.[11] The rendered body of contemporary art is more distributed and networked than

its cyborg predecessor: it is typically framed less as a self-contained or bounded figure, and more as a mutable site where various corporeal and sociotechnical elements drawn from a media-environmental expanse temporarily register.[12] The rendered body's characteristic expansiveness means it is well poised to capture the fluctuations in composite agency marking the computational present. While the agential compositions expressed through the rendered body vary with the specific sociotechnical processes and questions it is placed into contact with, here I centre on a filmic example in which the rendered body aligns with the movement towards heightened technical agency sketched above. I discuss acclaimed German-Japanese artist Hito Steyerl's *Factory of the Sun* (2015), and argue that this film stages a transition from the cyborg to the rendered body as the most apposite conceptual figure for the sociotechnical present, a transition propelled by Steyerl's understanding of the importance of machine-machine ecologies in shaping the terms and operations of contemporary power, capitalism, and protest today.

Factory of the Sun foregrounds a vision of our fibre-optic present as an expansive 'gamespace', wherein the borders between simulation, gameplay, and sociopolitical 'reality' have become distinctly hazy.[13] This diffuse gamespace provides a rich example of 'citational media', for Steyerl creates it through an accumulation of ludic, wider sociotechnical and media-theoretical references. These citations include implicit and direct references to Haraway's 'Manifesto': *Factory of the Sun*, for example, fleshes out Haraway's brief description of informational control as a 'deadly game', and tailors Haraway's observation that 'our best machines are made of sunshine' to the context of fibre-optic networks, where information travels as light (indeed, this quotation provides one of the inspirations for the film).[14] However, Steyerl also moves beyond the scope of Haraway's 'Manifesto' in her engagement with sociotechnical processes animated by heightened technical agency and autonomy, including high-frequency trading and automated warfare, the very machine-machine ecologies Hayles foregrounds. Through this combination of audio-visual citations, Steyerl's gamespace evokes a redistribution in composite agency: a movement from human-machine coupling to machine-machine ecologies. It is this transformation, I argue, that propels her transition from the cyborg to the rendered body.

Navigating *Factory of the Sun*'s gamespace are, first, human programmers and dancer-players often clad in gold unitards, and sometimes accompanied by robotic voice-overs, so they resemble cyborg hybrids of human and machine (Figure 7.1). Insofar as these gold-clad figures are screened in a film directly referencing Haraway's 'Manifesto', they function as 'citational figures', recalling but also departing from Haraway's cyborg and the 'worlding' it performed.[15] Later, *Factory of the Sun*'s cyborgs are replaced by rendered bodies, depicted in anime style, figures that are also 'citational', for Steyerl appropriates them from the Internet and frames them with reference to ludic non-player characters (NPCs) and bot ecologies — that is, with reference to algorithmic agencies. While Steyerl's cyborgs never follow the resistant path Haraway once envisioned, *Factory of the Sun*'s rendered bodies do emerge as protest figures. These rendered protestors meet the new machine-

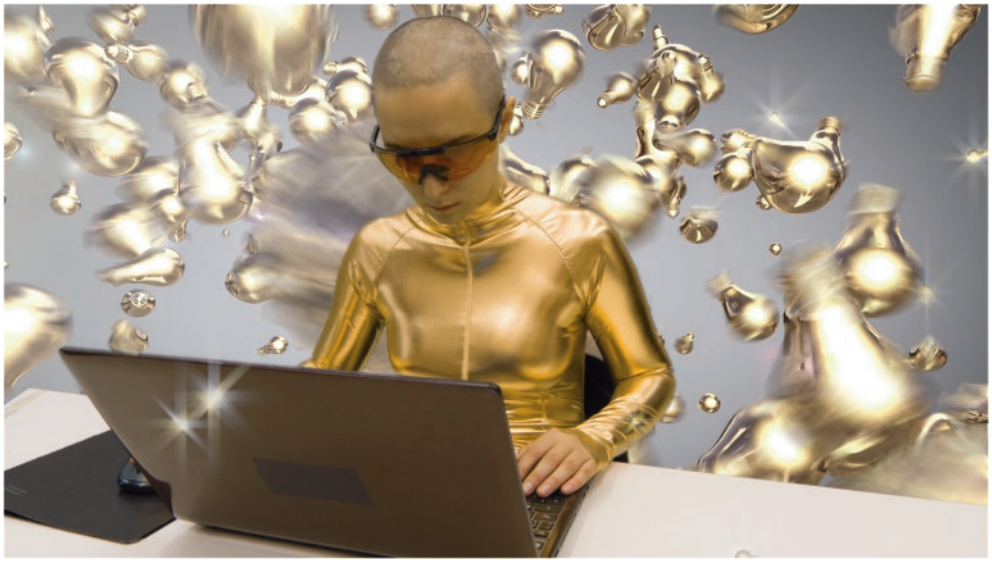

Fig. 7.1. Still from *Factory of the Sun*, 2015. Single channel high definition video, environment, luminescent EL grid, beach chairs. 23 minutes. [This and subsequent images: Image CC 4.0 Hito Steyerl, courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York, and Esther Schipper, Berlin/Paris/Seoul.]

machine ecologies on their own algorithmic terms, as it were, accessing automated planes of Steyerl's gamespace that her cyborgs implicitly cannot reach. However, the rendered body remains a profoundly ambivalent contestatory figure in the film, even more ambivalent than Haraway's cyborg. For Steyerl's rendered figures at once attune spectators to potential automated protest allies *and* symptomatise informational power's pernicious predictive modelling of the world. Below, I move between contextualising Steyerl's gamespace and analysing her citational figures to highlight the immanent relationship between computation and figuration that is central to *Factory of the Sun*'s evoking of the redistributions in composite agency shaping power, capitalism and protest today.

Countergaming

Haraway's 'Manifesto' announced a transformation underway in the organisation and deployment of twentieth-century power, highlighting a shift from the 'organics of domination' to the new 'informatics of domination'.[16] Haraway evocatively characterised the informatics of domination as a 'deadly game', writing that this epoch of power is animated by a transition 'from all work to all play' as the borders once differentiating leisure and labour fade.[17] While striking, Haraway's recourse to this ludic terminology is not a major component of her 'Manifesto'. The 'deadly game' is just mentioned once, and the implications of this metaphor for understanding, and historicising, the information-saturated present are never fully pursued. Haraway also mentions the medium of video games, but again only in passing. She underscores video games' problematic gendered imagery and proclivity

towards militarism, writing that:

> The culture of video games is heavily oriented to individual competition and extraterrestrial warfare. High-tech, gendered imaginations are produced here, imaginations that can contemplate destruction of the planet and a sci-fi escape from its consequences. More than our imaginations is militarised.[18]

Haraway thus does not probe the conceptual and mediatic relation of video games to the new informatics of domination she announces.

The decades since the publication of Haraway's 'Manifesto', however, have witnessed amplified interest in video games in both media theory and contemporary art. This contemporary ludic turn suggests the ongoing significance of the 'deadly game' as a conceptual frame, while pinpointing video games in particular as a privileged medium through which twenty-first-century power and capitalism can be understood. Beginning with media theory, Alexander Galloway offers an explicit addendum to Haraway's thesis in his book *Gaming* (2006) where he argues that, unlike other media, 'video games don't attempt to hide informatic control; they flaunt it', for the player doesn't merely *play*, they are in fact 'learning, internalising, and becoming intimate with a massive, multipart, global algorithm' as they interface with the game.[19] Nick Dyer-Whitfield and Greig de Peuter similarly observe that whereas television and cinema were the media most closely aligned with twentieth-century 'industrial consumerism', video games are resonant with twenty-first-century 'global hypercapitalism', and for this reason games may also offer 'the lines of exodus' from hypercapitalism.[20] This ambivalent potentiality exists, they explain, because of the media history of video games as forms 'originat[ing] in the U.S. military-industrial complex, the nuclear-armed core of capital's global domination, to which they remain umbilically connected'.[21] McKenzie Wark arguably fleshes out the relevance of games to the sociotechnical present most extensively in *Gamer Theory* (2007), stressing that video games '[offer] the line within which to grasp the form of everyday life'.[22] Wark avers that the contemporary world has been 'made over as a gamespace, made over as an imperfect copy of the game'.[23] Entertainment, politics, and labour, for instance, are increasingly animated by game-like elements, such as quantified rankings, she observes.[24] Therefore, the borders between games and the world have become porous, it is no longer possible to exit 'gamespace', and twenty-first century subjectivity is best understood as 'gamer' subjectivity.[25]

Steyerl's essayistic work aligns with this theoretical acknowledgement of the conceptual importance of video games. In 'Why Games, Or, Can Art Workers Think?' (2017), she cites the concept of 'gamespace' directly, concurring with Wark about the game's expansion beyond defined ludic borders in the digital present. Here, Steyerl is interested in how the legacy of game theory plays out in gamespace, reflecting:

> It is striking how much reality has been created as a consequence of different iterations of game theory: neoliberal policies, a wide array of military applications, nuclear and non-nuclear, from targeting devices to deterrence strategies, as well as management theories and planning systems — not to mention the consequences of automated computation as a whole.[26]

Steyerl suggests that one way video games spill out from contained ludic spaces is in their behavioural 'training' of players to be (or at least to 'imitate') the rational, calculatable actors desired by early game theorists. She also characterises recommendation algorithms as an expanded game, one underpinned by a flawed game-theoretical belief in predictive calculation. Recommendation algorithms engage large data sets to make reductive inferences about what a given person likes. She writes that in so doing they engender a departure from 'desirable games' which are 'restricted to a dedicated space and time', and function instead as an encompassing 'correlation game', in which 'you have no idea where, when, how and through whom you were captured for participation'.[27] In keeping with Wark's description of 'gamespace' as 'an unknown algorithm from which there is no escape', one cannot exit the correlation game described by Steyerl, for it unfolds along the very networks that connect us, greatly aided by expansions in technical agency and cognition.[28]

Coterminously with these tendencies in media theory, the last two decades have witnessed a proliferation of artistic engagements with video games, the most recent chapter in the long history of intersections between art and games. Video games have been brought into gallery collections and have featured increasingly in art exhibitions.[29] As I am reviewing this chapter, for example, I have just returned from the Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf, where an exhibition is running on *Worldbuilding: Gaming and Art in the Digital Age*, curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, to celebrate the gallery's fifteenth anniversary. Ludic tropes, figures, and aesthetics are prominent in films made by many contemporary artists. Artists like Cory Arcangel have modified game cartridges to create films, for example in *Super Mario Movie* (2005). Machinima — a portmanteau of 'machine' and 'cinema' in which films are made from recordings of gameplay — has been created by renowned experimental filmmakers like Peggy Ahwesh (*She Puppet*, 2001), Phil Solomon (*In Memorium [Mark LaPore]*, 2007–08), and Sergei Murasaki (aka Chris Marker, *Ouvroir, the Movie*, 2009), as well as by post-internet artists including David Blandy, Larry Achiampong, and Cao Fei. Video games have additionally been a topic of reflection in documentary artists' films. Sondra Perry's *It's in the Game '17* (2017), for instance, contextualises EA (Electronic Arts) Sports' uncompensated use of her brother's digitally-rendered figure in a basketball video game as belonging to a wider colonial and racialised history of theft marking visual culture. Harun Farocki, an artist of considerable influence on Steyerl, has also made several documentary artists' films about video games: his films *Parallel I–IV* (2012–14) survey the history of video game images, charting a movement from early pixelated aesthetics to contemporary hyperrealism, while his *Serious Games I–IV* (2009–10) observe the use of video games for training and therapeutic purposes in the US military. These diverse examples evidence the importance of video games as a lens through which the sociopolitical present is conceptualised and critiqued in contemporary art, echoing the aforementioned arguments in media theory.

What unifies the selection of artists' films just mentioned, and unites them with Steyerl's *Factory of the Sun*, is the absence of ludic action. These artists' films remain

films, in other words, as they turn to games, rather than inviting the spectator to pick up a controller, as other artists have done.[30] Galloway characterises this type of artistic approach as 'countergaming'. Inspired by Peter Wollen's coining of the term 'countercinema' to conceptualise Jean-Luc Godard's departure from mainstream cinematic conventions, Galloway's 'countergaming' describes artworks, including machinima and artists' mods, that prioritise aesthetics above gamic 'action' as they engage with computer games.[31] Galloway is ultimately critical of this tendency, claiming that by disavowing ludic 'grammars of action', artists '[miss] the point' of 'what makes video games special'.[32] Writing from the perspective of film rather than game studies, though, I am more optimistic about the significance of countergaming as an artistic approach. In recasting ludic aesthetics, and combining them with other sociotechnical, historical, and political references, recent artistic engagements with video games frequently produce reflections that hold importance both for the media bridged and for contemporary existence more broadly. Expanded to reflect these recent artistic developments, 'countergaming' can be conceived as a 'counter-archival' mode: a citational strategy that weaves connections to generate critical insights about the world.

This turn to video games in media theory and contemporary art provides the critical context for Steyerl's *Factory of the Sun* and its citational figures. Firstly, a brief summary of the film's main ludic tropes. The initial reference to games occurs not in the film but in the exhibition space. The German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, where *Factory of the Sun* was first screened, was made over as a theatre of simulated adventure plumbed from the 1980s technological imagination. Spectators encountered a black room illuminated by a neon blue light grid, inspired by *Star Trek*'s Holodeck, a virtual gamespace used for purposes ranging from entertainment to training exercises.[33] The gamespace Steyerl evokes thereby reaches out into the exhibition setting, and spectators are invited to enter *Factory of the Sun* through a frame that teasingly suggests a convergence of art and simulational modelling. Tropes associated with video games are then present across the film. These include countdown timers, loading screens, gamic interfaces, leaderboards, and controller icons, alongside references to genres including the third-person shooter and, most prominently, the platformed dance game. Some of Steyerl's ludic references are inspired by canonical game franchises, particularly Japanese *auteur* game-designer Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid* (1998). The choice of Kojima is significant, for Galloway highlights his games (alongside those of Yu Suzuki and Sid Meier) as exemplifying the window onto informational control that computer games can provide; likely one reason for Kojima's appeal to Steyerl.[34]

Factory of the Sun's ludic tropes provide a loose and intermittent frame through which Steyerl's wider references to contemporary machinic processes unfold. This combination of ludic and seemingly extra-ludic references works to produce the message that it is no longer possible to exit 'the game'. In the era of contemporary fibre-optic networks, *Factory of the Sun* suggests, the game has been transformed into a pervasive gamespace marked by automated mechanisms of informational processing and control, a gamespace in which we are all caught, though we may not always

see it. In depicting the sociotechnical present as such, Steyerl fleshes out Haraway's brief description of the informatics of domination as a 'deadly game', while also extending Haraway's thesis to highlight how informational power, capitalism, and potentially also protest rely increasingly on redistributions in composite agency that tilt towards the machinic. It is this agential redistribution, occurring with the expansion of the deadly game of informational control, that *Factory of the Sun*'s cyborgs and rendered bodies are deployed to express. The counter-archival, or 'countergamic', potential of the film's gamespace and citational figures therefore rests primarily in how they make visible and invite critical reflection on the scale and impact of heightened automation. Some counter-archival possibilities, I shall later suggest, are also glimpsable in the new forms of contestation that Steyerl depicts as emerging in this context, though these possibilities are more ambivalent.

Cyborgs That Don't Arrive at Their Destination

One prominent layer of *Factory of the Sun*'s gamespace is a platformed dance game set on Berlin's Teufelsberg.[35] This dance game tailors Haraway's observations about the dissolving boundaries between work and play to the context of platformed data extraction in the fibre-optic present, while also providing critical insight into Steyerl's subtle reconfiguration of the cyborg in this media environment. Most centrally, Steyerl's cyborgs never reach the resistant destination once envisioned by Haraway, remaining caught instead within pervasive structures of informational control, and also undergoing increased automation.

The game on Teufelsberg stars a YouTube dance sensation named TSC ('Take Some Crime'), one of *Factory of the Sun*'s protagonists. TSC is styled as a cyborg in a metallic gold unitard, and is sometimes joined by other unnamed dancer-players wearing the same costume. As these cyborgs dance, Steyerl places a series of ludic imperatives at the centre of the frame: some of these commands reference controller buttons, others mention accumulating 'render points' to unlock gains, and several imperatives relate to the emitting or capturing of 'light' (for example, 'press Y to leak light'). The cyborgs' repetitive dance movements appear as gestural responses to these frenetic commands, for their gestures are shown to generate, and circulate, light. Light, it is important to state, is established early in *Factory of the Sun* as a synonym for information travelling through fibre-optic cables, for these networks 'use glass to relay light pulses that must be translated into voltages'.[36] At the start of the main sequence featuring the Teufelsberg dance game, the voice-over states: 'you are your own enemy' and the task is to 'make your way through a motion capture studio gulag'.[37] The implication of unlikely resistance to the forced archiving of bodily information is thus implicit in the unfolding 'aims' of Steyerl's gamespace. And, indeed, cyborgian resistance to informational capture never takes place on Teufelsberg. For, as Steyerl's cyborgs dance, a leaderboard placed beneath them at the bottom of the frame simulates the real-time recording of their performance data, calculating light energy produced and 'render points' earned, for example, and generating a 'photon score'.

The cyborgs often smile as they participate in this dance game, seemingly enjoying themselves. Yet Steyerl associates the game with labour, at one juncture

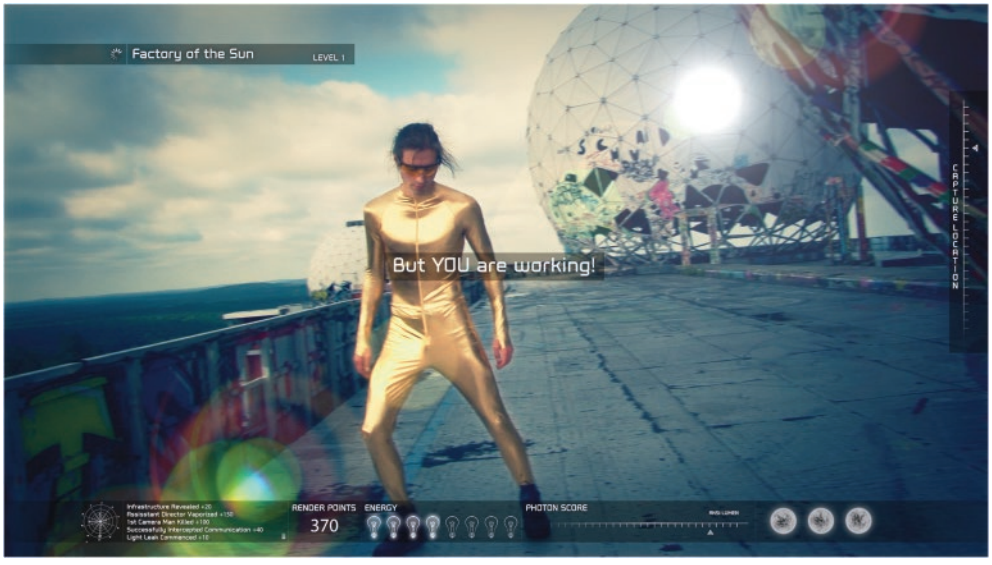

Fig. 7.2. Dance Game on Teufelsberg, still from *Factory of the Sun*, dir. by Steyerl (Germany, 2015).

stamping 'But YOU are working!' centrally in the frame (Figure 7.2). The implication is that regardless of the movements the cyborgs execute, by participating in the dance game's network of captured and emitted light they *work* in the diffuse 'factory of the sun' as they *play*. Thus work, in this context, equates to the extraction (and implied monetisation) of data retrieved as light pulses. A subsequent textual message layered onto the screen, 'OWN3D!', brings home this point: in ludic terms, 'owned' signifies 'failure', but this word is also suggestive of the capitalistic 'ownership' of expropriated data on digital platforms. Steyerl's combination of the tropes of light and work is here redolent of what Jonathan Crary calls '24/7 capitalism'. Crary shows that this late phase of capitalism, which strives to financialise all domains of lived experience, has unfolded with the spread of artificial light, including the 'unending transmission of light through fiber-optic circuitry'.[38]

Haraway famously characterised the cyborg as an 'ironic' figure, and proclaimed that 'irony is about humour and serious play'.[39] She was hopeful about the contestatory potential of cyborgian play, even in the context of the emergent 'deadly game' of informational control. With some exceptions, subsequent theoretical work has expressed a greater pessimism about the political possibilities of play.[40] Galloway, for instance, predicts that with the increase in 'immaterial labour' under neoliberalism 'play will become more and more linked to broad social structures of control', and asserts that 'today we are no doubt witnessing the end of play as politically progressive, or even politically neutral'.[41] Wark argues that earlier counter-cultural 'utopian dream[s] of liberating play from the game, of a pure play beyond the game, merely opened the way for the extension of gamespace into every aspect of everyday life', and observes that 'play is no longer a counter to work [...]. You have to be a *team player*. Your work has to be creative, inventive, playful —

ludic'.[42] Trebor Scholz similarly suggests that 'play' has in fact become 'playbour' because the monetisation of data from our online leisure activities means we work when we believe we are enjoying time off.[43] Rather than exhibiting the ironic or resistant play that accompanied Haraway's vision of the cyborg, Steyerl's cyborgs align with this increased theoretical pessimism surrounding play. Their dancing on Teufelsberg is especially resonant with 'playbour'.

Moreover, while Steyerl's cyborgs are (like Haraway's) composite figures, *Factory of the Sun*'s dance game suggests that the balance of such hybridity is tilting towards the machinic. This mechanisation is indexed subtly in the rapid relation between Steyerl's ludic imperatives and the cyborgs' executed dance moves, a command and response relation that does not leave much time for conscious processing. These rapid movements chime with the slogan 'make 'em dance' that Shoshana Zuboff employs to describe the automating effects of algorithmic behavioural 'herding' on human existence.[44] Relatedly, through their quick and repetitive gestural responses Steyerl's cyborgs are implicitly conditioned by the temporal rhythm of the game. In *Feed-Forward* (2014), Mark B. N. Hansen discusses how in action-based video games and video game speed runs the comparatively slower timeframe of human conscious reflection must be bypassed so that players can harmonise with the 'microtemporality' of the 'game engine'.[45] For Hansen, speed runs therefore successfully allegorise the 'cognitive opacity' of the sociotechnical present, an opacity brought about because 'our technoculture puts increasing demands on us to act in the absence of any prior awareness and without sufficient time for conscious deliberation'.[46] Steyerl's dance game does not constitute a 'speed run' as such. Yet in the swift relation she establishes between gamic instructions and performed corporeal gestures, Steyerl aligns her cyborgs' bodies with the rhythms of the game. We thus encounter a subtle heightened mechanisation of the cyborg provoked by the algorithmic agency and capitalistic imperatives shaping gamespace.

The dance game on Teufelsberg feeds into Steyerl's wider framing of her cyborgs as informational bodies (bodies of light) as seen from the perspective of machines. This broader context implies that it is not only Steyerl's cyborgs who are subject to increased mechanisation; the viewpoint through which these figures are framed has shifted towards the machinic too. Near to *Factory of the Sun*'s opening, for example, Steyerl displays many solid gold computer-generated images of lightbulbs, which emanate from the absent screen of a gold laptop and then fill the filmic frame. These lightbulbs materialise, spin, appear to partially melt and warp, and then shatter into small gold shards, shards that, upon closer inspection, sometimes resemble miniscule gold lightbulbs. Of these lightbulbs, Steyerl states through voice-over: 'this is an image, an image made of light, an image shooting through fibre-glass cables'. This early sequence is framed too by Haraway's observation, paraphrased through voice-over, that 'our best machines are made of sunshine'; Steyerl thus applies Haraway's reference to light to digital information and machine vision in the context of fibre-optics.[47] TSC first appears partway through this early sequence, and his body is initially figured as a pattern of gold fragments too (Figure 7.3). While his epidermal edges are hazy, parts of his figure are just identifiable because of the reflective gold patches, reminiscent of lightbulbs, affixed across the

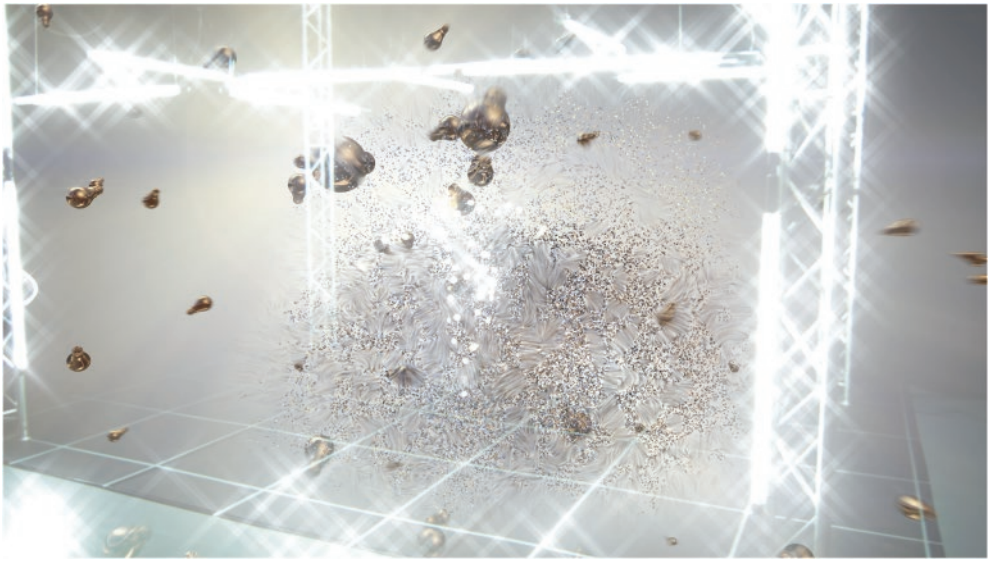

Fig. 7.3. TSC portrayed as an image circulating through fibreoptic cables, still from *Factory of the Sun*, dir. by Steyerl (Germany, 2015).

black unitard he wears in this sequence, patches necessary for the machinic reading of his body in motion capture. Like the shattered gold lightbulbs, then, TSC is first screened as non-indexical light pulses travelling along fibre-optic networks.

As noted by Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (a further theorist whom Steyerl cites in *Factory of the Sun*), fibre-optic infrastructure refashions longstanding historical associations between light and sight, because humans can 'no longer see through the glass that connects, separates, and breaks'.[48] Steyerl's initial framing of TSC teasingly invites spectators beyond fibre-optic glass, as it were, smashing this glass open to show that 'contemporary perception is machinic to a large degree'.[49] As Steyerl has observed in her essay 'A Sea of Data' (2017), in the context of machine vision 'seeing is superseded by calculating probabilities', while 'vision loses importance and is replaced by filtering, decrypting and pattern recognition'.[50] In 'Medya' (2017), she describes this perceptual context evocatively as comprising 'posthuman documentary: light and radio waves permeating every space unseen, whole lives transformed into patterns that must be translated to be perceptible to any human'.[51] Even before spectators watch the dance game unfold on Teufelsberg, *Factory of the Sun* has trained them to perceive Steyerl's dancer-players as patterns of light; that is, as bodies seen from the more-than-human perspective of the machine.

Insofar as images produced by and for machines are what is at stake in machine vision, Steyerl's opening depiction of perception offers an initial glimpse of a 'machine-machine ecology', the topic I shall turn to next. For as Steyerl's above reflections on 'posthuman documentary' evoke, machine vision constitutes a technical process that usually operates a step apart from human perception, whilst nevertheless involving humans at different levels and materially impacting upon human vision as such. This sort of perceptual 'decoupling' of humans and machines

is, indeed, a wider feature of twenty-first-century media environments, as Hansen's *Feed-Forward* importantly recounts. Hansen argues that, by contrast to the 'coupling or synchronization of media system and human sense perception' occurring with nineteenth- and twentieth-century media, twenty-first-century media typically 'question the viability of a model of media premised on a simple and direct coupling of human and media system'. In this latter context, humans are no longer the 'unique addressee' of media, Hansen argues, and 'our (human) experience becomes increasingly conditioned and impacted by processes that we have no direct experience of, no direct mode of access to, and no potential awareness of'.[52]

As the sequences analysed above suggest, as they navigate contemporary gamespace Steyerl's cyborgs never arrive at the utopian protest destination once envisioned by Haraway. The cyborg's formerly resistant, ironic play gives way to 'playbour' in the context of platformed data extraction. Put in other words, Steyerl's cyborgs do not contest the algorithmic infrastructures of the informatics of domination in which they remain caught. Moreover, the cyborg's formerly defining hybridity also undergoes a partial reconfiguration: a subtle tilting towards the machinic, propelled by the algorithmic agency and microtemporal rhythms of the digital platform. Finally, the perspective through which Steyerl's cyborgs are framed undergoes automation too, in the context of the rising prominence of machine vision and the related quantification of sight. With Steyerl's cyborgs, such mechanisation, however, remains incomplete. Her rendered bodies will take the transition from human-machine coupling to machine-machine ecologies further, hewing closer to the redistributions in composite agency that her gamespace cites.

Machine-Machine Ecologies

Before turning to the rendered body, I should say more about the machine-machine ecologies Steyerl references, because it is these ecologies that propel *Factory of the Sun*'s figural transition. The most prominent machine-machine ecology Steyerl evokes is high-frequency trading (HFT). An anecdote about HFT, in fact, opens her film. Spectators watch a grey screen featuring a ludic countdown timer; as the countdown unfolds, a video is screened under the heading 'A message from the Sponsor', a sponsor promptly identified as 'Deutsche Advanced Execution Services'. This 'message' is also titled 'A stupid brand infomercial', a citation recalling the parodic opening of Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid 4*. The subject of *Factory of the Sun*'s opening infomercial, though, is distinct from Kojima's famous parody of infotainment. Steyerl's video foregrounds a (fictional) Deutsche Bank spokesperson who tells the story of CERN (European Organisation for Nuclear Research) workers in Switzerland who believed they had discovered a connection enabling information to travel faster than the speed of light. The CERN workers soon found, however, that this calculation was erroneous; it was caused by a fibre-optic cable that had 'gone rogue'.[53] After relating this anecdote, the Deutsche Bank spokesperson emphasises that his bank is currently working on this very task of facilitating faster informational travel, proclaiming, 'we're going to solve these questions! At

Autobahn Equity!', the latter a reference to Deutsche Bank's algorithmic trading arm. The bank's commitment to speed echoes as a refrain across *Factory of the Sun*. In a later video, for example, the same fictional spokesperson asserts that scientists based at the 'Deutsche Bank sunshine campus' are trying 'to accelerate the speed of light to improve high-frequency trading'. Speed, light, and automation, as they relate to HFT hyper-capitalism, are hence the entangled themes opening *Factory of the Sun*'s gamespace and reverberating throughout.

While, as noted previously, Haraway observed that 'our best machines are made of sunshine', in *Factory of the Sun* it is not just light but crucially also speed that holds importance.[54] Speed is critical to the contemporary informatics of domination and to the related sociotechnical transition from human-machine coupling to the new machine-machine ecologies Steyerl evokes. In financial trading specifically, large profit margins are determined by millisecond advantages, leading Hayles to speak of an '"arms speed race" toward faster and faster algorithms, faster and faster connection cables, and faster and faster exchange infrastructures'. To be competitive, Hayles explains, HFT traders must deploy algorithms that operate faster and also at significantly greater scales than human cognition. Therefore, HFT generates what she describes as 'a temporal gap between human and technical cognition', instigating a 'machine-machine ecology that has largely displaced the previous mixed ecology of machines and humans'. This is because humans cannot participate in real-time decision-making or intervene directly due to the slower pace of human cognitive reflection and processing vis-à-vis machines. As Hayles puts it, 'humans are deliberately cut out of the circuit to allow the machines access to the microtemporalities essential for HFT'.[55]

In Hayles's view, HFT's significant volatility is linked to this redistribution in composite agency, this heightened automation. She stresses that 'the cognitive assemblages formed by HFT and human actors are systemically risky and are weighted too much toward technical rather than human cognition'.[56] It is not only, then, that HFT signals a movement from human-machine coupling to a machine-machine ecology; it is also that this redistribution in agency is linked to material harm. This is likely one reason why Deutsche Bank's algorithmic trading arm is not only the 'sponsor' of Steyerl's gamespace but also her gamespace's primary antagonist. Indeed, 'superluminal acceleration' — a phrase Steyerl introduces as a shorthand for HFT hyper-capitalism — is a recurrent trope, and the specified target of global protests undertaken by *Factory of the Sun*'s incarnate human demonstrators and rendered protestors alike.

Steyerl also associates Deutsche Bank with other sociotechnical arenas undergoing a transition towards heightened automation; most prominently, drone warfare. Through 'BOT News' broadcasts screened recurrently in *Factory of the Sun* (a broadcast form that is itself indicative of the growing prominence of machinic agency that I am tracing here), Deutsche Bank is identified as operating drones (see, for example, Figure 7.4). Several broadcasts show the spokesperson from *Factory of the Sun*'s opening denying or reluctantly admitting reports about drone use. Notably, when this bank spokesperson addresses such reports, his speech is

animated by language associated with the 'war on terror'. He speaks of a 'pre-emptive strike' against suspected terrorists, for example, echoing the anticipatory logic driving this conflict. He also deems reports about the bank 'flattening' nations to be false, while proclaiming 'I can tell you whatever I want', thereby alluding to the severe undermining of truth and falsity occurring with the war on terror. (The BOT News broadcast format, replete with a 'fake stories' tab, hints too at the ongoing circulation of untruths in our digital present, and the part of automated agents in the spreading of such misinformation.) Steyerl's referencing of war on terror rhetoric holds contextual significance for the agential transition from human-machine coupling to machine-machine ecologies I am discussing. For one thing, 9/11 and the war on terror provided the sociopolitical pretext in the USA that allowed data collection online to expand rapidly, along with the forms of technical agency and cognition upon which large-scale informational processing relies.[57] For another, the years following 9/11 saw a 'massive shift' towards robotic warfare, including drone warfare.[58]

References to drones recur in *Factory of the Sun*. Drones appear in the aforementioned dance game on Teufelsberg, for example, circulating above TSC. As in Figure 7.4, drones and also drone strikes against incarnate human protestors are captured in the documentary-style footage presented in BOT News broadcasts. Such references to drones, it is important to note, are brief, and never fully fleshed out or contextualised. Nevertheless, by citing robotic warfare Steyerl alludes to another sociotechnical terrain marked by a redistribution of composite agency towards the machinic that looks set to continue; a terrain of amplified automation wherein 'soldiers [...] disappear into the weapon that replaces them', and 'the machine becomes the technical individual', as Bernard Stiegler puts it.[59] Like HFT, Hayles

Fig. 7.4. Bot News broadcast about drones, still from *Factory of the Sun*, dir. by Steyerl (Germany, 2015).

posits drone warfare as an example of a sociotechnical assemblage undergoing a transition from a human-machine ecology towards a machine-machine ecology. I have mentioned time, and particularly speed, as important to the examples of heightened technical agency discussed thus far, from the microtemporalities of the platformed game to the microtemporalities of HFT. Time is also an important factor in the military's use of automated weapons. Hayles explains that with a 'manned aircraft' the human pilot will require rest after a certain period (about two hours), but an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) can remain in the air 'literally for days'.[60] She writes that UAVs currently form part of a large cognitive assemblage spanning many technical and human actors, ranging from the information picked up by UAV sensors all the way up to presidential staff and lawyers, to highlight a few actants from many.[61] However, for the military, Hayles notes, the 'weak link' in this assemblage is the 'necessity to maintain communications between the UAV and the remote pilot', for this connection makes drone warfare susceptible to pilot errors and to geopolitical disruptions, for example hijackings.[62] Such concerns have propelled a movement towards developing 'unmanned vehicles that fly autonomously', or UAVVs, vehicles that could coordinate their own attacks autonomously, for instance via 'swarm' logics.[63] In addition to removing the aforementioned issues emerging at the point of connection between the remote pilot and UAV, Hayles observes that UAVVs are attractive to the military because they can be scaled up rapidly and inexpensively. With such developments in autonomous weaponry, she argues that historical terrains of human decision-making are, once again, given over to machinic decision-making, with profound material implications.[64]

Seemingly, HFT and automated warfare are 'non-gamic' sociotechnical assemblages that Steyerl cites within her gamespace. However, it is worth pointing out that both HFT and drone warfare have provoked comparisons with games. HFT is variously referred to as 'vampire capitalism', 'hyper capitalism', and '*casino* capitalism', the latter phrase evoking gambling games to underline automated trading's riskiness, as seen for example through the increased frequency of black swan events.[65] Moreover, when discussing the experience of human traders observing HFT algorithms, Hayles offers the analogy of:

> A video game player who infers the rules governing the algorithm generating the screen display by observing the game's behaviour when he tries various tactics; with practice, he is able to predict how the game will react in specific circumstances and refines his tactics accordingly.[66]

HFT and video games, this comparison suggests, similarly attune humans to algorithmic forms of agency that are only partially accessible to them — herein lies the infrastructural link between the two.

Remote warfare has been connected to video games repeatedly, and sometimes controversially. Such comparisons have sparked criticism, for example due to the crucial material differences delinking the two in terms of death toll. Steyerl advances this critique in 'Why Games, Or, Can Art Workers Think?', when she attacks the glib observation that war 'has become a game'.[67] She states provocatively that 'for the vast majority of humanity it would be great if war were just a video

game', for 'in a game, players respawn. You get shot — no problem: you can start all over again'.[68] While eliding reductive conflations of robotic war and video games, however, comparisons between the two can be found on the basis of interlocking media histories, technical infrastructures, visuality, and informational modelling — and it is these contextual links that, I believe, Steyerl wishes to allude to by including drones in her gamespace. Joseph Pugliese, for example, argues that drone use is 'underpinned by both the morphology (gaming consoles, video screens and joysticks) and the algorithmic infrastructure of gaming — with its foundational dependence on "good approximation" ratios and probability computation'.[69] In relation to his fieldwork site, the Nellis US Air Force Base in Las Vegas, Pugliese makes a further contextual link, noting that 'the drone console [...] becomes interchangeable with that of a computer game, as drone pilots upload their own civilian computer games into the same system'.[70] In *Gameplay Mode*, Crogan also points to similarities between computer games and automated weaponry, including on the basis of their common recourse to simulation. He contends that the borders between virtual 'simulation' and 'reality' become hazy in drone warfare, for this form of conflict projects 'simulation' into the world, to the effect that 'the robotic prosecution of war is in a sense its disappearance into something else — something like the thing simulation models in order to control'.[71]

Such virtual modelling is prominent in Steyerl's citation of drones. For example, in a recurring sequence set in the studio, TSC simulates his own death by drone strike (Figure 7.5), his fall choreographed by his sister Yulia. As TSC falls repeatedly, his bodily data is recorded through motion capture, appearing on the screen of the laptop that Yulia operates. This internal screen thus offers *Factory of the Sun*'s spectators another glimpse of the rendering of TSC's body as an informational pattern. And motion capture here occurs in tandem with a reference to mortal capture, as drone conflict's material effects (pain and death) are evoked via modelling. Significantly, one iteration of this recurring sequence directly precedes the rendered bodies' portrayal as protestors in *Factory of the Sun*. This ordering of sequences highlights the rendered bodies' departure from human existential temporalities for, unlike TSC, as algorithmic figures they cannot be 'killed'. It also means that informational modelling frames the rendered bodies' protest, with ambiguous effects, as I shall now discuss.

Rendered Bodies: Which Future for Protest?

The growing importance of machine-machine ecologies motivates Steyerl's transition from the cyborg to the rendered body as the most apposite citational figure for probing the uncertain stakes of power and contestation in gamespace. The difference between Steyerl's cyborgs and rendered bodies is best thought of in terms of degree. Both are composite figures, but in Steyerl's framing the rendered body expresses a further tilting of distributed agency towards the machinic. The rendered body's connection to, and difference from, Steyerl's cyborgs is evident at the point of its composition. In *Factory of the Sun*, the first rendered bodies screened are forged through TSC's extracted gestural data, data grammatised and animated

Fig. 7.5. TSC simulating his death by drone strike, still from *Factory of the Sun*, dir. by Steyerl (Germany, 2015)

by his Japanese fans to create a series of characters repeating his choreographed dance moves. As Steyerl recounts in interview, these fans employed MikuMikuDance freeware to map the motion capture data that 'someone [had] painstakingly recreat[ed] from watching [TSC's YouTube] videos' onto pre-existing digitally-animated figures taken from anime series and manga. Steyerl adds that perhaps '2 or 3 dozen different versions' of TSC's dance performance are now available online, and she appropriates some of these rendered figures in her film.[72] As mentioned, the rendered bodies' second appearance in *Factory of the Sun* follows the modelling of TSC's corporeal data on Yulia's laptop. The film's structure therefore invites spectators to perceive such a data connection between Steyerl's captured cyborgs and the rendered figures she borrows from the Internet, a connection kept in view through the rendered bodies' constant dance.[73] If rendering is conceived as a *process* unfolding along a continuum, then we might think of Steyerl's cyborgs as *rendered bodies in becoming* and her digitally-rendered figures as the culmination of the externalisation of the body through technology and the body's imaging via machinic vision that *Factory of the Sun* evokes.[74]

Due to the data link between figures, the rendered body is in some senses also a 'replica' of its cyborg forebearer. Like ironic play, Haraway once associated cyborg 'replication' with resistance. Cyborgs proliferate through 'replication' rather than 'reproduction', she stated, thereby rejecting Oedipal structures of gendered domination and forging new kinships beyond the family.[75] However, on one level, the replication of the cyborg's gestural data within the dancing rendered body speaks again to the failure of cyborgian resistance to informational capture.

The digitally-animated figures of contemporary artists' film have sometimes been read in these terms, as expressing informational control. One notable

example is found in Erika Balsom's excellent reading of Harun Farocki's filmic engagements with video games. Balsom argues that Farocki perceives gamic avatars, and computer-generated images more broadly, as exemplifying the 'informatics of domination' theorised by Haraway. She writes that in Farocki's art, computer-generated imagery appears 'as an allegory of control', an image regime that 'bespeak[s] a fantasy of rationalism and mastery, of a completely administered life'.[76] With CGI, Balsom reflects, 'quality' gives way to an emphasis on numerical 'quantity', and the 'complexity' and 'contingency' of embodied life are 'tamed' to 'inculcate a worldview based on planning and predictive models'.[77]

Steyerl's rendered bodies, however, are animated by greater ambivalence than the avatars Farocki frames. This is exemplified by their second appearance, where they are poised ambiguously between expressing new automated forms of protest tailored to an epoch marked by machine-machine ecologies *and* evoking the ongoing proliferation of informational modelling. In light of this ambivalent framing, the rendered body's data-based 'replication' of the cyborg is not entirely bereft of its contestatory potential, even while such contestation is reconfigured for the sociotechnical present and is profoundly uncertain.

In Steyerl's protest sequence, a series of rendered figures dance continuously, executing TSC's automated movements, while the animated backgrounds change. The background shifts from shards of smashed glass at the sequence's opening, through to different transnational settings, and culminates with an animated data centre that is screened often in *Factory of the Sun* (Figure 7.6). Through voice-over, the rendered bodies are connected to brief anti-capitalist protest narratives, narratives expressed in different languages and citing real, fictional, and speculative future events. I say the rendered bodies are 'connected' to these narratives, but the audio-visual relationship between on-screen body and voice-over script is loose and mutable. The mouths of the rendered bodies do not move, meaning these figures are never identified as the enunciative sites of the narratives; when several rendered figures are grouped together in the filmic frame it is difficult to identify the specific figure corresponding to the narrative; and some of the rendered bodies change appearance rapidly while a single narrative sounds out. Such audio-visual looseness means Steyerl's rendered bodies appear less as contained or bounded individual figures, and more as proliferating automated stand-ins drawn from big data archives, mutable stand-ins without fixed ties to the sociopolitical events referenced.

To offer some examples of the protest narratives relayed: spectators are informed that an early rendered figure (who changes appearance several times) 'died' during London protests against rising tuition fees before 'respawning' with a new capacity to 'bend light' and 'slow' light down. Given that protest in *Factory of the Sun* is against HFT 'superluminal acceleration', we can read the reference to 'slowing light down' as anti-capitalist and tied to informational disruption. Another rendered figure, spectators are informed, was 'crushed in the 2018 Singapore uprisings' (2018 being three years after *Factory of the Sun* was first screened), after this figure and others 'occupied the freeport art storage and turned it into a render farm

Fig. 7.6. Rendered bodies dancing in Steyerl's animated data centre, still from *Factory of the Sun*, dir. by Steyerl (Germany, 2015).

cooperative'. Finally, a rendered figure screened towards the end of the sequence was 'killed fighting Deutsche Bank High Frequency Trade bots'; when she was fifteen, the voice-over recounts, she 'trashed a Deutsche Bank window. But the debris was melted down and turned into fibreoptic infrastructure'.

In addition to being broadly anti-capitalist, these protest narratives persistently align Steyerl's rendered bodies with machinic agency. References to 'respawning', for example, depart from human existential temporal frames to converge with gamic, algorithmic tendencies. The conflict with HFT bots also implicitly situates Steyerl's rendered bodies within a machine-machine ecology, given how HFT algorithms operate at scales and speeds surpassing human cognition, as we have seen. Such mechanisation is redoubled by the rendered bodies' ceaseless performance of TSC's automated choreographic script, which provides the sequence's visual rhythm, continuing through each protest narrative.[78] By contrast to the dancing cyborgs on Teufelsberg, Steyerl's rendered bodies do not smile as they engage in this constant dance.

The rendered body's conceptual relation to automated agency is cemented at the sequence's close. As the rendered protestors recede from visual prominence, the voice-over states, 'we got killed in the future, we crowd your games and applications, we're non-playable characters, we cannot be played'. The citational framing of the rendered body as a gamic NPC relates to automation, for this term is used interchangeably with 'AI' by gamers: NPCs are algorithmic forms not operated by human gamers yet impacting on their gameplay.[79] The proclamation 'we cannot be played' has a similar effect, for it represents a variation on a phrase deployed previously in relation to Steyerl's cyborgs ('the game will play you'), thereby delineating a subtle difference between her figures. While her cyborgs are caught

Fig. 7.7. Visual crowding, an algorithmic force, still from *Factory of the Sun*, dir. by Steyerl (Germany, 2015).

in structures of informational control, *played* by the game they interface with, her rendered bodies emerge as uncertain figures of automated agency; these rendered protestors are delinked from visible or one-to-one forms of human-machine coupling that we might associate with gamic avatars (as NPCs, they are figures that cannot be played). A subtle citational framing related to bot conflict is also drawn into this closing statement, for 'crowding' is a technique associated with bot operationality. This mention of 'crowding' redoubles the impression of quantified mass evoked visually earlier in the protest sequence when rendered bodies fill the screen (Figure 7.7). For example, in one instance these figures form militaristic lines in Moscow's Red Square, evoking an automated army, an algorithmic force.

As with HFT and drone warfare, bot conflict is an ecology marked by expanded technical agency and cognition. In *Lie Machines* (2020), Philip Howard highlights the substantial resources diverted towards cyberwar by governments across the globe today, and stresses the considerable impact bots have on the distribution of (mis)information online.[80] The attraction of bots, Howard explains, is that they are 'cheap', 'versatile', and capable of acting constantly, i.e. without sleep, reasons thus resonant with those underpinning drone use. Howard contextualises bot usage as one element of a tripartite approach: 'If you can't comprehensively surveil or censor social media, the next best strategy is to write automated scripts that clog traffic, promulgate your message, and overwhelm the infrastructure of your political enemies'.[81] He continues that 'with power to replicate themselves and rapidly send messages bots can quickly clutter a conversation in a network of users or slow down a platform's servers and eat up a user's bandwidth'.[82] Such crowding or clogging is also a tactic within HFT; Hayles gives the example of one personalised algorithm

named the 'Disrupter' whose 'job' it is to flood the market with information, thereby disrupting it.[83] The characteristics that Howard associates with bots thus resonate with Steyerl's framing of her rendered protestors. For, as we have seen, these figures evoke rapid proliferation, informational disruption, constant motion, and crowding. The form of protest associated with the rendered body, then, is one attuned to the context of heightened automation that Steyerl's gamespace announces.

Factory of the Sun's figural transition from cyborgs to rendered bodies is therefore accompanied by a departure from Haraway's 'Manifesto' in terms of the meanings of politics and protest. It is important to reiterate that for Haraway, as much as a figure of composite ontology, the cyborg was *a protest figure* standing for an embracing of heterogeneity and difference within Marxist-feminist political alliances. While Steyerl's cyborgs do not become protestors, do her rendered bodies carry any residual relation to Haraway's conceptualisation of protest, even as they open onto the contemporary context of heightened automation? Probably not. Although Steyerl's rendered protestors are connected with different national and linguistic contexts, they do not evoke a sustained and meaningful engagement with subjective difference or singularity. Rather than subjective difference, it is proliferation, quantitative mass, and algorithmic operationality that find emphasis in Steyerl's framing of her rendered protestors — characteristics associated with bot conflict and with a form of politics Steyerl calls 'proxy politics'.[84]

In her essay 'Proxy Politics' (2017), Steyerl explains that proxy politics are a 'post-representative' politics performed by stand-ins. Stand-ins take many forms, 'bot armies' being a prominent example.[85] Calling attention to the algorithmic agency animating proxy politics, Steyerl gives the example of a Twitter (now X) bot unexpectedly using a photograph of your face. Here, she reflects, your photograph becomes a proxy, assuming an 'autonomous' and 'active' life of its own that is quite distinct from your biological life.[86] In *Factory of the Sun*, this example is comparable with the fate of TSC's grammatised data. These data fork away from him as they are recombined in Steyerl's found rendered bodies, figures shown to take on their own appearances, narratives, and algorithmic autonomy.[87] For Steyerl, proxy politics have wide-ranging yet ambivalent material effects. She notes how proxies 'add echo, subterfuge, distortion, and confusion to geopolitics' and can sometimes act as spam, but writes that they can also be 'turned around and redeployed' for new purposes.[88] She characterises proxy 'redeployment' as an act of *détournement*, thus alluding to a citational practice of image re-use that has great significance in the history of political art.[89] When read in dialogue with Steyerl's essayistic work, *Factory of the Sun*'s rendered bodies might be interpreted as performing a *détournement* of some of gamespace's worst attributes. That is, they might be read as figures emerging ambivalently through gamespace's extensive informational archives, yet disrupting, for instance, HFT hyper-capitalism.

However, the rendered body's status as proxy protestor is made uncertain by a possible counter-reading. Ambiguity is injected into the protest sequence through its recurrent future-oriented tendencies: the fictional Singapore uprising occurring

three years following *Factory of the Sun*'s first screening; the closing statement 'we got killed in the future'. This future-orientation means the rendered body is in sync with what Hansen calls twenty-first-century media's defining 'data-driven anticipation of the future'.[90] Such futurity chimes also with the 'future anterior' temporalities occurring in HFT: Hayles suggests this complex temporality emerges because human cognition 'can follow [the] electronic traces' of HFT algorithms 'only in a temporal window that has, from the viewpoint of the algorithm, already faded into the past, but which for the inquiring human resides in the future of conscious recognition'.[91] Beyond this general twenty-first-century temporal orientation, when read in conjunction with the metaphorics of the game, Steyerl's futurity calls to mind the predictive, simulational models of conflict fashioned by game theorists and infusing the history of digital computing. Crogan reminds us that 'the development of the digital computer as simulational system since the late 1940s tends to spiral the engagement with what is out there and what is to come toward a cybernetic, looping, preemptive regulation of the future's emergence'.[92] A spectre of doubt thus accompanies Steyerl's depiction of protest: the doubt that we may not be watching protest at all but rather its anticipatory calculation, a prediction performed with the possible intent of foreclosing future protest action. Uncertainty emerges as to whether the rendered bodies are extensions of gamespace's pernicious informational archives or whether they mount a counter-archival, anti-capitalist challenge to gamespace. Archives, and counter-archives, intimately shape the future, and so, put otherwise: which future for protest do Steyerl's rendered bodies portend?[93]

A particular strength of Steyerl's political cinema and essayistic engagements with politics over the years has been her insistence on complexity, ambivalence, and contradiction. The specific forms such complexity takes have shifted in conjunction with interrelated transformations in power, technology, and the media landscape over the last two decades. Yet the importance of these terms to Steyerl's work has not waned, as illustrated by the ambivalence that inheres in her current conceptualisation of proxy politics, or her recent assertation that contradiction is a defining feature of the contemporary.[94] Steyerl's protest sequence should be interpreted in this light. Through the rendered body, Steyerl asks spectators not to select between the apparently dichotomous options of algorithmic proxy protest and protest's anticipatory modelling and the sprawling meanings opened up by each of these interpretations. Rather, her rendered bodies attune spectators to both possibilities of the proxy at once. This ambivalence, though, does make Steyerl's rendered protestors decidedly uncertain contestatory allies.

Uncertain Solidarities: 'The Bot Manifesto'

The ambiguities of automated protest are evoked once more at *Factory of the Sun*'s close. Here, TSC dances for his YouTube channel from his basement in Canada whilst Steyerl uses a leaderboard at the bottom of the screen to give film credits in terms of 'light energy'. After this, the film's opening grey screen and countdown timer reappear, creating the impression that the film is about to restart, an expectation bolstered by gallery viewing expectations, for films are typically screened on a loop. However, the screen suddenly turns black, and then white text appears, letter by letter, announcing that the 'platform' has been 'hacked' by 'BOT Underground Bunch'. This announcement is replaced with 'The Bot Manifesto', which I quote in full:

> All photons are created equal!
> No photon should be accelerated at the expense of others:
> Resist total capture!
> Be a non-playable character!
> Sunshine belongs to everyone!
>
> Dunk Zombie Marxism!
> And Zombie Formalism!
> All politics are proxy politics!
> Mez! Dazzle! Shine!

Steyerl ends, then, not with 'The Cyborg Manifesto', one of *Factory of the Sun*'s initial inspirations, but with 'The Bot Manifesto'. A textual transition accompanies the movement from the cyborg to the rendered body that I have discussed in this chapter. Indeed, 'The Bot Manifesto' functions as a textual companion to Steyerl's rendered bodies, for both share citational frames, insofar as they are similarly tied to bots and the gamic NPC; they both depart from human existential temporalities (through references to 'respawning' and the 'zombie' respectively); and they are both associated with proxy protest against superluminal acceleration.

Much like the rendered body, 'The Bot Manifesto' does not represent a complete departure from its cyborg forebearer. Key ideas from Haraway's text are retained. For example, 'The Bot Manifesto' is framed as an interruption, it evokes hope in technological unfaithfulness and unpredictability, and it challenges complete control ('total capture'). Such characteristics were prominent parts of the cyborg's irreverent potential. However, also like the rendered body, 'The Bot Manifesto' departs from its cyborg counterpart in its foregrounding of heightened technical agency and autonomy. We can see this in terms of authorship. 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' was clearly attributed to a human author (Haraway). Yet while spectators know *Factory of the Sun*, and by extension 'The Bot Manifesto', are created by Steyerl, this final text performatively emulates a chatbot fabricating a political manifesto from an archive of existing political and fictional texts: a practice of automated citation. 'All photons are created equal', for instance, emulates a line from the US Constitution, while also evoking the sentiment of *Photons Be Free*, a holonovel penned by a holograph named 'The Doctor' in *Star Trek*, one of *Factory*

of the Sun's intertexts. This holonovel centres on the maltreatment and sentience of automata — that is, on machinic agency.

The overarching automated political message of 'The Bot Manifesto' can be identified as broadly anti-capitalist, as 'Dunk Zombie Marxism'. Steyerl's 'Manifesto' hence functions as another potential automated ally in a wider struggle against 'superluminal acceleration'. However, as with Steyerl's rendered bodies, this final protest text remains distinctly uncertain. Haraway has reflected that the key questions political manifestos ask are: 'where the holy hell are we, and so what?'.[95] To an extent, 'The Bot Manifesto' responds to such questions, suggesting through its very form that 'where we are' is in an increasingly automated society in which redistributions in composite agency shape the terms of power, capitalism, and contestation. And yet what spectators are watching is less a 'manifesto' in our usual sense of the term, and more a hodgepodge of mimicked and recombined fragments of information that *may* align with citation's political capacity but that, also, may not quite cohere. Notably, 'The Bot Manifesto' departs from the reflective knowledge characterising historical manifestos, so potentially chiming with Stiegler's concern that 'theoretical, conceptual knowledge' is threatened by the promise currently placed in big data archives;[96] the risk that with 'the algorithmic implementation of applied mathematics in computerized machines, *there is no longer any need to think*: thinking is *concretized in the form of algorithmic automatons that control data-capture systems* and hence make it obsolete'.[97] The threat facing conceptual knowledge is a further material harm prompted by wide-scale automation, a harm Stiegler refers to as a 'proletarianization' grounded in a technical 'exteriorization' of human existence that occurs without the reciprocal 'counter-thrust' of reflective 'interiorization'.[98] Moreover, another problem facing 'The Bot Manifesto' is the form of the loop, built into gallery screening conventions, for this loop implies an unfortunate recursive adoption of any protest message the manifesto may contain back into *Factory of the Sun*'s gamespace. These problems acknowledged, though, it is still possible to say that in their very uncertainty as protestors Steyerl's rendered bodies and 'The Bot Manifesto' inject some semblance of unpredictability into gamespace's totalising informational archives.

In response to power and capitalism's reliance on distributions of agency and cognition that tilt, increasingly, towards the machinic, *Factory of the Sun* therefore offers two ambiguous examples of automated political contestation. To close, I want to consider the significance of Steyerl's response by setting it in the comparative context of debates around how we should confront the material damage wrought by prominent machine-machine ecologies. In *Unthought*, Hayles makes the case compellingly that humans, and those working in the humanities in particular, have important roles to play in ameliorating this harm. Hayles presents 'emotion' and 'empathy' as 'important contributions' humans can offer within the military cognitive assemblages structuring drone warfare, for example. Similarly, in relation to HFT, she writes that 'humanists can contribute [...] to discussions about the larger social purposes that finance capital is intended to serve' and can connect finance capital with 'values such as social responsibility, fairness and economic justice'

whilst also offering an historical perspective.[99] Hayles's reflections here are not premised on some transcendent understanding of the human as detached from the technical-environmental milieu. She emphasises that the future of machine agency and cognition is of huge significance in part because of the ways in which it will shape human life.[100] Her arguments, rather, are rooted in agential 'differentiation': that is, in a belief that a better understanding of what different agents can bring to composite assemblages may enable these assemblages to be 'life-enhancing' rather than destructive for all.[101]

However, other theorists have de-emphasised the human in their responses to the material harm brought about by such machine-machine ecologies, for fear of re-establishing human exceptionalism. In *Accidental Agents* (2022), Martin Crowley observes that in the face of such harm 'the temptation to insist on the need for more extensive human over-sight is strong'; yet he promptly cautions that 'the opacity inherent in these systems has already, by definition, withdrawn them from any such instrumental relation and, consequently, from any such comprehensive oversight'.[102] Moreover, while this 'opacity' has generated alarm, Crowley asserts that 'there is no need to panic, in the face of these patches of opacity', for 'the transparency of the space of political representation was always an idealist, exceptionalist fantasy'. Indeed opacity, he shows helpfully, has long defined political alliances: 'allies rarely, if ever, enjoy comprehensive insight into each other's decisions; the risk this imposes is part of the price paid by the allies for the enhanced effectivity offered by the alliance'. Rather than bringing automated systems back under the purview of human oversight, then, Crowley recommends that we embrace a 'plural' authorship of progressive political action wherein we recognise digital platforms and programmes, whose operations are somewhat opaque to us, as 'participants'. Drawing on the work of Karen Gregory, he terms such opaque alliances 'weird solidarities'.[103] Instead of cyborgian human-machine 'coupling', 'weird solidarities' therefore emerge as a new mode of entanglement suited to an epoch marked by heightened technical agency and cognition.

It would be a mistake to conclude that Steyerl places no emphasis on the contribution of humans in her engagement with the heightened technical agency shaping contemporary power, capitalism, and protest. For in its very nature as a work of art *Factory of the Sun* conveys a belief in artistic production and reception as spaces of critical commentary and reflection. However, whether out of philosophical preference or simply due to her sense of what the contemporary sociotechnical landscape means is most likely (or both), it is automated contestation that finds emphasis at *Factory of the Sun*'s close. Incarnate protestors are attacked in drone strikes earlier in the film; cyborgs never emerge as protest figures; but the rendered body and an accompanying bot-generated manifesto offer uncertain contestations attuned to our automated present. The proxy protest Steyerl frames thus hews closer to Crowley's thesis than to Hayles's, for Steyerl invites spectators to consider the continuation of anti-capitalist protest by potential technical allies whose operationality remains partially opaque vis-à-vis human perception and cognition. Yet, in Steyerl's framing, such solidarities are always ambivalent, unpredictable, and

may slide back into the very archives of informational power and control they seem poised to counter. Not 'weird solidarities', then, but 'uncertain solidarities'.

In conclusion, we have seen how Steyerl's *Factory of the Sun* employs the citational strategy of 'countergaming', combing ludic and other sociotechnical references to cast the fibre-optic present as a pervasive and increasingly automated gamespace, in which we all participate, though we may not always know it. Steyerl's citational figures, the cyborg and the rendered body, are central to the critical reflections about computational existence and agency that *Factory of the Sun* offers. I have argued that a transition from the cyborg to the rendered body can be read in *Factory of the Sun*, and that this transition symptomatises the sociotechnical movement from human-machine coupling and towards the new machine-machine ecologies that are shaping power, capitalism, and protest today. With the move from the cyborg to the rendered body, hybridity and coupling give way to networked, distributed expanse, proxies and partial opacity as the terms structuring today's uncertain yet no less immanent entanglements between humans and technologies. The counter-archival potential of Steyerl's gamespace and citational figures thus emerges primarily through their inviting of critical reflection on the scale and impact of contemporary redistributions in composite agency. As we have seen, another, more ambiguous, layer of the counter-archival exists within Steyerl's depiction of automated protest, including through her portrayal of the rendered body. This proxy protest may constitute a counter-force targeting some of gamespace's material harms, a new type of anti-capitalist *détournement*, but it may also symptomatise a continuation of gamespace's pernicious archiving and modelling. Such are the uncertain political solidarities that Steyerl frames as emerging with the expansion of machinic agency and cognition in the context of a capitalistic gamespace we cannot yet exit.

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Notes to Chapter 7

1. Haraway associates the cyborg with the history of information: 'cyborgs have to do with this interesting critter called information', she reflects in interview, 'maybe you could date [the cyborg story] from the late 19th century, or maybe it's better to track it through the 1930s, or through the Second World War or after. Depending on what you want to foreground, you could track it in different ways, but it's pretty recent'. Nicholas Gane, 'When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done? Interview with Donna Haraway', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23.7–8 (2006), 135–58 (p. 146).
2. N. Katherine Hayles, 'Unfinished Work: From the Cyborg to the Cognisphere', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 23.7–8 (2016), 159–66 (p. 159). Haraway states that 'My feminist friends and others in the 1980s thought the cyborg was all bad': Gane, 'When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done?', p. 156.
3. Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', in *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), pp. 5–90 (p. 9).
4. Ibid., pp. 15, 10.

5. Ibid., p. 15.
6. As Hayles notes, Haraway too has moved away from the cyborg in her subsequent work to emphasise other figures and concepts: 'Unfinished Work', p. 160. These include 'companion species' and, more recently, the 'Chthulucene' and tentacular. See Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); and *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chtulucene* (Durham, NC, & London: Duke University Press, 2016).
7. Hayles, 'Unfinished Work', pp. 165, 159. Moreover, Hayles argues persuasively that while Haraway's 'Manifesto' announced the rise of the 'scary networks' of the 'informatics of domination', the cyborg's main 'shock value' came not from a connection with these networks of control, but rather 'from the implication that the human body would be modified with cyber-mechanical devices'; she suggests, however, that it is the former networks that have become critical to sociotechnical existence in the years since the 'Manifesto's' publication: 'Unfinished Work', p. 160.
8. Ibid., pp. 159–60.
9. Ibid., p. 161.
10. See N. Katherine Hayles, *Unthought: The Power of the Cognitive Nonconscious* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), in particular the discussions of automated warfare on pp. 131–41, and high-frequency trading on pp. 142–77.
11. This chapter is related to a book I'm completing titled *Rendered Bodies: Film Art and Expanded Organology*, which examines the different meanings tied to this figure in contemporary art. These digitally-animated figures have been referred to in different ways by different artists. My choice of 'rendered body' is influenced by Ed Atkins, particularly his three-channel digital video installation *Safe Conduct* (2016), in which the animated protagonist is presented via an etymology of 'rendering'.
12. It is worth noting that Hayles's aforementioned decision to swap the cyborg with *a concept*, rather than another figure, was due in part to her sense of the limitations of the 'individual unit'; for Hayles, the complexities of networked media and distributed cognition mean 'the individual person — or for that matter, the individual cyborg — is no longer the appropriate unit of analysis, if indeed it ever was': 'Unfinished Work', p. 160. The rendered body, as I theorise it, bypasses these concerns, for its expansiveness means it elides the idea of the 'individual unit'.
13. See McKenzie Wark, *Gamer Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
14. See Lanka Tattersall, 'What is the Contemporary? A Conversation with Hito Steyerl', Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 21 February 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNW1PP-034Q> [accessed 25 August 2023].
15. In interview, Haraway emphasises that the cyborg describes an 'obligatory worlding' attuned to the late capitalist information age: Gane, 'When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done?', p. 139.
16. Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', p. 28.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p. 43.
19. Alexander R. Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp. 91–92.
20. Nick Dyer-Witherford and Greig de Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. xxix.
21. Ibid., p. xxix. Moreover, Patrick Crogan posits video games as the key medium through which to perceive the military-industrial legacy shaping contemporary digital computing, for video games 'emerge out of ongoing interchanges between war, simulation, and contemporary technoculture'. Patrick Crogan, *Gameplay Mode: War, Simulation and Technoculture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. xiv.
22. Wark, *Gamer Theory*, no. 058.
23. Ibid., no. 024.
24. For example, Wark writes: 'Everything has value only when ranked against something else; everyone has value only when ranked against someone else [...] The real world appears as a video

arcadia divided into many and varied games. Work is a rat race. Politics is a horse race. The economy is a casino'. See Wark, *Gamer Theory*, no. 006.

25. Ibid., nos. 001–007, 015. This porosity between games and 'reality' has become central to neoliberal corporate strategies of 'gamification', strategies deploying gamic elements in, for example, work or fitness settings, for the purposes of generating productivity and profit. See Jennifer Whitson, 'Foucault's Fitbit: Governance and Gamification', in *The Gameful World: Approaches, Issues, Applications*, ed. by Steffen P. Walz and Sebastian Deterding (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), pp. 339–58. For a critique of conflations of video games and gamification, see also Ian Bogost, 'Why Gamification is Bullshit', in *The Gameful World*, ed. by Walz and Deterding, pp. 65–80.
26. Hito Steyerl, 'Why Games, or, Can Art Workers Think?', in *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War* (London: Verso, 2017), pp. 153–170 (p. 158).
27. Ibid., pp. 159, 161–63.
28. Wark, *Gamer Theory*, no. 035.
29. John Sharp, *Works of Game: On the Aesthetics of Games and Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), p. 15. Sharp notes, for example, that the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) acquired several video games for the first time in 2008 for its Architecture and Design department.
30. Examples of artists who have made video games include Angela Washko, David O'Reilly, and Bill Viola.
31. Galloway's definition of 'action' aims to bypass debates about activity in media theory that point to the ways 'audiences always bring their own interpretations and receptions of the work', instead corresponding with the viewpoint 'rooted in cybernetics and information technology, that an active medium is one whose very materiality moves and restructures itself — pixels turning on and off, bits shifting in hardware registers, disks spinning up and spinning down': *Gaming*, p. 3.
32. Ibid., p. 125.
33. The original holodeck was a black box ensconced in a yellow light grid.
34. See Galloway, *Gaming*, p. 91–92. From *Metal Gear Solid*, Steyerl also borrows gamic modes (e.g. 'realism mode'), and appropriates (and reworks) character names, for example 'Liquid Easy' (a play on Kojima's 'Liquid Snake'), here probing the metaphorical resonance of 'liquid' with discussions of digital culture and finance capitalism. For an insightful discussion of the meanings linked to liquidity in Steyerl's work and in the work of other contemporary artists, see Cadence Kinsey, 'Fluid Dynamics: On the Representation of Water and Discourses of the Digital', *Art History*, 43.3 (2020), 510–37.
35. This hill forms part of the transnational history of informational capture, for Teufelsberg is home to the now ruined NSA listening station, once operative during the Cold War. *Factory of the Sun* gives this historical context briefly.
36. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), p. 16.
37. Steyerl explains in interview that in *Factory of the Sun* she means motion capture to function as a 'clear and obvious allegory of the fact that basically any kind of motion or emotion is being captured, either for real or potentially. And that applies to basically any kind of activity': Tattersall, 'What is the Contemporary?'.
38. Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 24.
39. Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', p. 5.
40. One notable exception, for example, is Emily Baker and Annie Ring, 'Are We Now Cyborgs? Affinities and Technology in the Covid-19 Lockdowns', in *Lockdown Cultures: The Arts and Humanities in the Year of the Pandemic, 2020–21*, ed. by Stella Bruzzi and Maurice Biriotti (London: UCL Press, 2022), pp. 58–67.
41. Galloway, *Gaming*, p. 76.
42. Wark, *Gamer Theory*, no. 016. Wark also notes, though, that video games can be marshalled to critique sociopolitical gamespace, for example by elucidating the lies upon which gamespace rests, lies about '*a fair fight, a level playing field, unfettered competition*' (nos. 021, 024).
43. Trebor Scholz, 'Why Does Digital Labor Matter Now?', in *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*, ed. by Trebor Scholz (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 1–10 (p. 2).

44. 'Make 'em dance' implies a subliminal promotion of forced and continuous movement that unfolds beneath the register of conscious awareness on digital platforms, Shoshana Zuboff explains (a promotion of movement undertaken in pursuit of profit): *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (London: Profile Books, 2019), pp. 291–324.
45. Mark B. N. Hansen, *Feed-Forward: On the Future of Twenty-First-Century Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), pp. 56–57.
46. Ibid., p. 57.
47. Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', p. 13.
48. Chun, *Control and Freedom*, p. 16.
49. Hito Steyerl, 'A Sea of Data: Apophenia and Pattern (mis-)Recognition', in *Duty Free Art*, pp. 47–62 (p. 47). Smashed glass has long been a trope associated with machinic vision and agency in Steyerl's work: from the smashed monitor screen of her short film *Strike* (2010) through to her recent work *The City of Broken Windows* (2018).
50. Ibid.
51. Hito Steyerl, 'Medya: Autonomy of Images', in *Duty Free Art*, pp. 63–74 (p. 69).
52. Hansen, *Feed-Forward*, pp. 11, 37, 6, 8. In his recent book *Post-Cinematic Bodies*, Shane Denson also underscores how Steyerl's *Factory of the Sun* 'disrupts the subject-centric orientation of visual perception and instead makes *felt* the power and politics at stake not only in motion capture, but in the larger framework of computational visuality'. Shane Denson, *Post-Cinematic Bodies* (Lüneberg: Meson Press, 2023). p. 81.
53. In interview, Steyerl explains that this opening anecdote is 'real' and that her encountering of this news story was another early inspiration for *Factory of the Sun*. See Tattersall, 'What is the Contemporary?'.
54. Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', p. 13.
55. Hayles, *Unthought*, pp. 165, 142–43, 171.
56. Ibid., p. 164.
57. See Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, pp. 117–25, for a discussion of the entangled history of the post-9/11 political landscape and the growth of surveillance capitalism, for example.
58. Hayles, *Unthought*, p. 132; and Crogan, *Gameplay Mode*, p. 158.
59. Bernard Stiegler, *The Automatic Society. Volume 1: The Future of Work*, trans. by Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), p. 44, ebook.
60. Hayles, *Unthought*, pp. 132–33. Notably, the opening of Crary's *24/7* recounts studies by the US military into the possibility of reducing soldiers' need for sleep. This suggests the deployment of automated weaponry has been accompanied by ongoing attempts to automate the soldier's body: *24/7*, pp. 1–3.
61. Hayles, *Unthought*, pp. 135–36.
62. Ibid., p. 133.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., p. 136.
65. On black swan events, see ibid., p. 162. Hayles refers to HFT as 'hyper capitalism' and 'vampire capitalism' (p. 159).
66. Ibid., p. 163.
67. Steyerl, 'Why Games, Or, Can Art Workers Think?', pp. 153–54.
68. Ibid.
69. Joseph Pugliese, 'Drone Casino Mimesis: Telewarfare and Civil Militarisation', *Journal of Sociology*, 52.3 (2016), 500–21 (p. 511).
70. Ibid., p. 502.
71. Crogan, *Gameplay Mode*, p. 159. On the same page, Crogan writes that 'through its virtualization of the distant place where the robot stands ready to act on the world, the controlling system projects the simulational technics of cold war research and development out from the training and testing facilities and over the territory of the designated enemy combatant'.
72. Tattersall, 'What is the Contemporary?'.

73. In interview with Steyerl, Tattersall briefly mentions that Steyerl assembles this latter sequence featuring rendered bodies from found footage: 'What is the Contemporary?'.
74. As Vanessa Chang argues, motion capture 'redefines human embodiment as granular data set, legible to the machine if invisible to human eyes': 'Catching the Ghost: The Digital Gaze of Motion Capture', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 18.3 (2019), 305–26 (p. 316).
75. Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', pp. 6, 29.
76. Erika Balsom, 'Moving Bodies: Captured Life in the Late Works of Harun Farocki', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 18.3 (2019), 358–77 (p. 371).
77. Ibid., pp. 374, 367; Balsom connects this tendency with artist Zach Blas's evocative writing on biometrics and the particular vision of the body that biometrics render (p. 363). See also Zach Blas, 'A "cage of information," or, What Is a Biometric Diagram?', in *Documentary Across Disciplines*, ed. by Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press/ Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2016), pp. 80–91.
78. While I don't have space to draw this comparison here, dance and coded gesture more broadly have long been important parts of Steyerl's political cinema. Steyerl often frames, combines, or otherwise recasts the codified movements found in contemporary media to imbue these gestures with new political valence. For a discussion of how this plays out in Steyerl's *November* (2004) and *Lovely Andrea* (2007), see Lucy Bollington, 'Towards A New Model for Approaching Conflict Images: Glimpsing War Through Hito Steyerl's Political Cinema', *Screen*, 62.4 (2021-22), 459–83 (pp. 473–74). In Steyerl's recent works, such as *Factory of the Sun* and *SocialSim* (2020), where dance is performed by rendered bodies, such coded gestures tend to express inter alia heightened automation and the rapid spread of digital information.
79. Steyerl also connects her rendered figures with character names inspired by Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid* franchise that are additionally applied to her dancing cyborgs, a repetition further suggesting that her rendered bodies are continuing *Factory of the Sun*'s uncertain game, and so taking this game onto a different (fully automated) plane.
80. Philip Howard, *Lie Machines: How to Save Democracy from Troll Armies, Deceitful Robots, Junk News Operations, and Political Operatives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), p. 40. Howard notes that in 2016 twenty-five countries were 'spending upward of $2.5 billion a year on large cohorts of commentators, reviewers, harassers, and advocates who manipulated public life over social media', and that by 2020 'more than seventy countries had organised social media misinformation teams' (p. 16).
81. Ibid., p. 61.
82. Ibid., pp. 60, 57
83. Moreover, when discussing HFT 'algorithms fighting algorithms', Hayles notes that 'in human terms, their interactions resemble the kinds of moves and countermoves typical of propaganda (psyops) warfare: feints, dodges, misinformation, and camouflage': *Unthought*, p. 163. A similar informational conflict is hence at work across different arenas of automated existence.
84. Steyerl cites 'proxy politics' directly at *Factory of the Sun*'s close, as we will later see, therefore pointing to the relevance of this concept for an understanding of the new configurations of politics and protest she frames.
85. Steyerl writes that proxies can be 'masks, persons, avatars, routers, nodes, templates, or generic placeholders': 'Proxy Politics: Signal and Noise', in *Duty Free Art*, pp. 31–46 (p. 43).
86. Ibid., pp. 43, 39–40.
87. This proxy logic in fact has a longer history in Steyerl's political cinema, even as this cinema encompasses a diverse range of understandings of the political attuned to changes in the media environment. In her early film *November* (2004), which is concerned with protest, Andrea Wolf's travelling image as a martyr following her execution is shown to have material political effects in the world independent of Andrea's biological life. The travelling image of Andrea is a proxy image, in other words. A notable parallel on the basis of the proxy can hence be drawn between *November* and *Factory of the Sun*, even while protest in each is forged in relationship with different mediatic metaphors, from cinema's travelling images and the poor image in *November,* to games and machine-machine ecologies in *Factory of the Sun*.
88. Steyerl, 'Proxy Politics', pp. 44–45.

89. Steyerl writes, for example, that proxy politics are about 'how to act or represent by using stand-ins (or being used by them), and also how to use intermediaries to *detourne* [sic] the signals or noise of others': 'Proxy Politics', p. 45.
90. Hansen, *Feed-Forward*, p. 4
91. Hayles, *Unthought*, p. 144.
92. Crogan, *Gameplay Mode*, p. xx. Crogan observes that 'the modelling of real-world physical or human behaviour to experiment with its hypothetical futures amounts to a technics of anticipating what has not yet happened', contextualising this pre-emption as an 'exacerbation' of 'the purposive quality' that inheres in 'technics in general': *Gameplay Mode*, p. xix.
93. In interview, Steyerl mentions that the idea was for the animated figures screened to be 'stand-ins for people who are going to get killed in the future in protests' and that these rendered bodies 'travel back into the past to appear' in animated form. However, she then reflects that 'I don't think anyone will understand that by seeing the film', and leaves the meaning of such futurity somewhat open in her comments. See Tattersall, 'What is the Contemporary?'.
94. On contradiction, see Tattersall, 'What is the Contemporary?'.
95. Gane, 'When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done?', p. 136
96. See, for example, Stiegler, *Automatic Society*, pp. 41–43.
97. Ibid., p. 48.
98. Ibid., p. 26.
99. Hayles, *Unthought*, pp. 140, 176.
100. Ibid., p. 141.
101. Ibid.
102. Martin Crowley, *Accidental Agents: Ecological Politics Beyond the Human* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), p. 200. Crowley writes that 'digital-algorithmic politics will be defined by the opacity of the decision-making processes operative at one position in an alliance to users located and making decisions at another of its positions' (p. 183).
103. Ibid., pp. 208, 201–04.

CHAPTER 8

❖

Twin Faces as Sites of Uncertainty in Algorithmic Image Cultures

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In November 2017, a number of identical twin social media stars with vast online followings posted videos on their YouTube accounts to mark the release of the iPhone X. There was one feature of the new range of phones that the twins were especially excited to test for their millions of followers: Face ID. The new biometric scanner built into the front camera system was being presented by Apple as the future of smart phone security, set to replace Touch ID on all subsequent models. The identification system's TrueDepth camera works by projecting 30,000 infrared dots onto the operator's face, which are used to trace its contours and produce a map. This map is then converted into a 2D image which becomes that iPhone's master key, without which it cannot be unlocked. This new security system seemed to be a gift to twin consumer tech reviewers determined to identify flaws in the interface: what better test for face-recognition algorithms than identical twin faces? Most videos showed the twins were able to unlock each other's phones. As one of the Dolan Twins told their more than nine million subscribers, 'according to Apple, Ethan and I are the same person'.[1] The appeal of twin YouTube stars echoes what Lisa Zunshine calls 'cognitively enjoyable' exercises of the twin plots employed in early modern drama.[2] The mistaken identity trope produced through the twin characters in Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*, for instance, challenges the audience's essentialist biases by momentarily troubling the borders between individual identities and threatening to sever the bond, fundamental to capitalist modernity, between individual bodies and individual identities. In the Face ID videos, however, it is not just the cultural assumptions of viewers that are put to the test, but also those of the biotechnical systems of control that are becoming increasingly naturalised through their incorporation into everyday communication technologies.

Kelly Gates argues that the roots of our current faith in facial recognition technology, evidenced by the techno-utopian iPhone X marketing discourse, can be found in the uncertainty of the aftermath of 9/11. Following the attacks, CCTV footage that emerged of two alleged hijackers passing through airport security prompted a claim that an automated rather than human-controlled face-recognition

system would have connected the images of the two men to their profiles in the CIA database and potentially prevented the catastrophe. The glitch in the system was not the technology but the human operator. This, Gates claims, is the origin story that has served to legitimise all subsequent facial recognition initiatives, instilling faith in greater automation and increasingly complex integration between bodies and information networks. As Lila Lee-Morrison puts it, biometric systems 'as risk mitigation and security technologies, have specific desired outcomes, namely, to establish identity as clearly as possible in a geopolitical landscape of uncertainty and in the context of border control'.[3]

But Face ID is only the latest biometric technology promising to 'stabilize the messy ambiguity of identity, to automatically read a stable, individual identity off the body'.[4] Biometric systems emerged in parallel with twin studies methodologies during the second half of the nineteenth century, in response to the rapid growth of an urban population deemed a potential threat to security. Systems such as Alphonse Bertillon's anthropometrics, which combined photographic images with databases of information about body types to aid the identification of criminals, promised to render each individual of the growing urban mass identifiable and therefore the object of state control. The advantage of face-recognition systems over other biometric technologies, such as fingerprint or iris recognition, is that they function at a distance and can therefore work without the consent of whoever is being scanned. Facial recognition technologies currently constitute the primary means of shoring up the connections between bodies and identities in a context in which the latter are increasingly produced by networked digital information.

Twin studies have always been closely entangled with biometric technologies, at the levels of both ideology and methodology. As William Viney points out, the twins used in Francis Galton's experiments of the 1880s 'formed part of a wider perceptual apparatus; they gave a new way of seeing'.[5] Galton's interest in twins as evidence of the influence of inheritance on human nature is closely connected to his experiments with photographic technology. Galton became interested in the potential of photography to visualise human types, such as in the composite photographs that he produced during the same decade as the twin studies. While the twin studies technique was thought to reveal the agency of inherited factors on human development over generations, beyond the immediate evidence of environment and upbringing, composite photographs were developed as a technique for rendering visible the human types that inform and structure individual differences. As Allan Sekula put it in his influential study of Galton's photographic portraiture, while 'Bertillon sought to embed the photograph in the archive [...] Galton sought to embed the archive in the photography'.[6] Twin bodies and photographic technologies, therefore, both held the promise of revealing hidden secrets about individual identity.

However, the twin bond has also been used to question the effectiveness of these technologies and test their limits. A 2018 National Institute of Standards of Technology report on the efficacy of commercial face-recognition algorithms identifies twin faces as an enduring stumbling block. 'One component of the

residual errors is that which arises from incorrect association of twins'; of the 127 algorithms tested, only one 'can correctly distinguish twins'.[7] However, as Kevin Bowyer and Patrick Flynn point out, in these tests the faces of monozygotic twins serve as adversarial images: training tools used to improve the capabilities of the technology. Furthermore, just as the 'exotic' appeal of twins was exploited as a marketing tool by the genetic studies experiments of the 1990s (such as the Minnesota Study of Twins Reared Apart), security software developers use twin tests as a publicity strategy.[8]

Despite the fact that simply by using these applications the twin influencers are presenting them as desirable, by pointing to and embodying a failure in the ever more pervasive biometric systems, the twin Face ID videos open up a space for their critique. In his work on computer worms and viruses, Jussi Parikka argues that digital technologies that have been naturalised to the point of 'ontological invisibility' only reveal themselves in the event of breaking down.[9] Every media ecology, he argues, 'seems to have an accident of its own'.[10] Accidents 'reveal technology, and the power/knowledge relations that media are embedded in'.[11] Often described as genetic 'accidents', twins introduce mistakes or glitches into the dominant regimes of power regulating digital cultures. Twin faces function as blockages in the increasingly smooth biometric interfaces that are binding humans with computational systems in more and more elaborate ways. In the process, despite their apparent frivolity, twin Face ID videos invite us to think the human-computer interface differently.

In this article, I explore the citation of algorithmic image systems in the performance of twinship in digital cultures and examine how twins introduce blockages into biometric technologies, in particular facial recognition software. I explore how these blockages constitute moments of uncertainty in the datafication of identity through a study of the performance of identical twinship as a form of mask or act of strategic invisibility, which takes place through the citation of biometric surveillance technologies on social media. The uncertainty of these events is echoed by other uses of the trope of twinship as a method for navigating algorithmic image cultures, including the location of 'twin strangers' on online image databases and the practice of the 'twin selfie'. These deployments of twins and twinship clash with the dominant social media logic of homophily which consolidates social divisions through a production of sameness and stasis. Unlike homophily, twinning here is driven by a logic of dynamic disequilibrium that is characterised by constant change, mutual modulation, and fractal involution. Whereas in the twin studies of the nineteenth century and the eugenics movements that they influenced, twin bodies were used to construct and render legible archives of human types, in digital cultures twinning functions more often as a counter-archive that introduces disorder into the policing of sameness by the logic of homophily.

Misrecognitions of Facial Recognition Technology

The videos in which twin influencers explore the limitations of commercial facial recognition technologies expose the contradictions that are characteristic of social media celebrity. They simultaneously present themselves as autonomous individuals, resourcefully carving out their own brand, and relays in information networks, mere conduits between commercial products and potential consumers. The hesitation between these two modes encodes wider tensions within digital image cultures, between a celebration and displacement of images and between conflicting regimes of power. Influencer duos such as the Dolan Twins and Brooklyn and Bailey present themselves as the exemplary network labourers of the digital economy: forging connections between disparate t(w)eens behind their screens, brokering alliances between products and consumers, communicating effortlessly across the various platforms of digital life while evidencing fluency in the always-emerging hybrid languages that each platform demands. In many ways, the Face ID video released on YouTube by the Dolan brothers Ethan and Grayson on 4 November 2017, which at the time of writing has been viewed nearly fifteen million times, takes to an extreme the medial self-reflexivity of all their output. It does so by drawing attention to the act of communication and connection itself over and above the actual content of the communication. By citing biometric surveillance technologies, the Face ID videos focus on the act of interfacing with computer systems, something that the twins do so efficiently that they can easily access both their own and their sibling's information without encumbrance. The split screen technique used to show the mobile phone as they set up and use Face ID is a visual enactment of the ease with which they slip and flow between different informational networks (Figure 8.1).

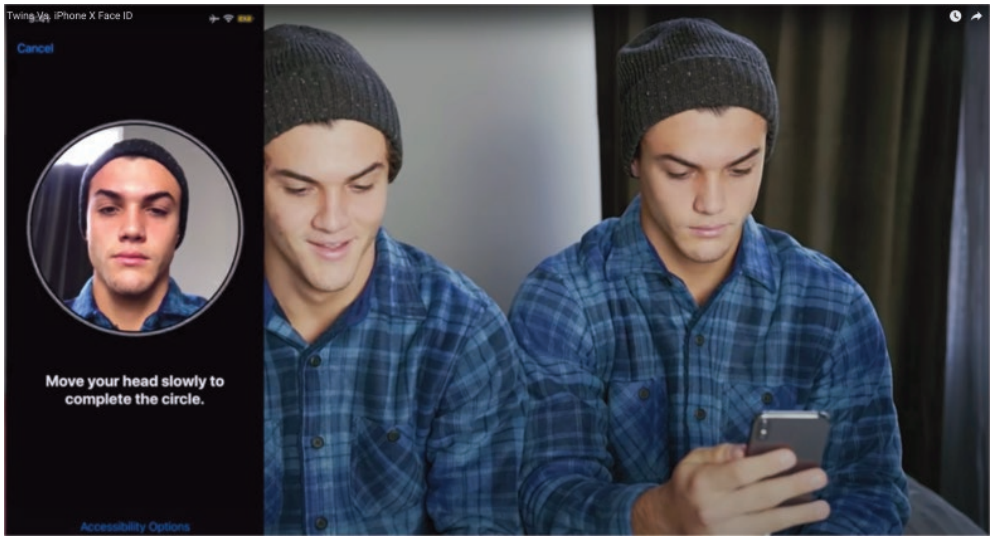

Fig. 8.1. Grayson Dolan setting up Face ID on the iPhone X, from Grayson and Ethan Dolan, 'Twins vs. iPhone X Face ID' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFtOaupYxq4> [accessed 7 December 2023].

In this, the twin stars are the embodiment of 'nodal citizenship', a term Grant Bollmer has coined to describe those who efficiently carry out the current economic and social imperative to 'relate to others by connecting and maintaining flows' of data.[12] Increasing connectivity in this regime is presented as an innate need of human nature. In the process, the agentic role of technology — the ways in which technologies embody and reinforce ideological discourses — are elided: 'The ability to distinguish between human and technology is eroded, producing humans as objects that serve as imagined material relays supposedly interchangeable with infrastructure'.[13] Social media are central to this conflation of humans and technology, producing users as 'posthuman' through a 'deeply ingrained and ultimately quotidian belief that it is in human nature to connect and circulate flows of information and capital'.[14] Within this regime, twin YouTubers present themselves as the ideal of posthuman connectivity. The ubiquitous technologies of digital communication in their videos merely reinforce the 'natural' connectedness that exists between them as twins. Rather than an aberration, the twin influencers present themselves as taking to an extreme an innate human predisposition towards interconnectedness. However, alongside this enactment of digitisation, in the videos the twins also enact their detachment from technology. Through their critique, they mark themselves as separate from and suspicious of the introduction of new systems of mediation. The premise and tone of the videos parody the claims to scientific objectivity made on behalf of the new Apple iPhone software. The twins carry out a series of experiments that test the limitations of the software in a way that echoes the studies surveyed by Bowyer and Flynn. Grayson and Ethan both in turn hold the phone at arm's length with a neutral facial expression, presenting themselves in false solemnity as species for the inspection of machine vision.

These tensions are reproduced in the physical act of interfacing or attempting to interface both with their electronic devices and with each other. While the mock objectivity of the influencers performs the scientific detachment of the mug shot, by operating the cameras themselves, the Dolans, like all Face ID users, are both subject and object of the disciplinary gaze, a coincidence of roles that blurs the 'see/being seen dyad' that Foucault places at the heart of the disciplinary apparatus.[15] Furthermore, the act of extending the arm to take a photo of yourself with a smartphone has become a visual shorthand for the extent to which bodies adapt to the affordances of our technological devices. Unlike the arrangement used in mug shots, the camera is incorporated into the body, a part of it rather than an alien entity. The Dolans alternate between emphasising the distinctness of their individual faces ('If you look really closely, they're a little different') and playing up to their similarities (they frame them in the same way using identical hats). On the one hand, part of the star appeal of the Dolans is that only their followers, those who really know them, can tell them apart with ease. This dynamic reinforces the myths of individuality and is part of the process of 'self-branding' that is central to the digital labour of influencers.[16] On the other hand, they triumph in being mistaken for 'biometric doubles'. The apparent repetition between Ethan and Grayson's faces pre-empts the repetition produced in the act of photographic capture by the Face ID system, a doubling that is emphasised by the split screen technique.

By foregrounding this hesitation, the twin Face ID videos evidence a tension at the heart of algorithmic image cultures more generally. They perform the paradoxes engendered by what Daniela Agostinho describes as the 'datafication of vision'. Since 'machine vision occurs through data, not optical means [...] vision becomes essentially post-optical'.[17] And yet images and metaphors that evoke vision are everywhere. As vision becomes datafied, 'optics is both displaced and reinstated'.[18] This shift in the ontology of the photograph is reflected by its role in image-sharing social media platforms. In many ways, social media has been a vehicle for the growing influence of images in social life so that, as Tama Leaver, Tim Highfield, and Crystal Abidin put it, the 'material world has sought to become "Insta-worthy" in redesigning practices, cultural institutions and material spaces'.[19]

However, in social media photography, the image has become computational, marking a shift away from the importance of the visual. The computational nature of the image is foregrounded with particular clarity by the photo-sharing app Instagram, which positions the metadata produced in the acts of photographic capture and distribution — from tagging to recording the time and place of upload — as being equally if not more important than the content of the images themselves. Furthermore, in the transition from taking a photograph and uploading it to your profile the manipulation of the image is a necessary stage that cannot be bypassed. In Instagram, as in computational culture more generally, there is no opting out of either 'filtering' or 'editing' the image. Alexis Madrigal points out how, since the beginning of the smartphone era, apps have offered to 'upgrade your face' by using algorithmic systems to produce an image of the face that statistically the user is likely to want to see.[20] However, unlike previous models that had a 'flaw-eliminating beauty mode' that you could turn on or off, the new iPhone XS range makes this 'skin-smoothing' feature a default. Since the photographic demands of selfie culture are a major driving force behind the technological innovations of phone manufacturer and app developers, the 'global economy is wired up to your face'.[21]

The result of this paradox, according to Daniel Rubinstein and Katrina Sluis, is that the networked image is characterised by the co-existence of two seemingly incompatible visual logics: on the one hand, a 'rational, visual representational logic according to which the image on our screen refers to a cat somewhere in the universe' and, on the other, 'recursive, viral logic of intensity, multiplicity and incompleteness in which the image refers only to itself'. While photography retains an aura of representationalism and is made to speak the language of identity, as digitisation 'breaks the chain of signifiers' it also creates 'an excess' or 'supplement' that is 'not representational but sensual and affective'.[22] This double logic within algorithmic image cultures serves to reinforce historical identity categories while simultaneously binding us to algorithmic informational systems at a pre-individual level. Through their exploration of the iPhone X's face-recognition system, the social media twins draw attention to the paradox of algorithmic image cultures. The seemingly double image of the Dolan twins' faces seems to pre-empt the proliferating, decentred logic of the image in networked cultures, the simultaneous

appearance of the same image across multiple platforms. The appearance of Ethan's and Grayson's faces next to a split screen containing one of the siblings' faces within the Face ID interface presents their twinship as an embodiment of this proliferating logic. Yet, on the other hand, the twins present their faces as an obstacle to machine vision, a glitch or stumbling block in the integration of human life and algorithmic identification processes, indexing a decoupling of the image from its referent. If one sibling's face can access either of the twins' digital identities, then it ceases to be representative.

The tension between two visual logics within the twin Face ID videos foregrounds how facial recognition systems mediate between distinct systems of power. In many ways, face-recognition systems are exemplary of the emerging systems of power in digital cultures that function through a logic of market-driven modulation or control. Biometric technologies are the most efficient interfaces with digital networks and serve to embed the logic of information capitalism within the body itself. Combined with automated facial expression analysis, face-recognition technology generates the type of information necessary to the efficient functioning of a control society: information about consumer habits, patterns of spending and debt, geographical movement and the consequent affective modulations of the body. Markets have the capacity to identify patterns in this data and cater to events, crises, or desires (whether individual or transindividual) before they arise. Faces in biometric systems are reduced to patterns of digitised information (produced by the 'mapping' with infrared dots) and function not as windows onto the essential identity of the individual operator but as a point of access to information networks. As James Ash and others point out, the 'smoothness' of the interface between individuals and computer systems enabled by facial recognition technologies would enable the 'open circulations' that, according to Deleuze in his influential essay 'Postcript on the Societies of Control' ('Post-scriptum sur les sociétés de contrôle', 1990), replace the closed milieus of disciplinary power and society.[23]

However, central to the success of face-recognition systems is their simultaneous appeal to both disciplinary and modulatory regimes of power and the visual logics that go with them. They seem at once extensions of criminal identification strategies rooted in the nineteenth century and emblematic of the emerging regime of modulation. As Sarah Kember puts it, facial recognition technologies 're-produce the norms of 19th-century disciplinary photography even as photography becomes allied to the security-based biopolitics of computational vision and smart algorithmic sorting'.[24] Recent media studies research has sought to understand why network culture, rather than ushering in a postracial or postidentitarian era in which the potential anonymity digital interaction would free users from the constraints of social and racial identity categories, has fostered a rise in identity politics. Wendy Chun uses the term 'homophily', Greek for 'love' as 'love of the same', to describe a logic that fuels and justifies online discrimination that reproduces, entrenches, and legitimises existing forms of social segregation. This logic functions not just at the level of the echo chamber — the idea that you find what you are looking for on the Internet and have your previously held opinions or prejudices confirmed

by the opinions of others — but also at the level of what Chun calls 'pattern discrimination', the shoehorning of data produced by online analytics software into simplistic identity categories that reproduce 'older' racial and class categories.[25] 'These algorithms,' Chun states, 'perpetuate the discrimination they "find". They are not simply descriptive but also prescriptive and performative'.[26]

In other words, the algorithmic logics that subtend social media, and which are facilitated by biometric interfaces, reproduce historical identity categories that legitimise social inequalities through a focus on individual habits and preferences as these are expressed through online activity.[27] Chun's concept of 'homophily' is echoed by the work of a number of researchers who have explored the ways in which algorithmic systems, including biometric technologies, reinforce historical racism. Simone Browne, for example, has used the term 'digital epidermalization' to describe the role of biometric technologies in the reaffirmation of the 'visual economy' of race, which like Kember she also traces back to the nineteenth century, at a cultural moment when the focus on the body at the molecular level might provide the conditions for what Paul Gilroy termed a 'postracial humanism'.[28] The paradox identified by Chun is present at the level of the interface through the way that Face ID (and similar systems) converts the human face to networkable digital information while reproducing the visual conventions of nineteenth-century ethnographic photography.

By performing a moment of failure, the twin Face ID videos have an unintended critical effect comparable to that of a number of artistic works that use facial recognition technologies. In her study of interventions by Thomas Ruff, Trevor Paglen, and others, Lee-Morrison argues that artistic works that engage with biometric systems do two things. On the one hand, they can 'provide a cultural translation of the technology' by placing it within the historical and political contexts that are occluding by tech marketing language. On the other hand, by 'decontextualising its processes' these artworks 'allow for an engagement with this technology that not only problematizes its use but also imagines alternative outcomes of the technology and its processes'.[29] The videos by twin influencers discussed here carry out both of these gestures: they place facial recognition technologies within a fragile point of intersection between contradictory systems of representation and power while pointing to emerging positionalities at the borders of the visible.

Loss of Face

The paradox of the algorithmic image (its proliferation belying a shift away from the visual) is mirrored by the role of the face in digital culture. The omnipresence of faces in networked culture coincides with a collective loss of faith in the visage as a seat of subjectivity. Claire Colebook argues that the technology-driven emphasis on instantaneity, disconnected emotions, and flashing screens, is rapidly producing what she describes as a 'total loss of face' in contemporary culture.[30] The 'face' that is being lost, according to Colebrook, is that which was described by Emmanuel

Levinas in his ethical philosophy. Faces, according to Levinas, constitute the source and provide the motivation for ethical behaviour since they provoke an 'awakening to the precariousness of the other', which serves as a reminder of our own state of vulnerability in the world and hence our responsibility towards one another.[31] As Colebrook explains, Levinas's concept of the face 'relies on a singularity that would be liberated from all generality, that would not be a specification of this or that universal type'.[32] In a social world of over-exposure to photographic depictions of others, in which we constantly swipe away faces on social media and dating apps, visages have lost their specificity and, along with it, their supposed connection to an interior reservoir of humanity. Ironically, Facebook heralded the demise of the face at the very moment of its seeming triumph. For Colebrook, one of the most visible signs of this cultural loss is the rise of the smiley face: 'So lacking in distinction that it has neither race, nor humanity, nor artfulness, the smiley face signals loss of life'. No matter how many iterations and variations are produced by enterprising software companies, the endlessly serialised smiley face marks a 'retreat from specification and the removal of any definitive body — anything that would allow for engaged sympathy'.[33]

Twin faces proliferate within this seemingly paradoxical coincidence between the omnipresence of faces and a cultural loss of face. A growing number of apps and websites are offering to find users' 'twins' by scouring the Internet for similar faces. The website twinstrangers.net, which, at the time of writing, has more than seven million paying subscribers, claims to be able to 'find your lookalike from anywhere in the world'. A video uploaded to YouTube explains that 'when you register, our AI face recognition instantly compares your photo against millions in our database finding your closest matches'. If two subscribers are matched they have the option of contacting each other. In one of the first promotional videos for the site, viewed more than nine million times on YouTube, Niamh tracks down her doppelgänger Karen using the Twin Strangers software. Two follow-up videos show Niamh meeting her second and third twin strangers. During her second trip to Italy, Niamh is told that she not only resembles her lookalike Luisa but shares a very similar 'aura'. Hearing this news, Niamh breaks down in tears. The discourse surrounding Twin Strangers echoes the ambiguity of the twin social media stars. On the one hand, it seems to celebrate the cultural loss of face driven by networked image data bases. But on the other hand, it constructs the face as a site of potential ethical communication. The site promises not only to match lookalike users but facilitate a deep interpersonal connection.

One of the effects of looking at photographic images of twins is that the faces staring back at you take on a mask-like quality. Rather than just the result of monozygosity, the impression of identicalness in many images of twins is the product of a performance. In photographic stagings of identical twin identities, the sitters employ a form of mask — the depths of emotional and biological differences are occluded by a surface sameness that is presented to the camera. In Peter Zelewski's 2018 photobook *Twins*, the photographer and the photographic subjects collude in their performance of identicalness. The supposed objective neutrality of

the camera is pre-empted by the dead-pan expressions of the twins as they present themselves as specimens that are representative of the human type announced by the book's title. One of the reasons for this mask effect may be the fact that, with many monozygotic twins, facial expression and movement — the play of emotion through their features — often breaks the spell of identicalness. Just as the machine vision of the Face ID system conflated Ethan's and Grayson's faces, when the human eye confronts a photographic portrait of identical twins for the first time, it tends to move back and forth between the two faces in search of differences on which to anchor itself. The gaze skates across the surfaces of the faces presented to Zelewski's camera just as the eye slides off the surface of a mask during a Noh performance. It is significant that the Twin Strangers videos all end with Niamh and her lookalike putting on make-up in an attempt to accentuate their similarities. It is only when they are made-up in the same way and assume the same affectless expressions that the uncanny effect is realised. Twinship here is literally a mask in that it is the result of artificially covering the blemishes that might draw attention to individuality.

The mask-like quality of twin faces in visual mass culture underscores the disruptive potential of the Face ID videos. Discussing state use of biometric systems during the Occupy movement, Zach Blas argues that the use of masks by protestors (including the iconic Guy Fawkes mask borrowed from David Lloyd and Alan Moore's graphic novel *V for Vendetta*) were 'forms of queer illegibility'.[34] These 'aesthetic and political practices of anti-normativity and anti-standardization' undermine neoliberal surveillance systems and create 'amorphous, encrypted, incalculable, excessive and weird collective stylings of bodies and environments'. These 'queer biometric failures,' Blas concludes, 'are utopian oppositions that do not cohere to state visualizations or representations; they evoke facelessness and defacement [...] and make the face a nexus of refusal, collectivization, and potentiality'. In their Face ID videos, the twin social media stars enact moments of 'biometric failure'. By performing identicalness for the camera, they construct their faces as 'natural' masks that jar with state visualisations. In the process, and despite the apparent frivolity of the videos, they point to the critical potential of twinship in defamiliarising the emerging identification systems of the digital age.

Jenny Edkins identifies a contradiction at the heart of contemporary 'face politics': 'With a shift from the modern episteme to a world of digital images' we might expect the face to be disappearing; however, in social media cultures 'the face endures as an emblem of political personhood'.[35] In the face of this contradiction, Edkins outlines a political strategy of 'tarrying with the precarious existence of the face: the face neither mantled nor dismantled, neither sustained nor destroyed, but rather revealed as both there and not-there, here and not-here at the same time'.[36] The mobilisation of twin faces as masks enacts a face that flickers between visibility and invisibility. In the process, the form of transfaciality performed by twin faces points to alternative configurations between faces and personhood.

Twin Selfies and Human-Machine Assemblages

Like most twin influencers, one of the stock visual genres employed by the Clermont twins, Shannon and Shannade, is the joint portrait using still photographic images. That many of these are self-portraits is made evident by the fact that the siblings are stood, smartphone in hand, in front of a mirror (Figure 8.2), or from what has become the defining characteristic of the selfie: the presence of an extended arm visible at the bottom of the frame. The #twinselfie both deploys and undermines the conventions of what is the most common vernacular photographic practice of the digital age, a convention that, according to Madrigal, is driving the increasingly complex use of algorithmic systems in smartphone cameras and image apps. On the one hand, the twins exploit the cultural associations between the genre of the selfie and authenticity. In contrast to some of the more staged and aesthetic photographs posted onto their profiles, whether they be model shots promoting their merchandise or the ubiquitous staged lifestyle images, the selfies are presented as unplanned and therefore windows onto the realities of their everyday lives. But, of course, the selfies are exemplary of the paradoxically highly mediated immediacy of a mode of stardom that relies on an aesthetic of authentic inauthenticity. On the other hand, as evidenced by the oxymoronic nature of the hashtag #twinselfie, the genre undermines the other key cornerstone of the selfie: the focus on the individual self. The self that the twins present in their twin selfies is a mutually entwined self, a photographic performance of the dynamic of entwinement that is central to their brand.

Fig. 8.2. The Clermont twins pose for a selfie, Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/clermont_twins_/> [accessed 20 November 2022].

The selfie has proved to be a particularly fruitful focus for the analysis of the socio-technical assemblages enabled by algorithmic photography. The photographic practice is often dismissively described in the popular press as being symptomatic of a narcissistic culture. It is easy to see how the boom of the selfie could be marshalled as evidence of a collective cultural self-obsession. The prevalence of this mode of expression seems to indicate the reduction of public discourse to what Zygmunt Bauman terms 'life politics' in which the subject, stripped of any real political agency and unable to connect his or her experience to that of the wider social field, is reduced to maintaining an illusion of agency through the exercise of market-driven lifestyle choices.[37] The association between twinship and incest in contemporary mass popular culture has also be described as indicative of cultural narcissism. Stephen Marche points out that, far from being taboo, incest has become a clichéd plot development in popular culture, a trope that is often played out through narratives of twins, whether they be Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia in the Star Wars franchise or Jaime and Cersei Lannister in *Game of Thrones*. Marche argues that twin incest narratives reveal that incest is really an extension of narcissism. When Siegmund and Sieglinde fall in love in *Die Walküre*, they are really falling in love with their own reflected images. Like the boom of the selfie for many of its critics, for Marche the naturalisation of the twin incest trope is indicative of societal atomisation.[38]

But rather than reaffirm the narcissistic qualities of the selfie, its appropriation by social media twins emphasises the constitutive connection between self and information networks in digital cultures. Selfies have been attracting increasing critical attention for the light they shed on the complex forms of intersubjectivity of the digital age. Rather than reflective of the technology-driven atomisation of communities, they are more often viewed by digital media scholars as socio-technological assemblages. Aaron Hess, for example, focuses on how selfies illuminate emerging and evolving 'relationships between technology, the self, materiality, and networks' of the digital age.[39] The 'selfie assemblage', as he terms it, gives expression to 'the affective tensions of networked identity: the longing for authenticity through digitality, the conflicted need for fleeting connection with others, the compulsion to document ourselves in spaces and places, and the relational intimacy found with our devices'.[40] Selfies both 'announce' these tensions and act as ways of 'coping' with or reconciling them. The connection between self and networks in the twin Face ID videos evidences these tensions between desire for authenticity and meaningful interpersonal connection and an ecstatic embrace of the reduction of life to information and the production of connective metadata.

Like Hess, Paul Frosh argues that selfies should not be understood purely in visual terms, but rather for the ways in which they integrate photographic images into 'a technocultural circuit of corporeal social energy' that he terms 'kinesthetic sociability'.[41] A key technological innovation that has enabled the selfie boom is the design of the smartphone. The fact that it can be easily held and operated with the same hand, that it displays an image of the 'pre-photographic scene' large enough to be viewed at arm's length, and that it has lenses on both the front and back mean

that, unlike with traditional camera design, the smartphone no longer functions as a 'barrier between visible photographed spaces and undepicted locations of photographing and viewing'. The two main consequences of this are that 'the space of photographic production or enunciation is effortlessly unified with the space of the picture itself' and that 'the unified space of production and depiction becomes a field of embodied inhabitation' since the camera is 'literally incorporated, part of a hand-camera assemblage'. Selfies emphasise the indexical aura surrounding photography as part of a 'connective performance' between gestural images and their habituated embodied responses (whether tapping the screen in approval or swiping in dismissal) rather than to authenticate 'semantic reference'.[42] Twin selfie photographs reproduce in microcosm the connections between bodies and technologies that constitute the 'kinesthetic sociability' of selfie assemblages. The genetic connections between each other's bodies, underscored by their performed twinship, preempts the techno-corporeal circuits into which they are woven by their embedded metadata.

While the twin selfie confronts its viewer with the socio-technological assemblage that are constitutive of identity, it also foregrounds the face itself as an assemblage. While faces are actually assemblages of different elements (skin, muscle, cartilage, bone, affect, cognition etc.), cultural practices such as portraiture, have created the face as a single, unified object, detachable from its bearer and expressive of his or her essential identity. In an influential chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* (*Mille plateaux*, 1980) titled 'Year Zero: Faciality', Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe the often violent cultural imposition of unity on the facial assemblage as the 'abstract machine of faciality', which renders the face 'inhuman' by turning it into a 'phantom'.[43] Gates argues that face-recognition systems are part of what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the 'technological trajectory' of the abstract machine of faciality. Despite the fact that, at the point of interface, systems such as Face ID reduce the face to an assemblage of contours, the social and political use of the information produced by the interface reaffirms the process of facialisation: the attachment of the image of a face to a stable individual identity. Twin faces constitute a challenge to this process. By setting the spectator's eye in motion — whether it be a human eye or that of biometric machine vision — they deterritorialise the face. The way the eye moves back and forth across twin faces frees their features from the false unity of facialisation in a way that echoes Deleuze and Guattari's description of the processes of 'dismantling' that make 'faciality traits themselves finally elude the organisation of the face — freckles dashing toward the horizon, hair carried off by the wind, eyes you traverse instead of seeing yourself in or gazing into those glum face-to-face encounters between signifying subjectivities'.[44] In this, they are anticipating an effect that Deleuze associates with the close-up in his later books on cinematic aesthetics. In a way that echoes this process of 'dismantling', cinematic close-ups of faces have the power to 'tear the image away from spatio-temporal co-ordinates in order to call forth the pure affect as the expressed'.[45]

Mark Hansen's concept of the Digital Facial Image (DFI) is a useful point of reference for the role of twin faces in relation to the 'faciality' of biometric systems.

Hansen uses the term to describe aesthetic experimentations with human-computer interfaces carried out by new media artists that focus on the human face. Kirsten Geisler's installation piece *Dream of Beauty 2.0* (1999), in which the user is invited to interact with the limited emotional and verbal range of a disembodied computer-generated face, is taken as exemplary of the way DFIs 'draw attention to the non-seamlessness of the interface between embodied human beings and the computer'.[46] Like Deleuze's close-up, experiments with the DFI 'strike against late capitalist semiotic mechanisms that function specifically by reducing embodied singularity to facialized generality'. Unlike the close-up, in which the face functions as a vector of deterritorialisation — 'a liberation of affect from the body' — the DFI acts as a 'catalyst for a dynamic re-embodiment of the interface'.[47] For Hansen, these experiments with what he calls the DFI hold a similar utopian potential to the mask in Blas's account. The 'interactive coupling' between humans and computer systems carried out by these aesthetic experimentations, 'catalyse the production' of 'new affective relations' that are emerging at the intersection between the 'expanded virtual domains' of digital technologies and the virtuality of the body.

Writing in the early 2000s, Hansen could not anticipate the expansion of the range of 'interactive coupling' between humans and computers that would be naturalised by social media. The sheer banalisation of these human-computer interfaces through their integration into everyday life inevitably detracts from the critical potential that Hansen associated with the DFI. In many ways, social media has served to harness the potential of what Frosh called the 'kinesthetic sociability' of selfie networks to the development of brand assemblages (a term used by Celia Lury).[48] The jarring genre of the twin selfie, I argue, restores some of this critical potential. The 'hesitation' that twin selfies introduce into selfie culture draws attention to the socio-technological assemblages that are constitutive of identity and irreducible to the imposition of identity categories carried out by algorithmic systems and their operative logic of 'pattern discrimination'.

The Clermont twins' articulation of the twin selfie with Afrofuturist aesthetics is particularly provocative. Since coming to fame through the 2015 reality television show *Bad Girls Club*, Shannon and Shannade Clermont have developed a huge social media following and modelling career. Their aesthetic is dominated by two intertwining tropes: the symmetry of 'identical' twinship and a punk futurism expressed in silver lamé clothing, robotic affectless facial expressions, and conspicuous body modifications. In the video for Nicki Minaj's 2018 hit 'Good Form', the sisters featured as a pair of symmetrical android servants, dancing in the background and performing as human stools. A feature in *i-D* magazine from the same year was illustrated with photographs of the twins in long silver hair and outsized mirror shades striding across a futuristic desert landscape. The Afrofuturist aesthetic frames the way in which they navigate social media, underscoring the fact that their bodies are reconfigured by the affordances of network technologies.

In *Afrofuturism 2.0* (2017), Reynaldo Anderson and Charles Jones argue that Afrofuturist aesthetics in the twenty-first century are used to explore the 'techno-genesis' of black identity in an area of transnational digital networks.[49] The trope

of Afrofuturist twinning in particular has been used to speculate about emerging transcorporeal configurations of information and media by artists and authors of speculative fiction such as French dance duo Les Twins, Tade Thompson and Nalo Hopkinson.[50] Daniela Agostinho has identified Afrofuturism as a tool with which artists 'compel us to rethink and possibly expand the notion of visibility' in the context of datafication in which 'visibility as a regime of algorithmic structuring coexists with the notion of visibility as a political site for subject formation, justice claims and resistance'.[51] The Afrofuturist twin selfies are strategies for mediating between these two regimes of visibility. On the one hand, by employing an aesthetic that has been popularised by some of the most successful female black musicians of the age (from Beyoncé to Janelle Monáe) the Clermont twins are maximising the potential of their images and videos to be 'surfaced' by algorithmic search engines. It is a strategy of commercial visibility. But on the other hand, Afrofuturist aesthetics are employed to intervene into the role of race in structuring the visual field. As Browne has shown, black bodies have historically been rendered highly visible by surveillance systems while paradoxically being invisibilised politically, denied access to the categories of political personhood and the full status of the human. The Afrofuturist twin selfie enacts a double displacement of the liberal subject: presenting the twins as entangled both with each other's bodies and the digital networks of social media. They claim visibility in order to divert its attention away from dominant categories of the subject towards alternative configurations of bodies and images.

Conclusion

In *Cannibal Metaphysics* (2014), Eduardo Viveiros de Castro uses twins as a model for the concept of dynamic difference that is at the heart of what it means to be human within Amerindian thought. In Amerindian cosmologies, he claims, twins are used as a model not of sameness or symmetry but as a model of the 'dynamic difference' and 'perpetual disequilibrium' that are the driving motors of life.[52] Amerindian thought embraces the idea that difference 'only blooms to its full conceptual power when it becomes as slight as can be: like the difference between twins'.[53] In the examples explored in this article, twinship and twinning constitute points of failure in biometric technologies — failures that, to repeat Parikka's point, reveal hidden logics at work within these systems. In this case, I argue, the 'failure' of twinship and twinning is deployed to expose a state of 'dynamic disequilibrium' within algorithmic image cultures. This differential logic runs against the grain of the algorithmic reproduction and policing of social sameness, the archival logic that Chun terms 'homophily' and therefore constitutes a powerful force of the counter-archival. Just as, for Viveiros de Castro, twins embody a form of dualism that is never stable and unchanging but rather constantly transformed by movements of recursion, involution, and convolution, the performances of twinship discussed here introduce an instability into the oppositions that govern networked image culture: between visibility and invisibility; representation and intensity; bodies and networks.

Notes to Chapter 8

1. Other consumer tech reviewers employed similar strategies with different results. Tech Insider, for instance, tested the system using thirty-six-year-old twin brothers and concluded: 'You can't fool the iPhone X'. But the majority of 'Twin Tests' posted on YouTube found that identical twin faces could unlock each other's phones. When one twin unlocks his brother's phone on a video posted by Mashable, his sibling responds: 'Don't steal my data, no! [...]. The iPhone X is not twin compatible'.
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3. Lila Lee-Morrison, *Portraits of Automated Facial Recognition: On Machinic Ways of Seeing the Face* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2019), p. 45.
4. Kelly A. Gates, *Our Biometric Future: Facial Recognition Technology and the Culture of Surveillance* (New York & London: New York University Press, 2011), p. 14.
5. William Viney, 'Getting the Measure of Twins', in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Critical Medical Humanities*, ed. by Anne Whitehead and others (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 104–19 (p. 107).
6. Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', *October*, 39 (1986), 3–64 (p. 55).
7. Ibid., pp. 8, 29.
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9. Jussi Parikka, *Digital Contagions: A Media Archaeology of Computer Viruses: Second Edition* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016), p. xxxiii.
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11. Ibid.
12. Grant Bollmer, *Inhuman Networks: Social Media and the Archaeology of Connection* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 7.
13. Ibid., p. 8.
14. Ibid., p. 5.
15. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 201.
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18. Ibid., p. 4.
19. Tama Leaver, Tim Highfield, and Crystal Abidin, *Instagram: Visual Social Media Cultures* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), ebook.
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21. Ibid.
22. Daniel Rubinstein, and Katrina Sluis, 'The Digital Image in Photographic Culture: Algorithmic Photography and the Crisis of Representation', in *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*, ed. by Martin Lister, 2nd edn (London & New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 22–40 (p. 35).
23. James Ash and others, 'Digital Interface Design and Power: Friction, Threshold, Transition', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 36.6 (2018), 1136–53 (p. 1139). Gilles Deleuze, 'Postscript on the Societies of Control', in *Negotiations: 1972–1990*, trans. by Martin Joughlin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 177–82.
24. Sarah Kember, 'Face Recognition and the Emergence of Smart Photography', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 13.2 (2014), 182–99 (p. 193).
25. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, 'Queering Homophily', in *Pattern Discrimination*, ed. by Clemens Apprich and others (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), pp. 59–97 (p. 75).

26. Ibid., p. 66.
27. In a tweet critiquing the marketing discourse behind the machine learning biometrics firm Faception: Facial Personality Analytics, Ben Snyder comments: 'Today in shitty machine learning start-ups, this company claims to predict IQ, personality, and violent tendencies by applying deep learning to facial features and bone structure. That's phrenology. You just made the ML equivalent of a racist uncle': Twitter (now X), 20 November 2018.
28. Simone Browne, 'Digital Epidermalization: Race, Identity and Biometrics', *Critical Sociology*, 36.1 (2009), 131–50 (p. 132); and Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 37.
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30. Claire Colebrook, *Death of the PostHuman: Essays on Extinction, Vol. 1* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2014), p. 150.
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32. Ibid., p. 148.
33. Ibid., p. 150.
34. Zach Blas, 'Escaping the Face: Biometric Facial Recognition and the Facial Weaponization Suite', *Media-N*, 9.2 (2013) <http://median.newmediacaucus.org/caa-conference-edition-2013/escaping-the-face-biometric-facial-recognition-and-the-facial-weaponization-suite/> [accessed 18 April 2023].
35. Jenny Edkins, *Face Politics* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 3.
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42. Ibid., pp. 1611, 1612, 1609.
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